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Troublesome Youth Groups, Gangs and Knife Carrying in Scotland

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TROUBLESOME YOUTH GROUPS, GANGS AND KNIFE CARRYING IN SCOTLAND

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Background and Aims

1. Recent years have witnessed growing concern about the existence of youth gangs and the engagement of their members in violent conflict involving knives and other weapons. However, there is limited reliable evidence relating to the nature, form and prevalence of youth 'gangs' and knife carrying in Scotland. Recognising these information shortfalls, the research reported here set out to:

    - Provide an overview of what is known about the nature and extent of youth gang activity and knife carrying in a set of case study locations.

    - Provide an in-depth account of the structures and activities of youth gangs in these settings.

    - Provide an in-depth account of the knife carrying in these settings.

    - Offer a series of recommendations for interventions in these behaviours based on this evidence.

2. The research was conducted in 5 case study locations, namely: Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire. There were two major data collection components. First, the research interviewed those engaged in the delivery of services designed to manage and challenge problematic youth behaviours, inclusive of youth gangs and knife carrying. Second, the research gained access (via these services) to a large sample of young people. Despite the intention to interview distinct samples of gang members and knife carriers, most of the young people identified through this methodological approach held some form of group affiliation.

Agency Perspectives

3. In each case study area 'troublesome youth groups', comprising young people who engage in low level anti-social behaviour, were recognized to exist. The scale of this activity varied from area to area. The tendency to regard these groups of young people as symptomatic of a youth gang problem, however, was variable. In contrast, youth gangs were typically identified as engaging in violent conflict, or gang fighting. However, everywhere there was a lack of a tight definition of a troublesome youth group or gang. Differences in definition seemed to arise, at least in part, out of the perceived political and resource (dis)advantages of recognizing gangs (or not) locally and not purely the reality of the behaviours of groups of young people. In–line with the mixed recognition of troublesome youth groups or gangs, there was variable monitoring of problematic youth behaviours across the case study settings.

4. Based on the views of agency representatives, troublesome youth groups or gangs across Scotland are not all the same. In the West of Scotland interviewees defined youth gangs according to their strong territorial affiliations and rivalries manifest in gang fighting. In contrast, interviewees in the East of Scotland mainly identified troublesome youth groups that were engaged in (relatively) low-level antisocial behaviour. Neither youth gangs nor troublesome youth groups held

criminal behaviours as a reason for their existence. Far more youth gangs were identified in the West of Scotland than troublesome youth groups in the East.

5. Youth gangs and troublesome youth groups were identified as sharing a set of common features, namely that they were based on friendship (and kinship) groups and were used to achieve social goals such as protection and personal identity. In general, troublesome youth groups and gangs were identified as being concentrated in areas of multiple deprivations. The existence of these groups was suggested to hold a destructive influence in certain communities and to bring substantial disadvantages and adversities for their members in terms of embroiling them in a web of violence, personal risk, lack of mobility and criminalisation.

6. Of those young people that were identified as engaging in violence, most did so collectively via gang fighting. Fighting was associated with alcohol consumption and / or drug taking, though these were not seen as causal factors. Knife (and other weapon) carrying and use was closely, though not exclusively, associated with those who engaged in gang fighting. Some young people were identified by police as holding offending profiles, inclusive of violent / weapon carrying offences that were not linked to group activity.

Young People's Views and Experiences

7. Whilst some young people referred to the groups they were involved with as 'gangs', in general they resisted the gang label, preferring to talk about the people they hung about with in terms of an 'area', a 'team' or a 'group'. The groups were mostly small, with relatively narrow age ranges, though at weekends these groups might consist of as many as 30 to 60 young people.

8. The vast majority of the groups were mixed-gender, but predominantly male. Both male and female respondents reported that young men, in general, were more heavily involved in offending and violence than young women. Young women, in contrast, were perceived primarily as group associates. The groups can best be characterised as fluid and informal friendship networks that met regularly, but not in any formal capacity. Group membership and, for some, violent group behaviour were regarded as a normal part of growing up in particular families and neighbourhoods. Young people articulated an interweaving of individual, friendship and group identities, which in the West of Scotland were further underwritten by territoriality. The significance of territoriality was not nearly so strong in the East of Scotland.

9. The generic features ascribed to these groups by the young people themselves hold a resonance with the Eurogang network definition of a gang, this being:

> *"a street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity" (Weerman et al 2009).*

Hereafter, we employ the term gang, using it as an umbrella term to encompass troublesome youth groups as well as groups engaged in more problematic behaviour inclusive of collective violence.

10. Young people reported a sense of belonging associated with gang membership, the interlocking of friendship and gang identities taking place at an early age, that membership was sought for self protection and entailed backing-up your friends, and that fighting was seen as a way of developing a reputation and gaining respect. Essentially, gangs are not organised, but remain groups of adolescents looking for something to do, belonging, status and identity. Many aspects of their lifestyle are conventional and reflect those of other young people who do not associate with gangs.

11. Members reported participating in a range of anti-social and criminal behaviours including property damage, theft and public disorder offences, as well as violence. Drinking alcohol was a commonly identified pastime and recognised precipitator of violence. Drugs were readily available to young people but not everyone reported taking them. Very serious offending (including violent offending) was the preserve of a few 'core' gang members and did not necessarily take place within the frame of the gang.

12. Territorial fighting was the most common type of violence reported, particularly in the West of Scotland. Longstanding traditions and historical arguments were often mentioned as precursors to violence with a rival gang. In the East of Scotland, there was not the same degree of focus on the past battles or feuds. In addition, fights in the west were often orchestrated and planned, whereas violence in the east was more often described as opportunistic. Most fights were not serious and instead involved a great deal of bluster, posturing and stand-off. However, young people also reported occasions in which gang fights had led to serious injuries.

13. There was a certain degree of sex difference, with young women tending to be very much on the periphery of violent encounters and no expectation that they would participate. Both males and females appeared to operate according to an unspoken set of rules of engagement, which defined who fought with whom. For some young people, fighting provided a certain degree of excitement and thrill which they thrived on.

14. Attitudes towards weapon carrying and use varied enormously, with no clear trend or pattern being evident. Many carried weapons, but many others were opposed to the idea. Young people reported using a wide variety of weapons. Those that carried knives did so for a variety of reasons, as a means of self protection (with no intention of use), as a weapon (with the intention of use) and to promote their reputation (use and non-use).

15. Most were aware of the physical and social risks of knife carrying and/or use. Many (carriers and users) had been victims of knife attacks and were aware of risk of imprisonment (associated with being caught using a knife in a fight) and the longer term risks to their social and economic well-being. This led some to desist from knife carrying. Others chose to use alternate weapons. However, recognition of the risks appeared to hold a limited impact upon some from carrying or using knives.

16. Whilst many of those young people interviewed had not (yet) considered withdrawal, those that had were aware of there being significant barriers to exit. The intertwining of individual and gang identities acts as a significant inhibitor of withdrawal; to break from the gang requires a break from some of the key

relationships in a gang member's life. However, most were able to articulate a range of negative outcomes associated with gang membership. These negative outcomes centred on restricted physical mobility for fear of assault by a rival gang. As those gang territories based on residential neighbourhoods are characterised as lacking recreational, social and economic resources, restricted mobility essentially restricts the opportunities open to a young person.

17. Those interviewees who claimed to have withdrawn from gang membership reported significant lifestyle changes. Some had simply grown out of gang fighting; it no longer held the excitement that attracted them in the first instance. Others were increasingly aware of the negative consequences. Crucially, a seemingly successful exit strategy rested in the establishment of new social and economic experiences and relationships.

Recommendations

18. There is a clear need to improve official data sources on youth crime, inclusive of youth gang activity and knife (weapon) carrying. Developing National standards and collating data on the qualities of gang members and knife carriers will enable a more nuanced probing of the aetiologies of these behaviours to be achieved. This task is of fundamental importance for the design and delivery effective intervention strategies.

19. The evidence collated in this study demands the development of area and group (age and nature of offending/anti social behaviour) sensitive intervention strategies. Interventions with some youth gang members will be more appropriately framed according to their individual rather than group offending behaviour. Policy initiatives targeted at 'core' gang members may have a much wider impact on reducing youth disorder in terms of dispersing the gang through removing its central focus.

20. A core finding of this report is that gang members (inclusive of those who carry / use knives and other weapons) are drawn from areas of multiple deprivations. Strategies involving socio-economic improvement and increased opportunities for young people might be particularly beneficial. This suggests the need to integrate socio-economic strategies with gang intervention strategies.

21. Youth gang members (because of the nature and location of their behaviours) are likely to be highly visible as problematic individuals. Moreover, many of those known to the police and the children's hearing system are at high risk of being in a gang. Therefore, there are a number of channels through which intervention strategies could be directed, including youth street work and the police, schools and social workers.

22. Criminal Justice strategies (policing and punishment) appear to influence the decision-making of some, but not all, gang members and knife carriers. For example, stop and search strategies led some to no longer carry a knife though others reported carrying alternate weapons. Older gang members / weapon carriers are more sensitive to these strategies. The ease with which young people reported gaining access to knives and their ability to substitute a knife for another weapon suggests that knife amnesties will have a limited impact on violent behaviours using weapons.

23. Young people's awareness of the negative consequences of youth gang membership and knife carrying implies that stand alone and one-off awareness-raising (educational) strategies will have a limited impact in changing behaviours. Longer term and early interventions, such as family and neighbourhood (anti-territorial) based intervention projects, which recognise the context of communities with long gang traditions, and aim to make available resources and services aimed at helping and supporting very vulnerable young people, may hold the potential to support long-term change.

1 TROUBLESOME YOUTH GROUPS, GANGS AND KNIFE CARRYING IN SCOTLAND

Introduction

1.1 The phenomena of youth gangs, and the carrying of weapons, particularly knives, by young people are currently subject to media and political attention in Scotland, as in many other jurisdictions. Yet despite this attention, little is known about the nature of youth gang involvement, or the nature of knife carrying by young people in Scotland, and the roles that such activities may play in young peoples' everyday lives. There is considerable confusion over how youth 'gangs' are constituted, what being in or associated with a youth 'gang' means for young people, or how this links to other aspects of young people's experiences. While the term youth 'gang' is engrained in contemporary political and media discourse about youth crime, relatively little is known about how 'gangs' link to youth crime in Scotland, in particular violence and the incidence of knife carrying, or access to firearms. Gang involvement, violence and weapon carrying are often unhelpfully conflated, and seen as mutually inclusive. A failure to distinguish between knife carrying and knife use further confuses issues. Yet the nature of gang involvement, and the extent to which knife carrying and knife use are a feature of youth gang activity has not been subject to close research.

1.2 As a means of contextualising the research that is the subject of this report, this introductory chapter briefly reviews the current policy and academic interest in both youth gangs and knife carrying in the United Kingdom, and in Scotland specifically. It goes on to discuss the limitations of available data. There is little consistency in the definitions of 'gang', 'gang membership' and 'knife carrying' employed by different agencies and organisations in Scotland, and this has serious implications for the ways in which data is generated, and institutional responses are formulated. The lack of robust data also has implications for the way in which this research has been framed. Against this background, the aims of the research are outlined, and its methodological approach is described.

Policy and academic interest

1.3 Despite an overall decrease in rates of youth offending, recent years have witnessed growing concern in Scotland, and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, about the existence of youth gangs, and about knife carrying by young people. The political and policy focus has shifted from anti-social behaviour to more serious violence perpetrated by young people (Sharp, Aldridge and Medina 2006).

1.4 The last decade has seen a proliferation of research on youth gangs in the UK, although the debate continues between those who argue that gangs in Britain are a 'new' phenomenon arising from changing social conditions (see, for example, Pitts 2007); and those who argue that what has changed primarily is the spread and appropriation of the use of the 'gang label' (see, for example, Hallsworth 2006).

1.5 Some high profile studies have documented the prevalence of gang 'membership' and its relationship to offending (Sharp, Aldridge and Medina 2006; Bradshaw 2005; Bennett and Holloway 2004). Other studies, which have largely adopted qualitative investigative techniques, have privileged the views of young people and enriched understanding of youth gangs in Britain through the identification of significant variations in the nature of gangs, and their offending behaviour (Pitt 2008; Youth Justice Board 2007; Kintrea et al 2008). It suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of gangs that takes into account socio-economic and cultural context as well as geographical location.

1.6 Despite the longevity of the gang phenomenon in Scotland, and the recurring public, academic and political attention to the issue over the past 100 years (Sillitoe 1956; Armstrong and Wilson 1973; Patrick 1973; Davies 2007) relatively little is known about youth 'gangs' in Scotland today. Public ideas relating to the gang phenomenon tend to come from media sources, documentaries and fictional accounts; which often focus the most extreme, remarkable or criminal elements of the youth 'gang'. Such representations of youth 'gangs' often resonate with stereotypes of American street gangs, which potentially distort the experiences of children and young people growing up in Scotland.

1.7 In Scotland, and in Glasgow in particular, representations of youth 'gangs' have long been synonymous with violence; particularly violence involving weapons. Yet it is not clear how far Thornberry's (2003; see also Smith and Bradshaw 2005) observation resonates with the Scottish situation, that is:

> *'that gang members, as compared with other youths, are more involved in delinquency – especially serious and violent delinquency – is perhaps the most robust and consistent observation in criminological research' (Thornberry et al (2003: 1).*

1.8 Certainly, there are vigorous claims about the scale of gang activity in Scotland. In 2008, the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) established within Strathclyde Police in 2005, reported that there are approximately 300 youth 'gangs' in Scotland (Leask 2008) and that some, though not all, engage in violent conflict involving weapons. Some Scottish research suggests that gang members are more likely to carry weapons (inclusive of knives) than non-gang members, but young people as a whole are more likely to carry a weapon than older age groups (Scottish Executive 2005).

1.9 There is also widespread recognition of the harmful consequences of gang membership and knife carrying to both victims (individuals and communities) and offenders. Successive studies have identified 'gangs' and 'territoriality' as key areas of concern for children and young people in Scotland, particularly the West of Scotland (Ipsos Mori 2003; Turner et al 2006; Seaman et al 2006; Kintrea et al 2008). In Scotland, the concentration of individuals claiming gang-membership is considered to be greatest in areas of deprivation (Smith and Bradshaw 2005: 12), and there is strong evidence of associations with particular territories (Bradshaw 2005), manifest in territory-based conflict (Patrick 1973: 93).

1.10 In this context, youth ‘gangs’ and knife-carrying have become increasingly central to political and institutional responses to youth crime in Scotland. The VRU has pioneered a range of initiatives relating to youth violence and knife carrying; most recently, the £5m Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV), based on US models of gang intervention. The “Collective Violence” phase of the VRU’s Anti-Violence campaign saw a raft of enforcement initiatives to tackle gang activity, focusing on alcohol consumption and weapon carrying, and the roll-out of community-based initiatives to tackle ‘gang culture’.

1.11 In 2006, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal service (COPFS) announced new guidelines to police and prosecutors in relation to knife crime, increasing the likelihood of arrest, detention, and charge for young people in possession of knives.

1.12 There have been two knife amnesties; ‘Operation Blade’ ran in Strathclyde region in 1993 and a UK wide amnesty was held in 2006. High profile public awareness campaigns, as well as a raft of policies directed at education and prevention in relation to youth violence, have formed key elements in recent government strategy. For example, the 'No Knives Better Lives' initiative was launched in 2009, which includes an endeavour to make young people more aware of the dangers and consequences of carrying a knife.

Limitations of Existing Data

1.13 The collection of reliable evidence relating to the nature, form and prevalence of youth crime in general and youth ‘gangs’ in particular, however, is hampered by a range of definitional and procedural issues. First, there is a chronic lack of publicly available data on youth offending in Scotland generally. That which exists is hampered by differences in reporting and data-collection procedures between different institutional bodies, creating substantial problems in gaining an accurate picture (Fraser et al 2010). There has never been any Scottish national survey of young people which is comparable to the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS) that is undertaken south of the border and so estimates of the prevalence of youth gangs remain problematic. Second, there is a range of competing views, with no clear consensus in relation to the definition of what a ‘youth gang’ is, or how it might be defined or understood in the Scottish context.

Definitions of ‘gangs’

1.14 The term ‘youth gang’ carries significant cultural and symbolic resonance, yet masks complex questions about the broader social, economic, political and cultural context in which processes of social development and the formation of youth identities take place. Its usage conveys moral judgments whilst at the same time can obscure complex realities about young peoples’ lives. ‘Gang’ and ‘gang membership’ are very loose, yet very loaded terms, with pejorative connotations.

1.15 Academic research in the US and the UK shows considerable divergence in gang definitions and understandings. In the United States, definitions range from relatively benign peer-groups (Thrasher 1927) to structured criminal

enterprises, involving formal hierarchies and profit-motives (Sanchez-Jankowksi 1991)). Whilst there are reports of youth gangs engaged in fighting in UK cities going back to the 19th century (e.g. Davies 1998), UK researchers have been reluctant to impose universalised 'gang' definitions; rather, emphasis has been placed on the fluid, messy and largely amorphous nature of youth group offending (Downes 1966; Youth Justice Board 2007; Aldridge, Medina and Ralphs 2007; Hallsworth and Young 2008), pointing to the blurring of the boundaries of what constitutes a 'gang' and the 'inconsistency of interpretation' between peer groups, gangs and criminal networks (Bullock and Tilley 2002). Recent research highlights the fluid and interlinked networks of young people, characterised by 'ephemeral leadership, high turnover, and only moderate cohesiveness' (Klein and Maxson 2006:164).

1.16 In their research undertaken in a northern English city, Aldridge et al (2007) use the term 'gangs' to refer to youth groups that are durable, street-orientated and have a group identity for which involvement in criminal activity is key. This definition draws heavily on the widely used Eurogang definition:

> *"a street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity" (Weerman et al 2009).*

1.17 In Scotland, while the term 'gang' is engrained in public and political consciousness, there has been little attempt amongst researchers to create a workable definition for the purposes of comparison. The few research studies that have focused (either directly or indirectly) on gang behaviour have tended to define the issue in a local rather than national context (Patrick 1973; Deuchar 2009).

1.18 Notwithstanding the absence of a universally applied definition of gangs, various official bodies in Scotland have acted to deal with the perceived problem caused by gangs. The role of the police, in particular the high profile VRU, in simultaneously raising the profile of youth 'gangs', defining the 'problem' posed by them, and developing strategies to tackle youth 'gangs' in Scotland, has been, and continues to be, very important. Yet different police forces in Scotland conceptualise and define youth 'gangs' in different ways, reflecting differences in intelligence-gathering, as well as the differences in youth group behaviour across different areas (see chapter 2).

1.19 Similarly, statutory and voluntary agencies working with young people have varying perceptions of what constitutes a 'gang' and 'gang membership'. With no standardised definition of a 'youth gang 'in Scotland, it is difficult to produce a national assessment of gang membership and activity.

Data sources on youth 'gangs'

1.20 Reliable and valid data on 'gangs' is extremely limited. Administrative data on recorded crime in Scotland tells us very little about youth offending, and nothing about gang involvement, see Table 1 below. There is no specific requirement for police to record group involvement in a crime and, even were they to do so, the information would not necessarily be helpful, as research undertaken in

other jurisdictions is indicative of the majority of youth offending being committed in groups (Sarnecki 2001). Also, given that young people rarely report violence to the police (Fraser et al 2010), it is unlikely that a high proportion of gang-related crime and violence would be reported.

1.21 Homicide data represents one of the few sources with a high proportion of known offenders, and is therefore one of the few violent crimes where reliable estimates relating to age can be made. There are, however, relatively few homicides in Scotland per year. Homicide (offender) rates have overall remained relatively steady over the past twenty years; fluctuating around a rate of 30-40 homicides per million population. Males aged 16-30 are significantly more likely to be the accused in a homicide case, but the clarity of the data is compromised by the breadth of age-range (Fraser at al 2010).

1.22 Since 2000/01, Scottish Government statistics on Homicide include a category for 'rival gang member' in the relationship of the victim to the accused (although this is not broken down by age). The figure has fluctuated between one and six homicides per year since this time. This is a relatively low prevalence, as the total annual number of homicide cases recorded by the police has fluctuated between 113 and 99 over the same period, with a peak of 137 in 2004/05 (Scottish Government 2010).

1.23 Until the reporting year 2006/07, Scottish Government published statistics on school exclusions that incorporated a category for 'Territorial/gang related' motivations (92 incidents, or 0.2% of exclusions). However, the most recent publication had insufficient data to include this category.

1.24 The VRU has compiled a database on 'known youth gangs in Glasgow', which records multiple personal and offending characteristics of individuals identified as gang members, from the Scottish Intelligence Database (SID). The picture is less clear in other locations where youth gangs have not been perceived as a priority. Some divisions within Police Force areas have compiled 'gang profiles', but different police forces conceptualise and define youth gangs and gang membership in different ways; and intelligence-gathering proceeds differently across the eight Scottish Forces. As recognised by police interviewees contributing to this research, intelligence data is of variable quality and reliability; it is often outdated due to the fluidity of gang membership, and relatively rapid turnover of members. It is not clear when and how the police data is updated, and with what sort of frequency young people are classified or de-classified as 'gang members'.

1.25 In addition, the VRU have recently launched a National Data Collection Plan, wherein all police forces are required to complete an information spreadsheet containing all incidents of serious violence. The spreadsheet categories are standard and with common data definitions and ask for information such as the level of violence, the motives, any weapons used and so forth. The first national sweep covered April-June 2010.

1.26 The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC), is a prospective longitudinal study of approximately 4,300 young people aged 11-12 from across Edinburgh, which commenced in 1998. The aim of the study is to

investigate the factors leading to involvement in offending and desistance and, over the course of six annual sweeps of data collection, data has been collected from its cohort of young people using self-completion questionnaires. Included in these were a set of questions on weapon carrying (including knives and other types of weapon) and, at three sweeps of the survey (at ages 13, 16 and 17), it posed questions on gang membership. Analysis of this data is provided in McVie (2010).

Table 1: Data sources on 'youth gangs' in Scotland

Agency	Publication	Definition of 'gang'	Data source	Description	Age-range
Police	Homicide Stats	Not specified	Not specified	Table 'relationship of accused to victim' includes 'rival gang member'	16-30
Education	School Exclusions	Not specified	Not specified	Table 'reason for exclusion' includes 'territorial/gang-related'	5-17
VRU	Unpublished	Not specified	Police Intelligence	Data base of youth gangs and gang members	Not known
ESYTC	Research report	Self-defined	Survey (n=4,3000)	Longitudinal study including questions on gang membership	13-17

Definitions and Data Sources on Knife Carrying

1.27 Like youth 'gangs', 'knife crime' is a commonly used but loose term. It covers a wide range of offences (for example: offences in which an individual is stabbed; those in which a knife is produced and used in a threatening manner; those in which someone happens to carry a knife), which are in fact quite different. Whilst all may cause distress, not all necessarily result in a physically-harmed victim. The types of knives carried, produced and used, may differ significantly, from penknives to Stanley knives to scimitars. Moreover, broken bottles, screwdrivers and sharpened golf-clubs, while not classified as knives can be just as lethal. Data sources on knife carrying in Scotland are shown in table 2 below.

1.28 Statistical bulletins setting out information on crimes such as assault (which may or may not involve a knife or other form of weapon) do not generally state whether a weapon was used. *Recorded Crime in Scotland*, 2008/09 states that the police recorded 8,980 instances of a person handling an offensive weapon in 2008/09, the lowest recorded figure since 2000/2001 (Scottish Government 2006) although it should be noted that not all of these incidents involve knives. For the purposes of the bulletin, the category of 'handling an offensive weapon' covers offences relating to the carrying of knives in public places, as well as other offences placing restrictions on knives and offensive weapons.

1.29 Homicide Statistics, covering murder and culpable homicide, highlight the use of a 'sharp instrument' as the most common method of killing in homicide cases. Recent figures show a slight year-on-year increase in the number killed by the use of a sharp instrument (55 in 2007/08 compared to 57 in 2008/09)

(Scottish Government 2008; 2009). However, statistics relating to the use of a sharp instrument do not distinguish between cases where the perpetrator had been carrying a sharp instrument in a public place and situations where, for example, the perpetrator picked up a sharp instrument at the scene of the crime.

Table 2: Data sources on 'knife carrying' in Scotland

Agency	Publication	Description	Age-range
Police	Recorded Crime	Recorded instances of 'handling an offensive weapon'	Not specified
Police	Homicide Statistics	Table 'method of killing' includes 'sharp instrument'	Not specified
Courts	Criminal Proceedings	Convictions for 'handling an offensive weapon'	16-21
SCRA	SCRA Annual Report	Referral to a Reporter for 'carrying an offensive weapon'	8-16
ESYTC	Research reports/digests	Longitudinal study including questions on weapon-carrying	13-17

1.30 The statistical bulletin *Criminal Proceedings in Scottish Courts* provides information on trends in criminal convictions for violent crimes and offences, including 'handling of an offensive weapon', assault and homicide.

1.31 The Scottish Children's Reporter Association (SCRA) annual reports show the numbers referred to the Children's Reporter on offence grounds. The offences of 'assault' and 'carrying an offensive weapon' are not defined in SCRA publications, but it is likely that police definitions form their basis. In line with the overall decrease in offence referrals, the number of referrals for assault and carrying an offensive weapon have decreased significantly over the past two years – from 10,084 in 2006/07 to 7,582 in 2008/09 (Fraser et al 2010). However, statistics for specific referral grounds are not recorded by age or gender.

Aims and Scope of the Research

1.32 Taken together, the growing policy interest, alongside a chronic lack of informative data, point towards the need for a more theoretically and empirically informed understanding of the nature and activities associated with youth gangs, and of knife carrying in Scotland.

1.33 This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government, in recognition of the need to improve the understanding of gang association and activity, and knife carrying in Scotland, and to utilise this increased awareness as a basis for assessing possible opportunities for effective interventions.

1.34 The main aims of the research are: to provide an overview of what is currently known about youth gangs and youth gang activities in five selected urban

locations across Scotland, and about knife carrying in those same locations; to provide an empirical qualitative account of gangs, and of knife carrying in these settings, and; to offer a series of recommendations for interventions based on this evidence and in relation to current national and local policy interventions.

Selection of research sites

1.35 To address the aims of the research in light of the context described earlier, the research was planned to take place in urban locations across Scotland - Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and West Dunbartonshire. The locations were selected by the Scottish Government in advance of commissioning the research, predominantly on the basis of an internal analysis of available police crime data and intelligence reports on youth disorder, particularly the prevalence and patterns of youth gang activity and knife carrying in each of the areas. The identification of the research locations was also driven by the desire that the study incorporate a focus on major urban locations in Scotland and thus aid the development of a national picture.

1.36 The advance identification of research locations through the use of institutional sources and intelligence data has several implications, not only in terms of the predominantly urban focus of the research, but also for the subsequent research design. The locations were selected on the basis of heightened concerns about gang activity and knife carrying in each location (knife crime statistics).

Methodological Approach

1.37 A key initial task of the research was to identify specific research sites, and potential participants, within the pre-selected urban locations. A two-phase approach was adopted for this purpose. The first phase involved collation and analysis of crime data, intelligence reports and qualitative interviews with 'key actors' to create city profiles of the nature and locus of known youth gang activity and knife carrying and use. The second phase entailed semi-structured interviews with young people, identified by the 'key actors' consulted in phase one, associated with youth gangs and/or knife carrying in each of the research sites.

1.38 Sensitive to the debates and complexities concerning the definition of gangs, as well as the potential for stereotyping and stigmatisation noted by other UK researchers, the research team approached the definition of 'gang' cautiously. The Eurogang definition offers a good starting point, as it captures some key elements of gangs (or troublesome youth groups – groups of young people engaged in low level anti-social behaviour) as identified in previous research (Weerman et al 2009), and offers the possibility of comparison across the research sites, and with other national studies.

1.39 International research, including that which has specifically set out to employ a Eurogang methodology, has identified significant variations in the nature of youth gangs/troublesome youth groups. The utility of the Eurogang definition for adequately reflecting the situation across Scotland is unclear, hence it was adopted as a working definition in the first instance, and interrogated by the

data generated by the research. The research evidence also tells us that the phenomena of gangs, and knife carrying, are best framed within the broader context of social, political, and demographic arrangements within a particular locale, and we were keen to ensure that our analysis be guided by such factors, as well as informed by the understandings and experiences of the young people involved in the research. Indeed, as the research progressed and our definitional descriptors were interrogated and amended by those who work with young people as well as by the young people themselves, this lead to further refinement (see Chapters 2-7).

Phase One: Contextualisation and Identification of Research Sites

1.40 The first phase of research entailed analysis of a range of available data sources to contextualise the pre-selected urban locations in terms of their demographic, crime and socio-economic profiles. This drew on official recorded crime data, as well as data from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics and, in Edinburgh only, data from Lothian and Borders Police following a Freedom of Information request.

1.41 The first phase also involved semi-structured interviews with representatives of local statutory agencies, voluntary organisations, and groups engaged in the delivery of services designed to manage and/or challenge problematic youth behaviours (inclusive of youth gangs and knife carrying). These included youth workers, police, police analysts, community safety officers, and community workers with site-specific knowledge. Whilst it was originally intended to undertake a total of 25 interviews (5 per location) the complexity of the research environment was such that an additional 30 interviews were undertaken, resulting in a total of 55 interviews for this phase.

1.42 The main purposes of interviews were: first, to explore participants' understandings of the nature and prevalence of troublesome youth group and gang activity, and knife carrying in the area in order to assist with area profiling, and contextualisation of the research sites. Second and importantly, to assist in the identification of settings for interviews with young people based on their knowledge of youth activity in the area.

1.43 In recognition of the likely variations in the nature and composition of youth gangs/groups and knife carrying behaviour, and in order to facilitate the comparison of data across the various research sites, a set of research vignettes (short stories) were devised. The vignettes drew on VRU data (a Glasgow database) and endeavoured to describe the key characteristics of youth gangs, gang members and their offending behaviour as recorded in this database (see Appendix).

1.44 Given that the research is located across different settings with interviews being the primary data collection tool, using vignettes enabled a standardised assessment (via a qualitative approach) of perspectives of youth gangs, gang members and their offending behaviour across the case study settings and amongst the various agencies engaged in the delivery of services designed to manage and/or challenge problematic youth behaviours and experiences.

Phase Two: Accounts of Group/Gang Membership and Association and Knife Carrying

1.45 The focus of the second phase of the study was the carrying out of semi-structured interviews with young people associated with youth groups/gangs and/or knife carrying in each of the research sites. The main purpose was to explore the understandings and experiences of young people, and, in particular to seek views on what being in or associated with a youth 'gang' means and/or what being a knife carrier means, and how this links to other aspects of youth identity and experience. Interviews were structured to obtain views on key aspects of the entry to, participation in and desistance from troublesome youth groups/gangs, and/or knife carrying.

1.46 The first phase of research suggested a number of routes to identify and approach young people to participate. However, in practice this proved far from straightforward, and particularly problematic in two locations, due to perceptions of the limited nature of gang activity, and knife carrying.

1.47 The original intention was to undertake 24 'gang member' interviews and 20 'gang associate' interviews, evenly spread across Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, with an additional 25 interviews with knife carriers from West Dunbartonshire. There were to be a further 20 interviews with non-gang members/non-knife carriers. However, following a restructuring of the research design it was determined to undertake gang member and knife carrier interviews in all of the five case study locations. This represented a significant expansion of the research and to accommodate this change, interviews proposed with gang associates and non-gang members/non-knife carriers were scaled down.

1.48 There were several ways in which young people were approached for interview. The initial phase of research suggested that an appropriate approach was through local youth projects, with project workers and other 'gatekeepers' helping to broker the arrangements. Following restructuring of the research design, a (second) snowball sampling approach was adopted, relying on referrals from initial participants to identify others. This resulted in significant numbers of interviews in Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and, to a lesser extent, Edinburgh. In Dundee, agencies did not recognise that there were gangs active in the city. In Aberdeen, it proved difficult for gatekeepers to broker more than a small number of interviews with young people.

1.49 The Scottish Government supported two further access routes to young people. Criminal Justice Social Work teams were encouraged to support the research endeavour. However, these contacts also stressed the 'limited' nature of these phenomena in their area(s) of operation, and particularly so in Dundee and Aberdeen. Thereafter, the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) were approached to grant access to knife carriers in the prison system. Access was granted to three prisons: HMP Barlinnie, HMP Perth and HMPYOI Polmont.

1.50 In summary, the team faced significant difficulties in securing interviews with gang members in Dundee and Aberdeen, and with knife carriers in Dundee, Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

Table 3: Numbers of Interviews in each research site

Location	Gang Members and/or Knife carriers	Gang Associates
Glasgow	29	5
West Dunbartonshire	10	5
Edinburgh	12	7
Dundee	6	1
Aberdeen	3	-
HMP and HMPYOI	17	-
Total	**77**	**18**

1.51 A total of 77 gang member and/or knife carrier interviews were conducted, as Table 3 shows. This includes 29 interviews in Glasgow; 10 in West Dunbartonshire, and; 12 in Edinburgh. In Aberdeen and Dundee, the research struggled to complete interviews with gang members due to the limited nature of the phenomena and just three and six interviews, respectively were completed. A further 17 interviewees were accessed via the SPS and Youth Justice Social Work schemes. These interviewees were predominantly from Glasgow.

1.52 Although most gang research focuses on young males, the research did not preclude the inclusion of young women, and 18 young women were interviewed. A total of 18 interviews were undertaken with associates, that is, friends, siblings and girlfriends of gang members.

1.53 Despite the intention to interview a sample of knife carriers who had no connection to a troublesome youth group or gang context, this did not prove possible. The majority of those young people interviewed (across each setting and via each access route) held some form of group affiliation. In response to this information shortfall, McVie (2010) undertook a detailed analysis of the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC). This study, which adopts a distinct quantitative methodology, enables access to a sample of young people who admit to carrying a knife (or other weapon) but claim to hold no troublesome youth group or gang affiliation.

Structure and Contents of Report

1.54 Chapter 2 describes how staff from agencies engaged in the delivery of services designed to manage and/or challenge problematic youth behaviours understand the prevalence and characteristics of troublesome youth groups/gangs and knife carrying in their areas of operation, in each of the research locations. Chapters 3-7 draw upon the views and reflections of young people. Chapter 3 describes the structures and characteristics of troublesome youth groups and gangs. Chapter 4 plots the various contexts leading to gang membership, weapon (knife) carrying and engagement in violent behaviours. Chapter 5 examines the nature of group and gang activities, the conventional and the criminal inclusive of violent behaviours. Chapter 6 focuses upon knife

carrying. The chapter probes interviewees' motivations for carrying and/or using knives and other weapons. Chapter 7 focuses on the exit strategies of young people wishing to desist gang membership and violent offending, inclusive of knife (weapon) carrying.

1.55 Finally, Chapter 8 reviews the major findings of the research and, and on the basis of this evidence, offers a series of recommendations for interventions. It also includes a discussion of the research questions which arise from the findings of this study.

2 AGENCY PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

2.1 This chapter is based on interviews with representatives of agencies engaged in the delivery of services designed to manage and/or challenge problematic youth behaviours (inclusive of youth gangs and knife carrying). Interviewees included police officers and civilian employees of police forces, local government staff working with community safety partnerships, social workers, and voluntary sector staff. The chapter aims to establish the prevalence and characteristics of troublesome youth groups, gangs and knife carrying. It aims to provide an integrated perspective across the study locations, but draws out differences where they are apparent.

Definition, intelligence and prioritisation

2.2 Troublesome youth groups were recognised to exist in all the case study areas, Interviewees generally understood the term 'gang' to refer to groups of young people that self-identified as a gang and engaged in violent conflict and/ or other antisocial behaviour (as a group or as a member of the group). In some cases there was a reluctance to accept the word gang, in other cases it was used freely.

2.3 Interviews with agencies were facilitated by vignettes (see Appendix). The vignettes described two types of gang, Type A and Type B, with the former representing a larger group with a strong identity involved in higher levels of violence and the latter a smaller, less distinctive, less violent group. The vignettes were developed with reference to the National Violence Reduction Unit's gang database, which was compiled from police intelligence in Glasgow. It emerged that the term 'gang' is used quite loosely by agencies to refer to a wide range of different kinds of groups.

2.4 In West Dunbartonshire and Glasgow, gangs of both Type A and Type B were reported to be present, along with lesser groups. In Aberdeen and Edinburgh there were some groups with some of the characteristics of Type B, but no group fully conformed to the vignette. In Dundee, neither gangs nor troublesome youth groups were seen as a problem and neither of the vignettes were recognised. Across all the areas, including Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire many of the youth groups identified as troublesome by agencies did not conform to either of the vignettes, as the groups identified locally were said to have less clear identities and to be less violent. Across the case study locations, although the word gang is used quite freely, it emerges that there is, in practice, a variety of experiences ranging from an absence of anything recognisable as a gang in Dundee to a wide spectrum of problematic groups in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire, with a few constituting significant, strongly identifiable gangs of active offenders.

2.5 The extent to which youth gangs, however defined, were prioritised also showed substantial variation across the study areas:

2.6 *Glasgow*, Strathclyde Police identified disorder and antisocial behaviour, including the behaviour of youth gangs (weapon carrying/violence) as a high priority. Numerous intervention streams are co-ordinated via the Violence Reduction Unit, most notably the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) - a gang intervention based on the Boston Ceasefire Project.

2.7 Numerous databases hold information relevant to youth gangs and weapon carrying in Glasgow, though this data cannot necessarily be filtered in order to specifically address youth gangs or indeed be conjoined by area and by category. Each police division collects data under the headings of stop and search, crime management, vulnerable persons and STORM (a system for monitoring the nature of calls made to the police), all of which feed into the Glasgow offenders data base. Separately, intelligence reports are compiled by police divisions and submitted to the Scottish intelligence database. The data on youth gangs (and weapon carrying), therefore, is pieced together from existing databases rather than one particular bespoke source. The Gangs Taskforce also endeavours to collate data centrally.

2.8 In addition, Glasgow Community Safety Services (GCSS) maintain the 'Glasgow Operational Matrix' (GOM), a database that holds the 20,000 known offenders under the age of 28 that are resident in Glasgow. This lists among other things the name, age, grade of offences and gang affiliation of the offenders drawn from the Scottish Intelligence Database. GOM data relates to charged rather than convicted offenders. Glasgow Community Safety Services has also identified numerous weapon 'hotspots'. GCSS identifies youth gangs as a very high priority. Finally, the Violence Reduction Unit, based in Glasgow, has compiled a database on youth gangs in one area of the city. This database records multiple personal and offending characteristics of individuals identified as gang members and was used to create the youth gang vignettes used in this research.

2.9 *West Dunbartonshire*: Gang-related activity such as youth disorder, vandalism, weapon carrying and serious assault are recognised as very high priorities within the West Dunbartonshire Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment. Gang related activity was thought to account for a third of all antisocial behaviour reported to the Police and youth disorder was the second most common complaint received by the Community Warden Service. Clydebank was identified as the primary locus for such behaviours. The most prevalent issues were identified as young people loitering and being perceived as intimidating.

2.10 *Edinburgh*: The Edinburgh Violence Reduction Programme, established by the Lothian and Borders Police and the Community Safety Partnership has 'street violence' as one of its work streams, but it does not highlight Edinburgh as having a particular problem with gangs. Experts working with young people in the city generally did not perceive there to be a gang problem, and the closer they were to working with young people directly, the more likely they were to avoid the term 'gang'. There was however a fair amount of intelligence about gangs and troublesome youth groups available, including from website monitoring.

2.11 *Aberdeen*: Although the level and seriousness of gang activity appeared to be no greater and possibly less than in Edinburgh, gangs had a higher profile. Care was taken by interviewees in the use of the term 'gang' and there was recognition that what might be called gangs in Aberdeen did not necessarily match with use of the term elsewhere. Nevertheless, gangs were identified quite readily. Anti social behaviour is one of six priorities of the Aberdeen Community Safety Partnership, with youth disorder listed as one of five sub categories, and within which there is clear recognition of gangs. There is also a multi-agency group focused on youth which aims to reduce offending and ensure better outcomes for children. The Youth Justice Services Team aims to co-ordinate agencies and diversionary opportunities. A youth offenders programme inspired by Glasgow's CIRV project will soon be launched in Aberdeen.

2.12 Public perceptions of growing levels of criminality and antisocial behaviour led Grampian Police to draw up a profile of 'youth gangs' in 2006 which has been refreshed at intervals. This was based on police intelligence plus information from social networking sites. However, the reliability of the open source information appears to be questionable and this is acknowledged by the police.

2.13 *Dundee*: In Dundee, the Tayside Police, the Antisocial Behaviour Team and the Youth Justice Team were able to identify little evidence of gang fighting. Violent incidents involving young people were regarded as being peer-on-peer or related to domestic conflict. There is no intelligence held on gangs in Dundee.

2.14 Looking across the case study areas at how gangs are regarded by agencies, there was no consistency. There is no agreed definition of a gang across Scotland or even a clear definition within local areas. In some cases interviewees were reluctant to use the word gang; in other cases they used it freely. The data on gangs reflects local perspectives; information available about gangs is not comparable from place to place. Moreover, it is usually not easily accessible and because much of it is based on 'intelligence', it is not verifiable either.

2.15 The priority afforded to gangs by Community Safety Partnerships and individual agencies was also highly variable, and not necessarily driven only by the prevalence of gangs or the impacts of their activities. Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire placed significant emphasis on the presence of youth gangs as an issue of concern and there was evidence of significant statutory and voluntary resource being directed toward delivering services aimed at combating the manifestation of youth gangs and their associated behaviours. Aberdeen and Edinburgh were both recognised as having a few gangs with at least some of the Type B characteristics, yet the local response was different.

History and trajectory

2.16 In all the locations we examined it was said that there had been gangs as far back as the 1950s or 1960s. In Glasgow and Edinburgh gangs are documented at as far back as the nineteenth century.

2.17 *Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire*: Interviewees suggested that a few gangs had involved successive generations of the same families (Type A gangs especially). Young people in gangs were said to grow up within families with and historically- based gang identity. Some gangs in Glasgow were said to stand out as having a semi-continuous history of serious conflict. In most instances, though, it was just the gang name that had lasted. A gang name might be revived by a different group of young people after a period of disuse, with no retrospective social connection. These represented a perennial problem for communities and law enforcement agencies; however there was no clear sense that their prevalence and impact were changing, although recent years had seen much greater attempts to get a grip of the problem.

2.18 *Edinburgh*: Here also it was noted that there were well- known gang names in use which had historical significance; however, this did not indicate substantial current activity. Fighting between troublesome youth groups had died down during the last ten years and was now at a low level historically. However, some of the symbolism of gangs remained such as the use of gang names and tagging, it was not believed that these represented substantial gang activity.

2.19 *Aberdeen*: The sense of tradition being handed down in Aberdeen was even shakier: it was said that today's gangs do not have a continuous history but rise and fade away quickly, often within a few months. Nevertheless, some of the names used are longstanding. Gangs had only been recognised as an issue by local partners since 2006; there was sense that gangs in some form had been around for a long time but no real evidence was provided for their trajectory. Some interviewees had the impression that the problem of violence between groups of young people was getting worse.

2.20 *Dundee*: Here there were no current groups recognisable as gangs; they had died away in the 1990s. Internet sites show that young people in Dundee do use the names of historical youth gangs, and such groups are engaged in 'name calling' but there is no evidence of actual conflict or anything identifiable as gang activity.

Location and deprivation

2.21 In all locations, the areas in which gangs were found were among the most deprived parts of the council area, often social housing estates. The historical roots of today's gangs were generally traced in interviews to the development of housing schemes in the post war era.

2.22 In Dundee, the weakened identity, and ultimately the demise of gangs was attributed to the demolition and redevelopment of many of the housing schemes and to school mergers which had weakened area identities. Redevelopment and school realignment was also mentioned in parts of Edinburgh where gang activity has declined in recent years.

2.23 While not all young people who live in deprived areas come from poor households, some interviewees were also keen to stress that those that had the most involvement with youth groups tended to be from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.24 In all of the case study areas there was a problem to some degree of conflict between young people in the city or town centre. However, it did not appear that this was based on gang rivalries. In West Dunbartonshire, for example, violence was mainly a product of the 'night-time economy' and involved a wider age-range of people. In Aberdeen young people from all over the city and beyond congregate in the city centre, including lifestyle groups such as Goths, and groups who attend private schools. There is some conflict between young people but it was suggested that young people from the poorer estates would never go into the city centre as a self-styled gang.

2.25 Edinburgh showed one key difference to the other areas. One violent gang, drawn from various areas of the city and surrounding towns, operated in the city centre. Its activities included attacks on other young people, usually individuals but also sometimes on groups of young people, including one attack on overseas tourists.

Scale of gang activity

2.26 There was a lack of precision among agencies about the scale of gang activity and interviewees did not always agree on the number of gangs and their scale.

2.27 *Glasgow*: In Glasgow police intelligence on gangs gave an apparent precision but some interviewees suggested that the numbers of young people identified were an artefact of the design of intelligence databases and that the policing focus on gangs might lead to an over identification of gang membership. The criminal and/or anti-social behaviour of an individual might be recorded as part of their 'gang profile' even though the behaviour was not perpetrated in a gang context. In addition, some data was not regularly updated so those recorded as gang members might have desisted.

2.28 Glasgow nevertheless clearly held the largest number of gangs. Strathclyde Police estimated in 2008 that there were 110 gangs. The gangs in Glasgow conformed well to the vignettes; approximately 90 were said to match Type B, with Type A making up the rest. Most interviewees thought that very few, if any, gangs comprised more than 50 members.

2.29 *West Dunbartonshire*: There was less intelligence on youth gangs here. Interviewees identified between 3 and 10 youth gangs in the Clydebank area. There was a consensus between interviewees about the three largest, which conformed to Type A, but not about the others. There were also said to be other gangs, in Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven in the same council area, but detail was sketchy. Interviewees in both Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire also identified other groups of young people who fell below the Type B criteria, but who nevertheless displayed some of the characteristics of a gang.

2.30 *Elsewhere*: Gangs elsewhere had far less of a sense of identity, and many interviewees were at pains to stress that their gangs were not like Glasgow's. Because the gangs were less distinct, their scale was also more difficult to specify, and any discussion of numbers also begs a question of definition. In Edinburgh, interviewees altogether identified about 18 groups across the city that might be defined in some way as a gang. Most were large groups of

teenagers engaged in what was described as low level anti-social behaviour. A few smaller groups were identified as engaging in more problematic criminal behaviours. However, there were no Type A gangs in Edinburgh and none fully conformed even to Type B. In Aberdeen the number of youth gangs identified by police reports has varied a lot over short time periods, with 12 being identified in 2006, 27 logged as active over the winter of 2006-07, and 20 in 2008. This appears to be partly the result of variable intelligence, but also because gangs are small and weak; they emerge and fade away quickly. Again, there was no Type A gangs in Aberdeen, and none fully conformed to Type B. Numbers of members were in most cases less than 20 where they could be estimated. In Dundee there were no identified gangs or even problematic youth groups that had adopted the persona of a gang.

Structure

2.31 Gangs in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire were described as (generally) having a loose two-tier structure based on age with some gangs having three tiers. The lowest tier comprised 'Young teams' aged 8 to 12 years old, a core membership (the most problematic in terms of offending) aged between 12 and 16 and older members aged 17 and above. Glasgow Community Safety Services identified gang participants in one part of the city; 22% were aged 15 or under; 47% are aged between 16 and 18; and 29% are aged 18 and over (Irvine and McKay, 2008).

2.32 In Glasgow some interviewees suggested that the peak age of gang membership (17) was a result of the awareness of young people that gang-related activities at this age were far more likely to result in a custodial sentence. Others suggested that gang members are more likely to enter relationships, have children of their own or get jobs at this age. A local practitioner stated that gang members perceive these as accepted reasons for ceasing to participate in gang-related behaviours.

2.33 Gangs are said to have a maximum of two tiers elsewhere; the age range is narrower and younger. In Aberdeen it is typically 14-16 years old, but some gangs have members as young as 9. It is unusual for anyone over 17 to be associated with a gang. In Edinburgh, the usual age range of the larger groups was said to be 12-16, with the smaller, more problematic, groups including teenagers and adults.

Organisation, Culture and Membership

2.34 Across all areas the organisation of gangs was generally not very sophisticated. Gang leadership, if it can be called that, tends to centre on a one or more slightly older young people who had a more substantial and persistent record of offending, although not necessarily gained as gang members. For the rest, it was difficult to distinguish clearly between core, peripheral and non-members and gang membership was not stable. With few exceptions, gangs are not known to have any special ways of speaking, signals or dress codes. Occasionally, interviewees identified that a gang wore a particular item such as a baseball cap or type of tracksuit. In Glasgow interviewees stressed youth gangs operate according to a set of 'unwritten' rules. The most frequently cited

were: ‘you don’t grass to the polis’, and, to always give ‘honners’, i.e., to provide back up to fellow gang members in a conflict situation. However, the no-grassing rule was also felt to be prevalent within the communities affected by gangs as a whole, so in that respect gangs were not distinctive.

2.35 The vast majority of ‘gang members’ in all locations are boys or young men. Girls and young women might usually participate on equal terms but this was quite uncommon. Girls and young women tend to participate on the basis of a relationship with a gang member or by playing a ‘cheerleading’ role. Interviewees generally reported that boys would not physically attack a girl unless she herself had engaged in an aggressive act first. Thus a boy would only fight a girl in self defence, or if she had attacked another gang member.

2.36 Some interviewees in Glasgow suggested that girls sometimes associated with one gang for a period of time and then moved to develop an association with another gang (or gang member) in another area or ‘scheme’. Girls were portrayed as the frequent catalyst of conflict between rival gangs, a consequence of spreading stories or by entering into relationships with boys from rival gangs, including in Edinburgh relationships that also overrode traditional family rivalries.

2.37 All of West Dunbartonshire’s gangs and the vast majority of Glasgow’s are white and ethnically Scottish, with the exception of a handful of Asian and Eastern European gangs in parts of the inner city. In Aberdeen and Edinburgh gangs were all white, and the names of members associated with them were almost all Scottish. However some Polish members of gangs were noted in Aberdeen and in Edinburgh there was some discussion of troublesome groups of Polish people, both youths and young adults, although detail was hazy. Police intelligence also suggests there may be gangs made up of asylum seekers in Glasgow, although this was not corroborated.

Territoriality and identity

2.38 The identity of gangs in West Dunbartonshire and Glasgow is based on neighbourhoods and their rationale was overwhelmingly territorial, that is the gangs identified themselves with the neighbourhood in which they lived, claimed control over it, and sought to defend it against groups. All gangs in the West of Scotland locations were involved in fighting, sometimes frequently so, with groups from other areas. As one interviewee noted:

> *The territorial thing is very much alive and well today...the width of a street can dictate whether you’re going to get a scar for the rest of your life, because you have gone over to the other side of the street. You can walk 100 yards from this office and you will find territorial markers on the lampposts, on railings etc. and that’s a warning, this is our area, and if you pitch up here and we either know or we either think you are from another gang,, then there is the possibility that violence is going to result, simply on the basis of that.’*

2.39 All three tiers of membership identify themselves by the same gang name, typically associated with their scheme or neighbourhood. Some traditional gang

names have sectarian connotations. However, none of the interviewees identified sectarianism as a driving force behind gangs now. Tagging is widespread through gang territories: road signs, walls, lampposts and so on are tagged to signify which gang controls the area, or they mark the incursion of one gang into another's area.

2.40 *Edinburgh and Aberdeen*: Gangs in these cities have a much weaker identity. Many do exist primarily within particular neighbourhoods: some young people hang around the streets locally and sometimes they call themselves after the local area and paint tags. There is also a degree of posturing in relation to groups from other areas, including through websites. However, these groups were not said in either city to be having a very clear territorial identity. In Aberdeen they were described as: 'want-to-be-gangs' who were 'not very good at it'; they were said to appear in 'fits and starts; they might be siblings, they are ad hoc'. What gangs there are appear to have some territorial basis but they were described as:

> *'Entirely voluntary, they are not corralled into membership. They are groups of friends that want an identity and give themselves a name'.*

2.41 Some interviewees in Aberdeen believed that if young people involved in groups went outside their territory they would fear violence, as in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire. However others held that the neighbourhood focus was more an issue of bounded horizons. Aberdeen also has a number of supposed gangs associated with high schools in the city. Because the catchment areas for the school are relatively broad, they draw upon young people from several distinct neighbourhoods. These gangs appeared to co-exist with neighbourhood groups.

2.42 In Edinburgh, according to interviewees, young people might claim a territorial gang name, but held no gang association in that they were not involved in any gang activities. Rather, the territorial gang name was used to indicate the neighbourhood where the young person was from.

2.43 Their rationale was said to be primarily social or for mutual protection; they are not bounded by neighbourhoods, they travel elsewhere and there was little evidence of gang fighting across boundaries. Indeed some Edinburgh gangs do not seem to be area based; those that represent the most serious problems of criminality are based around a few large, problematic families, who have offshoots in different deprived parts of the city. It is the children of these families who are identified as being at the core of the most problematic gangs involved in anti social behaviour and assaults. In the city centre, as discussed above, there are reports of a gang drawn from different parts of the city and beyond.

'Gang fighting'

2.44 *Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire*: A key element of gang activity in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire is repeated, collective, inter-gang violence often based on long standing rivalry. The main 'hotspots' were identified as the borders between housing estates, representing gang territories. Interviewees

associated such violence with the consumption of alcohol, although alcohol was not the fundamental cause. Most of the interviewees reported higher levels of violence on Friday and Saturday evenings and in the lighter and warmer summer months. The process of the escalation of territorial gang fighting usually starts off with name calling and insults across gang boundaries, sometimes it does not get beyond that. As one community police officer noted:

> *'I could show you a hundred videotapes where there's' two groups standing in a field shouting at each other and throwing things at each other... It's group of people behaving in disorderly manner, it's not a gang fight. Hundred yard heroes, that's what we call them'.*

2.45 However, conflict could build up to scuffles, bolder incursions into rival territory, progressing to major outbreaks of violence involving injury and sometimes deaths through the use of weapons. As well as face to face activity, some gangs were said to engage in online taunting and to use the internet to arrange fights. Eventually and inevitably as violence rises, the police get involved and conflict dies down again for a while.

2.46 Offending patterns were identified to differ according to the age range of participants. Young teams (under 12) tend to engage in various antisocial behaviours such as graffiti (tagging), fire raising, vandalism and disturbing the peace. The 12 to 16 year olds were identified as the most frequently engaged in gang conflict, but also known to engage in a range of other antisocial behaviours. The older group aged 17 and above, still engages in violent behaviour though it is less frequently group based or territorial.

2.47 *Elsewhere*: In the East of Scotland cities regular collective violence was not present to anything like the same degree. Although one Aberdeen interviewee suggested that there was some territorial conflict between groups, it was clearly on nothing like the scale or the level of the West of Scotland. In Aberdeen and in Edinburgh youth gangs were associated mainly with antisocial behaviour, breach of the peace, vandalism and petty assaults, which was also often drink fuelled, but there was no regular conflict between gangs. Only one gang was noted as having any possible involvement in drug selling. In Aberdeen there is a noted problem of motorcycle/ quad bike nuisance, and this was associated in some of the intelligence with neighbourhood-based gangs, although other sources suggested not. In Dundee, interviewees discussed a range of problematic behaviour among young people, including violent incidents but this was not associated with gangs at all.

Knives and Other Weapons

2.48 In all of the case study areas, the use of knives and other weapons was a topic of the interviews. Unlike gangs (at least in some locations), there were no projects or agencies that had a specific focus on knife carriers or knife users, and this perhaps shaped the responses. Some interviewees nevertheless identified that knife carrying was associated with a range of circumstances not connected to gangs, for example knives being found in the possession of individuals who were arrested for offences such as theft or drug selling. Indeed, there is evidence from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime

(McVie, 2010) that young people who carry knives are a distinctive group from those that self-identify as gang participants. However, in the research interviews, the discussions tended to centre on the extent of the association between gangs and knife and other weapon carrying.

2.49 *Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire*: Gang fighting here was strongly associated with the use of weapons, with the type of weapon reported to vary by age. Younger participants were suggested to rely on bricks and bottles, or improvised clubs. Older participants were more likely to use knives. Knife carrying was frequent and widespread among gangs; knives tend to be domestic or lock back varieties, reflecting easy availability and low cost, although more exotic items such as machetes were sometimes used. Knife carrying was also said to be for protection against possible attack.

2.50 It was said that some gangs did not to use knives during fighting. Some gangs and/or gang members were identified as never having carried knives, whilst others had ceased to carry knives. This might be an effect of the 'stop and search' strategy of Strathclyde police and/or a growing awareness (amongst older gang members) of the consequences of being caught with a knife.

2.51 *Aberdeen and Edinburgh*: here it was reported that gang members did not routinely carry knives or other weapons. Where weapons were used, these tended to be opportunistic (e.g. bricks, sticks, bottles) and attacks were often directed against specific victims (e.g. in acts of retaliation). Where young people boasted about carrying weapons or posted pictures of themselves doing so, this was largely felt to be posturing. This does not mean that knives are never used. In 2005, there was a high profile case in Edinburgh where a youth group member fatally stabbed a member of another group. However, the campaign that followed was by credited local experts as resulting in young people having "got the message" about carrying weapons, and few were believed to be involved in carrying weapons on a regular basis.

2.52 One youth worker in Edinburgh indicated it tended to be the more vulnerable youths who were not involved in troublesome behaviour that carried weapons for fear of being attacked. This fits in with some of the findings from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, presented elsewhere.

2.53 Some individual members of troublesome youth groups in the East of Scotland were identified by police as having offending profiles but the offences are not necessarily linked to group activity, indeed the group offending activities of some of the supposed gangs in Aberdeen were not clearly identified by police sources.

Alcohol and Drugs

2.54 Across the locations, alcohol was mentioned frequently in conjunction with group behaviour. However, drug use was not said to be prevalent among young people involved in gangs or in troublesome groups, beyond a small amount of cannabis and perhaps ecstasy use. Indeed some young people were reported to be critical of harder drug users. Neither was drug selling linked significantly either to gangs or to troublesome youth groups in any location.

Some individual participants, however, appeared to have involvement in drug selling. These tended to be at the older end of the age spectrum and among young people who were becoming more criminally involved. In Edinburgh it was reported that drug selling was centred around some notorious families, the younger members of whom participated in gangs and were involved in drug selling on a localised scale. However, it was clear that drug selling was a very peripheral part of the activities of gangs everywhere.

Conclusions

2.55 Troublesome youth groups are a feature of disadvantaged areas in four out of five of the case study locations. Most troublesome groups of young people, and none outside Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire, fall below the thresholds of identity and violence to be recognised as conforming to the Type B gang vignette (Appendix).

2.56 A difficulty in understanding this whole area is that the gang problem is approached differently in different places (definitions/ measurement/ intelligence/ engagement), which may reflect local political factors as much as the underlying reality. However, it is clear from agency perspectives that gangs across Scotland are not all the same. Glasgow appears to have a far higher number of gangs than any other research location both absolutely and relatively, and their identity is sharper and based almost wholly on territory. There is also a clear sense of gangs being embedded in the history and culture of particular residential communities. The level and rituality of the violence in inter-gang conflict in Glasgow, if not unique, appears to be of a higher order than elsewhere in Scotland. However, this does not mean that conflict is always group based.

2.57 The West Dunbartonshire gangs, located mainly in an area contiguous with the northwestern boundary with Glasgow, are essentially the same, although there are fewer of them.

2.58 In Edinburgh, troublesome youth groups may hold ‘gang’ names and engage in (relatively) low-level antisocial behaviour, but they do not engage in violent conflict with other groups of young people. Territoriality also appears to have diminished in recent years. A unique feature of Edinburgh is the existence of one city centre-based, but not territorial, gang drawn from young people from across the city and beyond.

2.59 Aberdeen appears to have extensive youth gang activity but the numbers of participants are low and activities are rarely ritualistically territorial. Most activity is perhaps better classed as antisocial behaviour, patterned in a similar fashion to Edinburgh.

2.60 Dundee, apparently, is free from anything recognisable as gang activity, rivalries between groups having been dissipated by the 1990s.

2.61 Knife and weapon carrying is clearly not exclusive to young people that participate in groups or gangs, and knife offending by gang participants is not only found in the context of group behaviour. It appeared from the range of

interviews here that knives were most strongly associated with gangs in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire, with associations elsewhere being very weak.

3 GROUP STRUCTURES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Introduction

3.1 This chapter provides a detailed discussion of gang structures and characteristics, as depicted by young people themselves. The chapter is structured in the following fashion. First, it explores whether young people describe the groups they are involved in as gangs. Second, the size, age-range and gender composition of their groups are probed. Third, the role of young women within the group is considered.

3.2 It is important to note that the views of young people presented here , and in chapters 4-7, can not be said to 'representative' of troublesome youth groups and/or gangs, or of their membership, across all case study locations or even within a single case study location. Rather, the views presented here are illustrative those young people accessed via a range of agencies (including the Scottish Prison Service) operating within each case study location. Interviewees, therefore, were drawn from those young people 'in contact' with statutory and/or voluntary agencies. The interviewees varied greatly in nature. Some held mild and others serious offending profiles; some held weak and others strong group/gang associations, and; some were commencing group-based behaviours and others desisting. Finally, as indicated in Chapter 2 the groups and/or gangs also held varied identities. Some were comparable to the type A and B gang vignettes, whilst others held more fluid identities.

Young people's definitions: Gangs, groups or areas?

3.3 The term 'gang' had a variable resonance for the young people we spoke with. Whilst interviewees sometimes referred to the groups they were involved with as 'gangs', in general young people resisted the gang label, preferring to talk about the people they hung about with in terms of an 'area', a 'team' or a 'group'.

> *We're just all pals and we just- We don't really call ourselves a gang, we're just all a group of boys that hang about with one another. (Grant, 18 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

> *I wouldn't know if there's really a gang to be honest because it's only sometimes people fight and that. It's only if other gangs come up we'll fight against them. (Kyle, 19 years, Glasgow)*

> *We don't say we're a gang, we just say if they want to fight with us, we'll fight them. But it's just every other scheme just calls you a gang. (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow)*

> *We call ourselves [name]. We're just a team, do you know what I mean? Like other people have got teams like [name], [name], they're all just like a team and all, do you know what I mean? (Paul, 18 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

3.4 When questioned about commonly known gang names, young people (particularly from the West of Scotland and Dundee) often claimed that these names didn't refer to gangs but were merely the names of areas to which young people 'belonged'.

> *Look, this is the area [name]. It is a gang [name] but this is the area and all. See when they say they're fae a gang, it doesn't mean they fight for it or anything, it's just that's where they're from. (Zoe, 19 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

> *There are lots of names for different parts of the area. They all just call themselves a Young Team because of their age, but they are not really gangs. They don't really think of themselves as gangs or go fighting or stuff, they just hang about in the place they live. (Paddy, 23 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

> *'It's not gangs. It's just wee boys that think they're gangs…It's just wee boys causing a bit of trouble' (Paul, 19 years, Dundee).*

3.5 Many of the young people understood their social worlds in terms of 'territories' and 'boundaries', and categorised other young people in terms of where they were from. During the interviews participants drew upon this idea of territorial affinity or identity as a means of differentiating their own peer networks from 'regular' groups of friends (This theme is explored in greater detail in Chapter 4, Entry).

> *It's my scheme. My group hangs about there so that's where I hang about … We're all close. I think of my pals as brothers, and my pals class me as a brother. Some of my pals are like actually family. Not close family, but distant cousins and stuff like that. We all class ourselves as brothers, man. We all stay with each other. We're always with each other. (Jimmy, 19 years, Edinburgh)*

Group characteristics

3.6 When describing why the groups they were in were sometimes defined as gangs (either by the young people themselves or by others), the young people drew on similar factors to those referred to in the literature, i.e. they focused on their size, their on-street presence, their long-standing nature (discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Entry), their participation in antisocial and/or criminal activity (particularly fighting) and subsequent recognition within the larger community. In general, the young people we interviewed described gangs in keeping with the characteristics of Klein and Maxson's (1996) 'compressed gang' (see also Klein et al 2006). They are mostly small groupings, with relatively narrow age ranges, without sub grouping and some territoriality.

3.7 On the weekends these groups could consist of as many as 30 to 60 young people. During the week, however, the groups split into smaller friendship groups – comprising 10 to 20 young people who met on the street or perhaps at one another's homes.

My immediate group was probably about 20, 25 [young people]. That was ranging from maybe about [age] 11 to 17, maybe 18 some of them. Girls and boys, but the boys were maybe two or three years older than us mostly … If there was a small group of us we'd just really wander about, but Thursday to Sunday we'd get a bottle of cider and go and sit in the park somewhere, about a group of about 50 or 60 of us. (Lisa, 21 years, West Dunbartonshire)

At the weekends it's always maybe about 30 of us, 35 of us, and that's all together. But if it's during the week everybody just goes with their own pals kinda thing. It's just usually about fourteen of us, all our pals. (Jules, 23 years, Glasgow)

3.8 Most of the groups described by young people had relatively narrow age ranges. Around two thirds of respondents reported that the members of their group were within 10 years in age of one another, although some described a span of 15 to 20 years. Without exception these groups were primarily or exclusively teenagers, with just a handful of young adults. In terms of lower age limits, some respondents reported children aged as young as 10 or 11 hanging around in the group, although age 13 to 14 was the usual lower limit. The upper limit varied, although most young people seemed to think that 16 or 17 was the age at which most stopped being part of a youth group. This evidence suggests gangs remain primarily adolescent groups and that most young people 'grow out' of involvement when they reach young adulthood (See Chapter 7 Desistance).

There's the youngers and then there's the aulders. (The youngers are) Maybe about 11, 12 to 13. But once you're about 16 or 17 then the wee guys think they're the aulders, do you know what I mean? (Paul, 23 years, Edinburgh)

There's usually an older group [of adults] and a younger group, like say fourteen to sixteen year olds. They all just muck about together, drinking and stuff like that. Fighting…. Yeah, there's usually like older ones that like, when they were younger they would be the main gang in that area and they've just grown up more but they still, like most of them are still pals and that and they still call themselves what they've called themselves when they were younger. (Lewis, 15 years, Edinburgh)

3.9 Most of the groups reported engagement (as a group) in violent conflict with other groups of young people (see Chapter 5, Gang Activities, for a more detailed account of these behaviours).

[We're a gang and not just a group] Because we don't get along with guys from different schemes … We used to arrange fights and that, and meet half-way and have riots. (Jon, 20 years, Glasgow)

[It was a gang] Because we fought with other people from other schemes. … They'd come into our area and then we'd fight with them,

and then if we were all mad then we'd go up and fight with them. (June, 19 years, West Dunbartonshire)

3.10 Very few participants reported any form of hierarchy or formal group structure. Instead, they characterized their groups as fluid, messy, informal friendship networks that got together regularly, but not in any formal capacity (i.e. they didn't hold meetings). A common comment was:

It's just all the same. We're all a team. We're all out. Basically whoever starts the fight. Everybody could be the leader at whatever stage, whatever time it happens. (June, 19 years, West Dunbartonshire)

'Just because they were mates. I grew up with them. Everyone just kinda stays around. So it's just like that, just like a neighbourhood, just all your mates are in it and that's why you met them. Just because they lived next door to you and that' (Mick, 21 years, Dundee).

'… you just become a part of them when you're hanging about with them' (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow).

3.11 A small number of respondents did, however, indicate that their role in the group might be determined by their behaviour and the extent to which they would go to prove themselves true members of the gang.

It's like ranks, how big your family name is and they're the higher your branch the more respect you get. In the [Area] gang there's about twelve. I'm the leader of the younger ones. It's going to sound stupid, right, but it's like experience. Like, if you've been stabbed and that and you've fought a lot, the more experience you've got the higher you go up. I've been in every fight that [Gang name] has had in the last two years. (Marc, 14 years, Edinburgh)

3.12 Young people in the West of Scotland very rarely identified specific group leaders; they sometimes referred to the 'top men' in their set, by whom they meant gang members who were 'mair gallus' or 'gemme' (i.e. they had the 'most bottle').

*He's the best fighter… Well, he probably is one of the best fighters and he just- Like, he wouldn't take s**te off of anybody. If anybody said anything about him then obviously he would deal with it and like he was into doing the drugs and that, and obviously doing well and c***s respect him. Actually a lot of people don't like him, he's got a lot of enemies. (Kyle,19 years, Glasgow)*

3.13 Young people in the East of Scotland often talked about one specific leader of the group, although as with those in the West of Scotland that person was predominantly described as the individual who was the toughest or most daring within the group. The leadership role could be challenged by others in the group and it may be decided by violence; however, young people often steered clear of upsetting the leader for fear of the implications to themselves. This

difference between East and West may be related to the more fluid nature of the groups in the East that were not always determined by area of residence.

It's basically, basically it's just the hardest person there will be the leader basically. Yeah, it's who can handle themselves better and who can fight, basically. Yeah, and then everyone else would just follow that person. (Lewis, 15 years, Edinburgh)

3.14 None of the young people reported that their group had colours, signs etc., although many had their own graffiti 'tags' or 'menchies', that they used to mark their turf (or to mark other areas during incursions). Some young people reported that there were dress codes amongst the group, but that these were low key and not designed to mark them out as 'different' from other groups. It was more a case of wearing clothes that would not embarrass them, such as designer casual wear or football tops. While dress codes were invisible to most people, it was acknowledged that other youth groups would be able to mark individuals out:

When we go to fight we wear colours, like the [Gang name] is [Football club] shirts, tops and that. But for [Area name] it's, like, you have to wear either a black T-shirt, jumper, trousers or hat…You've got to wear pure black going about. Black plimsolls, black jeans, black joggies. Most of us wear joggies. Black jumper. A lot of us do wear balaclavas if we, like, stay in a different area or fight with a different area. (Marc, 14 years, Edinburgh)

It's more like designer makes. Nike and some decent makes as well, it's not just like a certain make they all stick to. It's just casual clothing, basically. Just anything. They've not really got particular set clothes that they would wear. (Lewis, 15 years, Edinburgh)

3.15 Youth groups were more identifiable by their tags or signs than by their clothes. There was no suggestion that signs or tags were an essential part of the group identity; however, it was not uncommon for participants to state that some members of the group, particularly the younger ones, would put a 'mention' up in areas where the gang hung around frequently and in other, neighbouring areas as a taunt to a rival group.

That's [Gang name]. Just look up, see if you walk down [Street name] and go into side alleys and that, you'll see graffiti everywhere for, like, the gangs…We do it in other areas mostly. Like, we'll do it in our own area and then go to other areas. (Marc, 14 years, Edinburgh)

Young women's roles within the group

3.16 The vast majority of the groups were mixed-gender, but predominantly male. Girls and young women were reported as comprising between one-fifth and one-third of the group.

I don't think there's ever an equal amount of boys and girls. I think the boys usually overplay the girls in numbers. (Christina, 15 years, Edinburgh)

It's mixed most of the time but there's usually more boys than girls. (Lewis, 15 years, Edinburgh)

3.17 Both male and female respondents reported that young men, in general, were more heavily involved in offending and violence than young women, and therefore were more likely to be perceived as 'true' group members. Young women, in contrast, were perceived primarily as gang associates, particularly by young men who often referred to gang-involved girls in derogatory and disparaging ways.

3.18 Young women were often described (by young men) as catalysts of trouble, directly and indirectly, through passing on telephone numbers, spreading rumours, sleeping with multiple partners across territorial divisions and/or actually fighting with young men.

*They mix a lot of s**t, make rumours up, say stuff and do stuff, fire into you when they've got boyfriends and their boyfriends are your pals … That's how fights start and then you end up fighting each other. People do it from other schemes, like High Town, their birds come up here. (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow)*

3.19 That said, young men admitted that they themselves often asked young women to fulfil these duties (e.g. infiltrating rival groups, passing on phone numbers, sanctioning young women who had been unfaithful to them) and deliberately cultivated friendships with young women from other areas in order to meet young women for sex.

3.20 There was also evidence of a sexual double standard in operation in the relations between male and female gang members. Many of the young men admitted that young women were 'treated like a piece of ass' and young women's options for dating were narrower as well.

*The guys had a lot more freedom. They would pick and choose girls, really, and if they were caught cheating it was like 'Tough, deal with it', whereas if a girl was caught cheating it would be like she was the biggest sl*t ever and she'd be totally and utterly denounced and made to be this small person. (Lisa, 21 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

3.21 Whilst the younger male respondents went out with girls in their own group, older young men often reported that they preferred to go out with 'other' girls that they met at school or via friends and family members. This was often because such young women didn't have a sexual history within the group.

3.22 Rather than challenging this sexual double standard, young women often reinforced it in their policing of their own sexuality and their relationships with each other. They not only rejected sexual relations outwith a steady

relationship, they rejected relationships with young women regarded as sexually promiscuous in order to avoid contamination by association.

3.23 That is not to suggest the young women were unaware or uncritical of their male peers attitudes and behaviour. Young men were routinely reported as being verbally abusive and controlling towards the young women in their group, using them for money, sex, or just somewhere to hang out. In fact, there was evidence that young women could be very vulnerable to sexual assault or even rape by members of the group with the greatest amount of power.

But a lot of the girls were just, like, sex objects or they were the ones who had money on a Friday because they were older and they were getting bursaries; or their mum and dad were easy to get money off and then they'd be like 'Okay, we'll just use them for their house. Everybody had their own role. We can sit at your house, we can do this at yours, we can do that, you do that for me, you do that for me. (Lisa, 21 years, West Dunbartonshire)

They're not attracted to him. He kind of makes them do it. It'd be like, come on, we'll go over there, we'll go for sex and if you said no I'd force you to do it, I'd physically lift you up and take you. Like, he's just so, like, I don't know what word can describe it but so like "do this, do that" and it gets hard to say no to him. (Davina, 16 years, Edinburgh)

3.24 Violence against females was typically not accepted within the groups. That said, many of the young men recounted incidents of when they would or actually had hit a young woman, usually when they were being 'annoying', 'asking for it', or initiated a fight themselves.

If she's strong enough to hit a guy she's strong enough to get treated like one. If she was hitting one of my pals or something- If it was two lassies [fighting one another] I wouldn't do it, but if it was- If she was hitting one of my pals or something, aye, she'd get it back. (Henry, 16 years, Glasgow)

…Quite a lot of the girls got involved with the older guys with sex and things like that, thinking 'If I have sex with him I'm never going to get touched'. I saw a lot of girls getting really hurt through that because they were just getting used and abused basically. (Lisa, 21 years, West Dunbartonshire)

'I know a girl from [a rival scheme].... She'd just run through you. She was fighting with a quean and just mauled her. This girl just fights with anybody… I've seen her fighting with a couple of boys and the boys have hit her back, like proper' (Frank, 16 years, Aberdeen)

Conclusion

3.25 This chapter has described some of the characteristics and internal dynamics of the groups' young people were involved with. Whilst some interviewees referred to the groups they were involved with as 'gangs', in general young

people resisted the gang label, preferring to talk about the people they hung about with in terms of an ‘area’, a ‘team’ or a ‘group’. Territorial and group identity was often, especially in the West of Scotland, interwoven.

3.26 The groups were mostly small, with relatively narrow age ranges, without sub grouping and some territoriality. On the weekends these groups swelled in size to as many as 30 to 60 young people. During the week, however, the groups split into smaller friendship groups. The vast majority of the groups were mixed-gender, but predominantly male. The groups can best be characterised as fluid, messy, informal friendship networks that got together regularly, but not in any formal capacity.

3.27 Despite the adoption of multiple group labels, evidence of varied group characteristics and differing intensities of group association, the generic features ascribed to these groups by the young people hold a strong resonance with the Eurogang network definition of a gang. Hereafter, therefore, we will employ the term gang as a common reference to all teams, areas and gangs described by the young people interviewed in this study.

4 ENTRY

Introduction

4.1 This chapter plots the various contexts leading to membership of a gang. In particular, we trace the intergenerational and area transmission of the normality of gang membership, membership as learned behaviour, quality of life and the significance of place attachment and schools (particularly in the West of Scotland) in solidifying friendship and nascent gang identities. The chapter progresses to plot the processes and motivations linked to joining a gang.

Family and area tradition

4.2 In the West of Scotland in particular, most interviewees pointed to the longstanding presence of gangs in their local area. Indeed, the existence of gangs was taken as a given whilst growing up. Many, though not all, pointed to the participation of their fathers and older siblings in gangs and gang-related fighting. Indeed, several gang members reported that they had been introduced to the gang by their older siblings. The witnessing of gang fighting, directly or indirectly through story-telling, appeared to emphasize the normality of gangs.

> *It been going on for generations, man. And a lot of their das and all that, they were in it and all, do you know what I mean? (Paul, 18 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

> *I don't even know how far back it goes, but it's, I can remember my da', no ma da' but my pal's da' and that, they used to tell the stories, know what I mean, like we tell the wee guy's stories and what we had done, and then their boys did like fifteen and that, and like dropping one, drunk, know what I mean, talking to each other and like that, "see that fight with that ******, man, he smashed one of my pals, da" and "aww, I used to smash f*** oot them and a' that" know what I'm talking about? That's just guys talking about it, like ah used tae like that, ken? (Sarah, 19 years, Glasgow)*

> *My dad and that did and my uncles and that did. It's all you hear when you're a wee guy, it's them talking (Simon, 17 years, Glasgow)*

4.3 Gang associates were less likely to report having this degree of entrenched gang behaviour in their family. They distinguished between the families of serious gang members and their own families:

> *I think their family don't really care about them as much as everyone else's family. Like, their parents, if they got taken home by the police it would be like "oh, whatever," and then just let them go back out and stuff like that. The fact that their parents had the view that it's their life and they can ruin it if they want, really. Whereas my mum would have the view of "it's her life and she can ruin it but not yet". She wants me to have a good start in life, whereas I don't think their parents did. (Christina, 15 years, Edinburgh)*

Learned behaviour

4.4 Most interviewees identified someone they looked up to whilst growing up (i.e., before they became a gang member). Despite the participation of fathers and older siblings in gangs, the role models identified by interviewees tended to be current and older gang members. Interviewee's reflected on the 'respect' that these individuals held and had accrued through participation in gang fighting. As children, the interviewees tended to imitate the behaviours of older gang members, playing games of chase that mirrored the to and fro of gang fights. It is evident that gang membership and gang fighting exist as learned behaviours.

The wee guys… just want to, they just belong, because they see us fighting. You tell them not to… But we used to look up to them [the older ones] but now we've grown up so obviously the younger ones probably look up to us but we don't want all the wee young guys fighting. (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow)

Aye, all the younger boys, we do all talk to them. They look up to us sometimes, know what I mean, like, because we give them respect here. There's a lot of people on the scheme that talk down to all the wee boys, and it's not really fair, know what I mean? I talk to anybody, really. If they respect us, respect is given. They all look up to us (Kenny, 16 years, Glasgow)

Quality of life and territoriality

4.5 Almost the whole sample reported that they had lived within a particular neighbourhood or 'scheme' (public housing estate) for their entire lives. Most characterised these neighbourhoods according to a range of negative attributes inclusive of deprivation, sectarianism, drugs and violence. Most frequently, however, interviewees bemoaned the lack of social and sporting facilities in the neighbourhood.

There's nothing aboot to dae and it's just like nae free fitba pitches that we could go to just to kick about or nae inside (Gary, 15 years, Glasgow)

There's nothing really to like, it's just where I'm from know what I mean (Bruce, 21 years, Glasgow)

It used to be nearly every weekend that people would come through and cause trouble and it would start a big gang fight. Like, people would get hurt and I don't like that kind of stuff (Henry, 16 years, Glasgow)

You wouldn't think it, but it is quite rough, like, it's dangerous at night because, you know, things are, especially when there's groups of teenagers and that, it's quite bad (Steph, 14 years, Edinburgh)

'Really, there's nothing to do. It's just boring. Seeing all the same folk, seeing everything the same. All we normally do is go up the shop, get

something, then go up my house or my mates' house or we play football. That's all we do' (Brian, 16 years, Aberdeen).

'You used to not be able to walk through the scheme without getting your trainers stolen. That was the trademark - you walk through and you get your trainers stolen' (Graham, 18 years, Dundee 5).

4.6 Growing up, many interviewees' (from the West of Scotland) life experiences were bounded by their neighbourhood of residence. Most held a positive affiliation to their neighbourhood, despite its negative characteristics (outlined above). In this context, friendship networks tended to be the most important aspect of neighbourhood that interviewees were able to identify. In this sense, territoriality and friendship networks are closely interlinked. In the East of Scotland, friendship networks were also very important. However, there was not the same intertwining of territoriality and friendship networks as the latter were not drawn exclusively from a particular neighbourhood.

The people in it, that's what I like about it. Obviously we're going to grow up and start working soon, but when I'm thirty I'd like to think I'll still be hanging about with all the same pals in the pub (Dave, 18 years, Glasgow)

*I'm not going to stay here for seventeen years of my life and then go away and start making new pals again. F*** that (Bill, 17 years, Glasgow)*

Schools

4.7 Schools occupied a pivotal arena in which some young people's progression toward gang membership was secured. It was in school (commencing at primary level) that long-term friendships were formed/solidified and place attachment or 'territoriality' significantly strengthened (in the West of Scotland). At primary school, forming friendships was often tied to joining a larger group of single-neighbourhood based friends. In the West of Scotland, interviewees were aware of the existence of territorial rivalries whilst at primary school. For many, neighbourhood boundaries matched primary school catchment areas.

4.8 Typically, the transition from primary to secondary school education brought young people from different territories together. This transition (age 12-13) is associated with increased participation in gang-related fighting. Fighting took place between gangs of youth representing rival territories who were enrolled in the same school, or between gangs of youths representing rival territories but attending different schools. In essence, school catchment areas (at primary and secondary level) unintentionally reinforce or challenge the territorial identities of young people.

At primary school it wasn't really a big major issue, gang-fighting… but it's once you're at secondary school and we used to walk around the pitch all the time after school, walk on the pitch, looking for a fight. That was normal back then. That was the normal thing to do. I started gang-fighting when I was about twelve, thirteen years old. I just started

because everybody else did it, so I could be part of the in-crowd. If you weren't gang-fighting, you weren't allowed to hang about with gangs or anything. You'd be yourself because everybody used to actually fight. That was the way to make a pal… the way to make pals was to go gang-fighting. That's where everybody went (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

We used to fight with [other neighbourhood] who used to go to the school…if we see them we'd probably fight them, aye… they would fight for their school and you'd fight for your school (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow)

Joining a gang?

4.9 Gang membership emerged from hanging out together on the streets. There was no evidence that gang members had ritualised initiation ceremonies. That said, some respondents acknowledged that in order to be accepted as part of the group they had to establish that they were 'sound' and demonstrate a willingness to stand up for themselves and their area.

*You don't really join – you just start hanging about with c***s and that, man, and if you're born in a scheme if you're going to stay in a scheme the rest of your life … There are folk that are born into a gang, they grow up with people that's their big brothers and their dads and that, they were all in the same Young Team. They've just got to carry on the pattern and just keep it going. (Vic, 16 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

You just become a part of them when you're hanging about with them (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow)

*Only takes one incident, though, then. You fight once and you have a couple of beers with your pals and you walk down and the c***s come out and you fight once and that's you, you're recognised, you're in (Simon, 17 years, Glasgow)*

Well, you just get to ken them. It's one of those things. You'll meet them through a pal and then you'll meet a person who's mates with one of your pals through one of their pals, and then it just keeps going and you all start to muck about with each other. I knew one of them from school. (Jodie, 14 years, Edinburgh)

It's, like, say I stayed in, just say [place name], and I went to try and be in the [gang] baby crew, I'd probably get battered first to test my loyalty. Go against the team from, and if I tested my loyalty to them I'd be fine. Well, depending on what [place name] baby crew I'm trying to get into. I've had a lot of kickings because of it (Marc, 14 years, Edinburgh)

A sense of belonging

4.10 The sense of belonging that gang membership afforded, in essence an interweaving of friendship, family and neighbourhood ties, was seen as a very important factor leading toward gang membership. For some, this sense of belonging was perceived to be stronger than the bonds they held with family members. Often these friendship networks become major sources of support for young people who have multiple problems and need a source of personal support. This instils a strong sense of loyalty.

It's like when you're with your pals it's as if you're one big family, know what I mean. You've got your family but we don't see it like that. We see it like your pals are your family and your pals are the people that you hang about with (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

I don't know, they are nice people. I mean, people think they're aggressive and all that, but once you get to know them they can be really friendly and caring and funny. I mean, I wouldn't see some of them as the people that they are because I know the other side of them, like the caring, trusting people (Christina, 15 years, Edinburgh)

Gangs, fighting and other illicit behaviours

4.11 Just as becoming a gang member was something that just happened; a normal part of growing up in a particular neighbourhood, engaging in gang-related (i.e., inter group) violence was perceived of as normal. The commencement of these activities coincided with the uptake of other illicit behaviours, particularly drinking and drug taking (within friendship networks).

There's always somebody that wants to fight in every scheme (Stephen, 16 year, Glasgow)

'Aye. That's like, sometimes when you are in [a nightclub in Dundee] and that […] that's, like, the place that all the people start fighting in. Someone will drag somebody or something and they'll start fighting people… Maybe because of the area they're from, actually. It could be because of that […] See what it's like, though, sometimes it's like people that don't like each other and then they'll go "he's from there" so their mates would start on him' (Paul, 19 years, Dundee).

There's nothing else to dae aboot here so – that's the best thing there is to dae is fight. Obviously it's not the best thing to dae but (Mick, 16 years, Glasgow)

*I played football and all that all the time and then you get to that age, man, fourteen and that you want to start boozing, don't you, and you start getting a drink in you and you f***ing… just had the false courage, just took a bottle of wine and then you want to go doing people, know what I mean (Ade, 15 years, Glasgow)*

*He just didn't want to fight. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke, he doesn't do anything. That's the way I lived until I was fourteen! Then I just started smoking fags, f***ing smoking hash, drinking, taking drugs (Bill, 17 years, Glasgow).*

Conclusion

4.12 This chapter has endeavoured to relate the various factors that appear to underpin gang membership. It is striking how gang membership and violent group behaviour are regarded as a normal part of growing up in particular families and neighbourhoods. Gang members, though not exclusively, are drawn from families with a history of gang membership. Further, it is evident how gang membership and behaviours are learned, both from family members and peer associations. Young people point to their observation of gangs and gang members (role models) as part of their childhood experiences.

4.13 Crucially, the interviewees evidenced an interweaving of individual, friendship and gang identities, which in the West of Scotland were further underwritten by place attachment or territoriality. In other words, individuals defined themselves in terms of their friendships (and not other activities), which in turn were formed to some extent in bounded territories or neighbourhoods. In a sense, the individual shares a common identity with the gang, and the gang with the neighbourhood. The significance of 'place attachment' is not nearly so strong in the East of Scotland.

5 GROUP ACTIVITIES

Introduction

5.1 Gang members engage in a wide variety of activities, both conventional and delinquent. This reflects the fact that they are largely part of a group of adolescents who have a desire to engage in normal youthful games and activities. However, they also have a group identity and some aspects of their lifestyle are oriented around both territoriality and violence. This chapter is structured in the following fashion. First, the day-to-day activities of gang members are explored. Second, the anti-social and offending behaviours of gang members are relayed. Third, the violent (individual and collective) behaviours of interviewees are probed and a distinction made between interpersonal and territorial violent behaviours.

Day-to-day activities

5.2 The day-to-day routines of gang members are in the main fairly innocuous and greatly resemble the activities of other young people. While gang members do engage in violence together (see below), most of their time is spent hanging around with friends in public places and private residences.

> *If it's a sunny day we'll probably sit out the back, but if it's pishing with rain we'll sit in one of my pals' house or something. (James, 19 years, Glasgow)*

> *We just hang about. Sit in people's houses, play the computer. Walk about the street. (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow).*

5.3 Those young people who were out of mainstream education (had left school at 16 or were currently not attending school) reported seeing each other on a near daily basis, usually meeting mid to late afternoon. More peripheral group members joined them during the evenings, at weekends and during the holidays. Being out of school was often reported as a catalyst for getting involved in more entrenched forms of delinquent behaviour.

5.4 Most young people talked of drinking during the day, evenings and weekends to varying extents. Binge drinking seemed very common. This tended to take place in public spaces which they had 'claimed' as their own or alternatively in young people's homes; few young people reported going to bars and/or clubs, either locally or in the city centre.

5.5 Many young people stated that drugs were readily available to the group, if people wished to use them, although it was clear that not all gang members were drug users. Those who did use drugs tended to describe this as a recreational pastime, with drug use limited to marijuana/cannabis, ecstasy, steroids and/or cocaine. Generally speaking, young people in gangs did not consider them or any of their fellow gang members to be addicted to drugs.

> *'When we were about twelve, thirteen, we just like used to just do drugs. Or some people did. Just hash, smoke hash and that. Then on*

the weekend just get drunk and some people take eccos and that. That's about it' (Kevin, 18 years, Dundee).

5.6 In contrast, heroin use was seen as synonymous with drug addiction and hatred and persecution of addicts was powerful in a number of case study areas. This vehemence stemmed from the interviewees perception of addicts' apparent willingness to steal from others within the community to pay for their habits. It could be argued, therefore, that gangs cast themselves in a role of protector for the community. That said, several gang members talked of their own criminal endeavours, which were not dissimilar to activities of drug addicts. When pressed upon the difference between the gang's criminality and the drug addicts', young people argued that drugs in general were not 'bad' only heroin, which was described as 'dirty'.

'That's a downer. The people on that [heroin], they always go about stealing things. They're just junkies. Other people will take ecstasy and that […] No, they wouldn't steal stuff. I was on about the jakeys. Other folk, they would just smoke hash or take an ecto or a bit of coke. Just on the weekend. But jakeys are Monday to, it's every day. And they steal to get it and rob people and old women and that. Old women just get their bags ripped off them and that' (Angus, 21 years, Dundee).

Antisocial behaviour and offending

5.7 Young people interviewed as part of the study admitted involvement in a range of delinquent and/or criminal activities, individually and as part of the gang, but much of this crime was not organised or planned. Rather, it tended to be opportunistic or sporadic as they hung around the local area, bored, looking for something to do.

5.8 The most commonly reported delinquent or criminal activities were public drinking and violence (see below); however, gang members also reported involvement in property damage (such as vandalism and fire raising), property theft (including, vehicle theft and minor shoplifting), public disorder offences (mainly breach of the peace) and drug dealing. Significant differences were observed in the scale of offending reported by different gang members. These activities were not the exclusive preserve of gang members, however, and were reportedly undertaken by a range of young people in the local area.

5.9 Drug dealing was most likely to be, although not exclusively, reported by older gang members (usually in their late teens) and it was clear that this was a point at which involvement in offending made the transition from general violence and delinquency to more organised, serious crime.

5.10 Often it was the case that older members of the gang would encourage, or even threaten, the younger ones into dealing small amounts of drugs on their behalf. This was partly a safety mechanism (as it meant they were not carrying so much personally), but also a lucrative and easy way of making money by exploiting young, often vulnerable, people.

5.11 Graffiti was common amongst the younger gang members, as well as non gang members. When non gang members tagged it would most commonly be in their area to signify a sense of belonging. Tagging outwith the territory seemed to be an activity aimed at publicising their area or team, or antagonising their rivals.

> *You just go and buy spraypaint and f***ing terrorize the place … It's something to do, man. Now you just get mad with it all the time but at that time we would go about doing menchies, know what I mean. You've just started high school and you get one and you just keep walking around and just out of habit, man, know what I mean … You're knocking about, just standing and talking and knocking about so you just do menchies ... Just your name and where you're from. (Simon, 17 years, Glasgow)*

> *Maybe once every six months or something, but they wouldn't see a bare wall and get their pen, they wouldn't carry a marker pen with them every day and write their name on the wall or something. But then the police, then they realise that that's how the police are tracking them down, by their names being on the wall and they would stop it. (Christina, 15 years, Edinburgh)*

5.12 Fire setting was reported as common pastime in summertime, especially amongst younger gang members. When the Fire Service arrived, they would be subjected to verbal abuse and miscellaneous missiles. Illegal bonfires were also common around the 5th of November. This was commonly reported by young people in the West of Scotland, but rarely by those in the East.

5.13 A minority of young people reported group involvement in housebreaking, but again there was no evidence that this was an organised activity. Most typically offending was committed 'for kicks' whilst intoxicated and/or to fund alcohol and recreational drug use. Some interviewees indicated that there were unofficial rules, however, based on some sense of moral code about where it was permissible to steal from and where it wasn't.

> *You can't go stealing off people in your area. That's the main thing. You can't do that because you're stealing from round about where people stay, and people don't like that, like their mums and that kind of people maybe and stuff like that. So that's like one rule. You get battered for that if you do that. If you go and break into cars in the area you get battered for that as well. Just stupid things, if you start smashing bottles and pure making a fool of yourself you get battered for that as well. So it's just to keep yourself alive! Well, not keep yourself alive but stay safe. (Paul, 17 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

Violence (interpersonal and group)

5.14 Most of the violence young people reported involved fights between individual young people who were already known to one another and perhaps members of the same friendship group. This fighting rarely involved rival gang members. Most interpersonal violence took place between same-sex peers, but instances of violence between individual boys and girls were also reported.

5.15 There was some evidence that violence between members of the same group was less likely to be indiscriminate than that occurring between rival groups. Gang members tended to need a strong motivation for fighting amongst themselves which often came down to betrayal of friendships.

> *They needed a reason to fight. They would have to have done something. They'd just have to give them cheek or do something like cheat on them with their girlfriend or boyfriend or something, for them to fight. Or if someone slagged off one of their friends. It's a friendship thing, really. (Christina, 15 years, Edinburgh)*

5.16 Those who were considered the more serious gang members, judged by their level of involvement in interpersonal violence were also sometimes involved in theft by force or threats of violence. Often, violence would extend into robbery, although young people might also be involved in targeting particular individuals because they looked as if they were likely to be wealthy.

> *We would just start off into a fight and it would just get too bad and then we would just end up robbing them. (Kevin, 17 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

5.17 Many young people saw ongoing retaliatory confrontations with gangs from other areas, rather than purposeful (individual and small group) criminality, as central to the identity of the gang (though not all young people reported engagement in such activities). Gang members reported fighting for many of the same reasons that other young people fight. The most commonly cited goals were to punish a peer for some action, to get a peer to back down from offensive action and to defend themselves (see below).

5.18 Most group fights took place after young people had been drinking and alcohol was also involved in much interpersonal violence. That said, alcohol was not regarded as a root cause of violence, but rather it was described as a disinhibitor, sometimes causing the young person to black out and therefore not be responsible for his or her actions.

> *You're full of something. It's never a straight fight. When you're sober it's always fisty fights, but when you're mad with it it's always a blade or whatever …It's just through being mad with it. See when you fight, you're mad with it. That's what starts the fight. Coke and just drinking and valium. Always drinking. There's always drink involved. (June, 19 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

> *Every time I'm drunk I will fight with someone, but if I'm sober and somebody looks at me I'll still fight with them too. But, like, I get more adrenaline when I'm drinking. (Sami, 16 years, Edinburgh)*

> *'Every weekend when we were drinking we'd go out after we were all drunk and we'd probably see other people from other parts of Aberdeen. Like [a rival scheme] and all that. Then we'd just start fighting with them' (Brian, 16 years, Aberdeen).*

5.19 Status challenges were a common precursor to fights between both young men and young women. The existence of an identifiable leader was used by gang members as a mechanism to initiate fighting. Several young people talked about targeting the leader of the group so as to prove that they were tough or hard because they were capable of beating the highest status member of the opposite group. This would often cause other members of the group to back-off.

See, when we go fighting, we'll not go for like ken the weediest looking guy, we'll go for the hardest person, it looks, we'll go for the person that looks hardest, because once you take the hardest one out you'll have no problem battering the rest, we always go for the hardest like." (Sami, 16 years, Edinburgh)

Territorial fighting

5.20 A significant amount of gang activity revolves around challenging, chasing and fighting rival areas or teams. Territorial rivalries were often longstanding and routinised. These historical disputes were often claimed to be caused by a specific event in the distant past, but the specificities of this incident were usually long forgotten. In other cases, no historical affront was reported and young people said that they merely engaged in territorial battles for the sake of it.

See years ago, there was a few- It was like the older ones than us, they split into two gangs and they two all just- Petrol bombs were getting thrown and everything. One boy got a big chop right across his heid. The guy that did that was more or less one of his best friends. It's just, one fight can cause a full scheme to just split. (Richard, 27 years, Glasgow).

Well they used to actually hang about with each other, to start with but people from [another gang] they battered a guy and like it was attempted murder, and my pal … said it was him that done it, and he was getting charged with attempted murder so that's how they started fighting with each other. It's been going in for a good few years now. (Walter, 23 years, Glasgow)

5.21 Most territorial or group fighting was not serious, but involved a great deal of bluster and standoff – with lots of running back and forwards, shouting, and throwing of missiles – but little actual violence. As a result, young people often referred to such fights in a manner akin to the playground chasing game of 'tig', albeit a version involving bricks and bottles. In these cases, serious injuries were rare and when they did occur they were rarely intentionally lethal.

Basically, see if you chase them, that's youse, you've won the fight because they've run away. (Chris, 19 years, Glasgow)

One time we were up gang fighting man, up [place name], and there was a boy, and he stayed in the first flats just when you cross the bridge, and his dad was at the window man and I was sitting shouting

abuse at him and I didn't know it was his dad and his dad came down with a heavy chopper. He came down with a heavy machete, so he did, chased us all right down the bridge. But it's just like tig … See when I say it's like tig, he turned his back and all of us just charged towards him, and he ran up, and then we chased him back down and that was it done. (Mary, 14 years, Glasgow)

5.22 Amongst a minority of respondents, gang fighting was viewed much more seriously, involving more serious violence and more grave consequences. For these young people, gangs were conceptualised as a rite of passage, a way of proving something to themselves, their friends and their rivals.

Territorial fighting: West and East

5.23 There was a distinct difference between gangs in the West of Scotland and those in the East in this respect, since East coast gangs rarely talked about old scores or historical battles. For them, gang identities were usually constructed around traditional or historical gang names passed down by previous generations that were merely adopted rather than 'owned'. Nevertheless, fighting between rival groups living in neighbouring or even further flung areas of the city was commonly reported.

They're not really as bad now as what they used to be, but they used to be, like, sometimes, like, schemes close to each other would fight but places further away will fight with someone sometimes. People, so, they definitely just go and fight with them, know what I mean, so you'd have someone from one side of the town to fight with someone down that way and then they would maybe mix up and fight with each other, even though they've already been fighting each other, just because there's all the people coming down to their bit for fighting. (Marc, 14 years Edinburgh)

Territorial fighting: location

5.24 Gang confrontations were reported as occurring across territorial boundaries or in places where young people congregated, such as a school or local shopping centre. Derelict land near territorial boundaries was the most commonly reported place to fight, presumably because the open space provided ample room for manoeuvre and perhaps also sufficient opportunity for escape. In other cases, however, the conflict zones were more precarious with fights taking place across busy roads, on bridges across motorways or railway lines.

We used to go up the steel bridge and they'd all be at the other side and we'd just fight them on that.' (Gary, 15 years, Glasgow)

We used to go over [place name] … it's all big long grass. There have been time me and my pals have walked into the middle and they've all stood up on the grass, hundreds of them, just surrounded you, and you had to just run the one way into them all, because that was the only way you could get out, or they would have all walked into you and done you in. (Jon, 20 years, Glasgow)

Then we would just end up meeting somewhere where no police would come and just fight' (Brian 16 years, Aberdeen).

5.25 The city centre was often perceived to be the most dangerous place to go by gang members, and those who ventured into the city to drink, dance and meet members of the opposite sex were wary of meeting members of other gangs, particularly historical rivals.

It's when they meet you in the dancing. I've met a lot of boys I used to fight with in the dancing and all that, and they've just came over and there like that shaking your hand, all pally, and I'm like that see if they get me outside, that's it man, it's like totally over man, they would just do me in. (Stuart, 16 years, Glasgow)

Territorial fighting: organisation

5.26 Sometimes group conflicts were organised in advance, sometimes by agreement by the two sides; at other times they were more opportunistic. In the West, gang members talked of rival groups fighting at the same place at similar times of the week in a routinised or ritualistic fashion. In some instances young people reported a strategic element to gang fights. They talked of lying in wait for rival gangs – pulling 'sneakies' – and picking the right moment to attack (i.e., when their foes were vulnerable for some reason). Respondents also talked about stacking the odds in their favour, by stashing weapons near pre-arranged battle sites. This was not reported amongst any of the interviewees in the East of Scotland, who were more likely to report violent encounters as being unplanned and opportunistic.

One of the wee guys was walking up [a neutral street] and all the big [rival scheme] sneakied him. They were hiding about and then they ran out and caught him; and then a few of my mates seen it and shouted and everybody ran around and chased them away, making sure my mate was all right. (Chris, 19 years, Glasgow)

Just go up there, see what happens. There's no planning in a gang fight, because … it might no go to plan, sort of thing. A sneaky, a sneaky, that's the only way you can plan a gang fight, is a sneaky… They tell us to come up there at 6 o'clock, we'll walk up at quarter to six, and maybe, it's long grass … We would go in bushes where they would walk by, and people would go there, so they would jump out behind them, so they can't run back to their own scheme, they have to run to [our scheme], and we would all be standing waiting on him, and then that's, that's them done, they can't do nothing. (Jon, 20 years, Glasgow)

5.27 Young people talked about using the internet as a way to monitor the activities of other gangs and organise fights with them; however, it is less often used to plan fights than is popularly supposed. Rather, the young people most commonly said they used MSN and Bebo more as a means of taunting their

rivals or passing veiled invitations to fight. Mobile phones were more commonly reported as being used in the planning and organisation of group fights.

We're always on MSN and Bebo on the Internet, and people try to be wide on that so we'll arrange a fight with them and get them to meet up and then we just all start fighting, because as soon as we arrange a fight we phone everybody. Like if I arrange a fight with somebody and they say aye and they want to fight me, I'll phone everybody I know and get them to meet me somewhere and we'll just all go down to the place and go fighting with them. (Sami, 16 years, Edinburgh)

But you wouldn't just write on Bebo, like, "fight on a Friday night". Someone could just see that and they would be just like "Are you coming out Friday night?"… some people might use Bebo but mostly they do it over the phone, eh, but try not to send a text because if you're getting texted you can get traced as well. You'd just look on that and you used to see where they were all meeting up... That was the way you'd know, like it'd be "are you coming out this weekend?" "aye, we'll be there here" so we used to go off and fight with them then as well. (Mark, 17 years, West Dunbartonshire)

Territorial fighting: motivation

5.28 Gang fighting was frequently framed by interviewees as being stimulated by a desire to seek self protection and an obligation to protect your friends (to protect your neighbourhood in the West). Fighting was seen as integral to the maintenance of these bonds. The accounts of interviewees frequently interwove these narratives. Some young people felt that it was this tendency to stick up for the other members of the group that differentiated a 'gang' from just a group of friends. Having the courage to defend another member of the group when they were threatened with violence was seen as a specific act of gang membership.

I felt safe because I had my friends behind me. It was basically us against the world, know what I mean It was us against everyone. I would have their back and they'd have mine. (Davina, 16 years, Edinburgh)

Aye, see I seen somebody battering one of my pals so I smashed him, obviously, and if I was getting battered he would stick up for me…You can't pass someone that's battering one of your pals (Dave, 18 years, Glasgow)

[It's] about belonging to a scheme, it's territorial… and some people respect that but you get people trying to take over, trying to get in fights to run that area, so obviously people are standing up for their area, their scheme (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

'It was just guarding my area, like people thinking they can try and take the mickey out of my cousin and that, so my cousin would start

fighting. Obviously if they're fighting I'm not going to stand there, so obviously I was getting involved in fighting as well. Nine times out of ten I got my head caved in and I was just getting sick of it. I was sick of people treating me like a little kid. Okay, I was a little kid but I wasn't a kid, know what I'm saying? I was getting treated like a little kid so I wanted to prove myself' (Will, 21 years, Aberdeen).

5.29 Being a girl in the gang brought an extra level of loyalty and protection from the boys, particularly if they were the girlfriends of core gang members. Girls were seen as in need of extra protection, although there was an element of control that restricted their freedom to some extent. However, this was not true for all the girls – only those who were considered 'popular'.

5.30 Conversely, not 'backing up' your friends could hold serious consequences. In the first instance, this might cause the gang to turn on the young person both verbally and physically. Despite the obvious dangers of such an attack, interviewees identified such incidents as of secondary importance in comparison to the potential dissolution of friendships and the social exclusion that might ensue. Not 'backing up' your friends was also framed (on rare occasions) as attempting to stand up to the gang.

*Cause you know you're getting backed right up and if they don't they'll getting slapped about for leavin' you. That's what's happens if you call yourself a ****** boy, you show your colours, don't you? It's like running away from your family, you cannae do that (Bill, 17 years, Glasgow)*

*You'd know they've got your back, like, 'cos if they didn't they'd get battered. If I got jumped and they ran away, then I'd jump them the next time 'cos they didn't f***ing back me up. That's pure brutal man. You have to trust your mates that they'll stick up for you like you would for them, or else they're pure deid (Jimmy, 19 years, Edinburgh)*

5.31 Participation in gang fighting was seen as a means to developing a reputation and gaining respect from friends, including those from other gangs. This search for respect should be seen in relation to the lack of alternative routes through which young men from extremely deprived areas could achieve self-esteem and status. Being prepared to stand your ground against the odds, being prepared to take a beating, was regarded as something to be respected. Whilst individual reputation was regarded as important, contribution to the reputation of the gang (as held by other gangs) was seen as paramount in most accounts.

*Naw, I'm no the best of fighter, but I'm no a c**p bag, know what I mean? I will take all the best fighters a square go, but if they batter me, I would rather take a doing off them, than beat into it, know what I mean? (Stuart, 16 years,,Glasgow)*

Well obviously you want schemes to look up to you. Say we're fighting [Rival Scheme A] and [Rival Scheme B] say "well, [Rival Scheme A] chase youse", well we want to be chasing them, you don't want other schemes to say they chase you. So that's how you get your name

*from, just chase them or catch them and do something to them. I obviously don't want to be labelled a s**tebag, know what I mean. If people are seeing you in the street they'll probably run or if they think you're a s**tebag they'll run o'er tae you. That's how you know. Other schemes know if you do well and it's just you, you'll know if somebody wants to run and dae something or if they don't. They're the s**tebags (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow)*

*We're the wee scheme. We've done f***ing most of them in. Not done them in, but smashed a few of them, know what I mean. Because we're a wee scheme they must think we're going to run away easily… We used to run riot with them all, man… That's how bad a reputation we have, know what I'm talking about, we were nae known and it was us that started it. We tore it right up. Started boxing every c***. (Sarah, 19 years, Glasgow)*

Well ken why we mostly go fighting is to get a reputation, bigger, like ken to make us like ken like proper sort of like, kind of, they ken we are the hardest group in [place name] (Sami, 16 years, Edinburgh)

5.32 But, having a tough reputation can be a double edged sword as other youths use their names to extend their own reputations and to afford themselves a degree of protection. A bad reputation could be seen as a very negative thing.

People were like "oh my God, you're in [gang name], you go about fighting" and I just used to get tarred with the same brush even though I wasn't like that. People would just look at me and be like "ew" kind of thing. I thought, "I'm not getting a reputation like that (Davina, 16 years, Edinburgh)

5.33 Young people also claimed to fight for enjoyment or because they were bored. Some emphasised the 'entertainment' aspect of the gang fights, as participants or observers. Other respondents reported walking around the streets looking for trouble, just for something to do. Many young people spoke of the visceral thrills of fighting and admitted they enjoyed hitting other people. Involvement in territorial conflict was sometimes devoid of any identifiable reason beyond the simple difficulty in avoiding it.

I liked to watch it right enough, I don't know what it was […] I didn't fancy that. A brick flying right off my head. There were a lot of bricks flying about […] there was a few of us, you know what I mean. People used to just sit and drink their cans, with all the hundreds of them fighting, I mean the amount of people that would be fighting. It was just unbelievable. (George, 25 years, Glasgow)

Fighting is releasing anger and all that, and people know you. You're known. It's a buzz fighting and that. (Vic, 16 years, West Dunbartonshire)

You do get a buzz out of it. See when you all run about and smash somebody with a brick, it's just like that, you find it funny, weird! The adrenaline rushing through your body is amazing. (Kenny, 16 years, Glasgow)

When I was younger, I was, like, kinda like, before I started going up to them and that, I started getting used to the adrenaline and that because I never used to get that. I just started getting the adrenaline rushes and that and I just wanted to go out fighting (Sami, 16 years, Edinburgh)

*See what you get on rollercoasters and that? It's just the exact same. See when you're running up and you're hitting somebody with a brick and they're running and they're doin' it right up your arse and they're laughing and you can't stop laughing, that's what it's like, you know you're getting caught but you're still laughing like f***. Know what I mean, that's just it, just good, they're doing it and all, they get caught and you see them laughing like f***. (Sarah, 19 years, Glasgow)*

Aye, its different, its like caught up in like teams, it was thrilling, it was exciting. There isn't much to do about the scheme rather than walk up and down, going for a walk to the loch and sit in the close, smoking hash all day, or all sitting in a den […]It was exciting to get out there man, it made you feel alive. (Devlin, 24 years, Glasgow

'I didn't have a reputation. It was just that if I needed to fight I'd fight. If I got jumped by a couple of folk I could fight, I could keep myself safe. But if there was loads of them against me and I got battered, I'd just, if I could get up I'd just get up and go. That would be it' (Brian,16 years, Aberdeen).

Conclusion

5.34 This chapter has presented evidence which suggests that street-orientated youth gangs have not evolved into organised criminal groups, but remain groups of adolescents looking for friendship, something to do, belonging, status and identity. Many aspects of their lifestyle are conventional and reflect those of other young people who do not associate with gangs.

5.35 Nevertheless, these young people often get involved in antisocial or criminal behaviour, ranging from breach of the peace to interpersonal and violence. Very serious offending was, however, largely the preserve of a few 'core' gang members.

5.36 Territorial fighting was the most common type of violence reported, particularly in the West of Scotland. Longstanding traditions and historical arguments were often mentioned as precursors to violence with a rival gang. In the East, gang identities were constructed around historical gang names; however, there was not the same degree of focus on past battles and longstanding feuds. Fighting provided a certain degree of excitement and thrill which the young people

thrived on, and was very much linked to the development of individual and group identities.

6 KNIFE (WEAPON) CARRYING

Introduction

6.1 This chapter explores attitudes towards and experiences of knife (and weapon) carrying and use. The chapter considers the interplay between knives and other weapons and the varied reasons cited for carrying and using them. The chapter progresses to report the reasons cited by young people as to why they avoid carrying (and/or using) knives (and other weapons), including their awareness of the risks of doing so.

6.2 It is important to stress that the attitudes towards, and experiences of, carrying and/or using weapons varied considerably across the participants in this study. For example, many gang members were also knife carriers; however, others were vehemently opposed to carrying knives. Some young people carried knives frequently, others rarely.

6.3 Some young people afforded a single explanation as to why they carried a knife (or other weapon), whereas others cited numerous reasons. Some carried knives in self-defence and said they had no intention of using them, whereas others admitted carrying a knife for use as a weapon. Young people who carry knives with the intention of using them tend to be engaged in serious individual (non-group) and collective violent behaviours. Some young people interviewed for this study could not offer an explanation of why they carried a knife. The following sections detail these varied explanations.

Protection

6.4 There was a strong assumption amongst some gang members that other gangs carried knives. As a result, some respondents claimed that they carried knives for protection, as a deterrent.

> *I'd carry anything that had a blade on. Anything, honestly. I've had my own pocket knives, Stanley knives. … It made me feel daft but it made me feel safe… I'd say protection. (Jodie, 14 years, Edinburgh)*

> *Not everybody in a gang will carry something, but people…will be like that, 'Aw well they're going to have knives and that so, we may as well go round with some'. There's no point in going round with nothing. (Walter, 23 years, Glasgow)*

6.5 For some, the decision to carry a knife followed an incident in which they had been slashed or stabbed. In contrast to the following interview segment, most held no intention of using the knife unless provoked.

> *When I got stabbed. I was like, people come up and stab you and you're not giving anybody else a second chance. I stopped and thought about the consequences, eh, and taking somebody's life and that and how that would affect my family and that. You'd have people taking the life of me. But the people not taking my life, then, it's a dog-*

eat-dog world out there, know what I'm saying. The way I see it it's either stab or be stabbed. Kill or be killed, know what I'm saying? (Will, 21 years, Aberdeen)

6.6 Some held awareness that carrying a knife didn't really make them any safer.

If they carry a knife they feel safe. I suppose they're no safe right enough, if they've got a knife on them, but it makes them feel safe. (Ivan, 24 years, Glasgow)

6.7 As a general rule, friends from the same gang or scheme would not use knives on each other. In the instances where this did occur, e.g. as a result of an outstanding drug debt, it could have a powerful multiplier effect, with serious, violent repercussions.

I say that fists should always be used on your pals, but see when it comes to everybody else, it's a different situation and you know that they'll do it back to you. You know that a person from another scheme will stab you but you're not expecting your pal to turn round and stab you … See when that happens, the full scheme will go against that one person for doing that because it's not right. (Kenny, 16 years, Glasgow)

6.8 Therefore young people most commonly carried knives for their own protection when venturing outside of their own scheme, including excursions for the specific purpose of fighting. A few respondents perceived that their engagement in other offending behaviour increased the necessity for them to carry a knife for protection.

The only reason I took that meat cleaver to [place name]…was, just daft I probably didn't even have the head to use it, it was just to feel more safe…going through on the bus and that boys get on with lockbacks, trying to stab a boy…because we are from different areas. (Sam, 18 years, Glasgow)

I started getting into harder drugs. I started using knives. I used to carry knives but I wouldn't have used it at the time; but now I was in more danger and endangering people… hanging around with drug dealers and drug addicts. (Will, 21 years, Aberdeen)

Weapon

6.9 In contrast to those who carried a knife for protection, some respondents carried a knife 'expecting' to use it as a weapon. This was often framed as a response to the behaviours of others. Nevertheless, knives were carried in the expectation that they could be used as a weapon.

It goes to a point where you have to go better, that you have to better your weapons, know what I mean, to match theirs, because if you don't you're going to end up the one who comes out worse. (Stuart, 16 years, Glasgow)

What's happening now is there's gonna be at least one person there with a blade on him … It's just getting violent, that's all it is…So if they get a hold o' you they want tae stab you. (Ivan, 24 years, Glasgow)

6.10 Interviewees distinguished knives (and similar, such as machetes) and other potential weapons in two ways. First, carrying a knife to a fight denoted intention to use it, in comparison to other 'to hand' objects (such as a bottle or brick). Thus carrying a knife implied premeditated rather than reactionary violence. Several interviewees reported carrying a knife for the purposes of undertaking a revenge attack. This observation stands in contrast to those who claim to carry a knife with no intention to use it. Second, knives were recognised as a more potent weapon, holding the potential to be lethal, in comparison to other weapons.

If you hit somebody across the legs with a golf club, you're just going to hurt them really. I've never heard anybody in their life taken with a golf club, have you? (Rob, 21 years, Dundee)

6.11 Gang fighting (as noted in Chapter 5) often entails missile throwing and chases as opposed to the use of knives or other weapons. At times, younger children would be given the responsibility, by older gang members, of collecting weapons that might be used in a gang fight. Many weapons are miscellaneous objects, such as bottles and bricks, which can be collected and thrown as missiles. When fighting does occur, young people use whatever weapons that are at hand.

When you're a wee boy you just sit and watch the older ones fight, know what I mean. They used to send us to get bottles for them. Bottles and bricks. We'd fill trolleys up with bricks. Ha! (James, 19 years, Glasgow)

Belts are a big thing, the bigger the buckle the better. Just strap it around your hand and just start smacking them with it […]Aye, belts were the weapon of choice (Rob, 21 years, Dundee)

6.12 In some instances, including organised gang fights or where young people were going into the territories that were occupied by rival gang members, knives were more prevalent. In other words, where fights are expected or planned, young people are more likely to make a choice about carrying a weapon, and the weapon of choice is frequently a blade.

If there was about twenty of us on the pitch it would be easily seven or eight of us that would, without the shadow of a doubt, stick a knife in you. With a machete we would do that (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

Reputation

6.13 Others reported that carrying knives (and certain other weapons) enhanced their reputation; that being known as someone who carried a knife meant that

people were more fearful of you and therefore less likely to take liberties with you (linked to notions of protection).

You can have a reputation for just carrying a weapon…If they thought somebody might try to get them, they would carry it just to act hard or to get in first if there was a fight. They would definitely get a reputation, because most people who carry knives like to show them off to people. (Sandy, 18 years, Edinburgh)

See there's some people that would carry knives about with them but when it comes to having a fight they wouldn't use it. I think the only reason they carry a knife is to make themselves look as if they're bigger, but they're not. (Sam, 18 years, Glasgow)

6.14 In contrast, however, some respondents made a clear distinction between carrying and using a knife. Those that simply carried a knife were not to be respected. Being prepared to, and being known to, use a knife garnered respect from some of the interviewees. Knife users regard themselves, and are regarded by other young people, as to be feared.

*And the rest would just stand there, probably… but when it came down to the nitty-gritty they would be away, they'd be s**tting themselves. (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)*

It's not the balls to carry it, anybody can carry a knife. (Nicolas, 23 years, Glasgow)

Using a knife

6.15 Young people recognised that knives could result in very serious, even lethal, injuries. It is unsurprising that young people often report being severely traumatised by their involvement in fights involving weapons. Even those young people, who went out deliberately looking for trouble, reported being shocked at what was actually involved. Very few of the interviewees we spoke to said they went out with the expectation of committing life-threatening harm.

I've seen my wee mate stabbed to death in front of me. I've seen quite a lot of stuff through gangs and through knife crime and all that, know what I mean. (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

6.16 Most knife users attempted to strike at very specific areas of their target's body (e.g. the stomach or the buttocks) in an attempt to reduce injury. Almost all of those interviewed (excluding some of those interviewed in a prison setting) held no intention to seriously injure or kill. That said, and as the final interview segment in this section illustrates, some interviewees have found themselves in situations that have become out of control and have led to a serious or fatal wounding being inflicted.

Using a knife you would stab them in the bum because they think it will be safe to stab someone in the bum because the hearts not there but then when you grow older you fin' out it's no because the main arteries

are there […] A lot of young boys think that is the safest place to stab someone and then you won't kill them. Because your intention is not really to kill somebody. (Devlin, 24 years, Glasgow)

*[Getting stabbed in the buttocks] Tea-bagged it's called … It's not humiliating it's just- So they know they are not going to get f***ing maybe done for murder, but obviously it could still kill them, it depends where you get them doesn't it. I mean like arteries and that, whatever. (Walter, 23 years, Glasgow)*

He made a motion, like he was gonnae grab somethin' [a knife] I just whipped a lockback out of my pocket and prodded him with it [Stabbed him] in the chest… I had to do it, he made a big whoop, a big explosion noise. It must have been his lungs popping or something. I just had to do it […] I wiz trying to put him down, I didn't really want to kill him or anything I just tried to do him before he done me. (Jason, 24 years, Glasgow)

6.17 Slashing an opponent's face was regarded as worse than stabbing them on the body as it marked a person for life and consequently stigmatised them. Many young people interviewed in this study had experience of being stabbed or cut with knives, and very few felt that it was something to be proud of. Those that had scars on their face were particularly regretful.

Because I have been slashed and I wouldn't want to mark somebody's face because they have to go through all the rest of their life with that. Stab them on their body somewhere then nobody can see it. (Keith, 22 years, Glasgow)

*It's going to f*** you up, going out in the town and that. I mean, if the bouncers see a big slash on your face they're going to think you're a ned. (Ivan, 24 years, Glasgow)*

I look at myself …and I'm disgusted with myself and the way my face looks… (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

If you get it on your face it's with you for life, isn't it? (Peter, 15 years, Glasgow)

Reasons for not carrying a knife

6.18 Just as multiple reasons were cited for carrying a knife, multiple reasons were cited for not carrying a knife. These explanations were recognised by knife carriers/users and non-knife carriers/users. As stated previously, young people recognised that knives could result in very serious, even lethal injuries. As a consequence, many interviewees reported a desire to avoid conflict with knives because of the risks it entailed.

*I'd rather go for a fist-fight with somebody. That way, if you get f*** punched out of you, you can take it easy but see if you know you could*

get stabbed, you pure start fearing and that can be it. You don't know what's going to happen. (Dave, 18 years, Glasgow)

*One of my mates, aye. He got stabbed and he was like "I cannae f***ing walk right now". He was paralysed for about six months and then he was in a wheelchair. (Chris, 19 years, Glasgow)*

One of the boys took a knife right up to my face, know what I mean, then I just felt something on my back … I was trying to walk up the road … I thought my rib was broken or cracked. And they were like, 'No, you've been stabbed, you've got a punctured lung' and someone stabbed me in the back (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

Well, I've been stabbed three times and I'm only fourteen. I've been stabbed once on my shoulder there, back of the leg, and my tailbone. The one in the back, he tried to kill me. [He] went in with a machete. (George, 14 years, West Dunbartonshire)

6.19 Some interviewees were keenly aware of the risks of being caught with a knife. Increases in police stop and searches and the risk of a prison sentence, if caught carrying or using a knife, were cited as a key reason for not carrying a knife. Interviewees who were approaching 16 years in age, or who were older, were more sensitive to this issue. That said, many were unclear or incorrect as to the precise legal consequences of knife carrying/using. Further, other interviewees reported the limited impact of police stop and searches or reported that they switched the type of weapon that they carried.

Oh, they did, like, brought It [a knife] *out in front of me and I'd been asked to take it but I never said yes because, I mean, the minimum is four years for carrying a weapon. Like, I mean, come on, I'm not going to go four years in jail just for one pal that I didn't even trust, know what I mean. (Davina, 16 years, Edinburgh)*

We'll never carry them [knives] *because then as soon as the polis catches you, if you're older, it's six months at least. (George, 14 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

Probably just like screwdrivers or a wee Stanley blade or something. Because you can get four years just for having a knife on you, and everybody knows that. But if you've just got like a wee Stanley blade, it's not big enough and you don't get as bad. You wouldn't go to jail, probably, if you had just a wee Stanley blade. If you had a hammer on you they can't actually, if you have a hammer and a packet of nails in your pocket, you know, they can't exactly say "you're going to go and batter somebody with that" because they've no proof. Unless you have already. (Paul, 17 years, West Dunbartonshire)

Most people will all go for a bottle because everyone's always got bottles on Friday night. Everyone's got drink on a Friday night, so mostly just a quick smash of a bottle and then you've got something to

stab someone with… Smash a bottle. And you can always get rid of it and stand and walk away. Crushing it up and leaving it. You get your bottle; stab someone with it, then you can crush it all up and get rid of it and then it's easier than with a knife and that. (Kevin, 17 years, West Dunbartonshire)

6.20 Another common reason cited for not carrying a knife, noted by both young men and young women, was that carrying a knife was 'unmanly' and contravened the rules of a fair fight. Using miscellaneous, ad hoc weaponry (such as bottles, bricks, poles and the like) was viewed as less problematic, largely because it implied less intent on the part of the offender. Again, these observations stand in direct contrast to those (reasons for carrying a knife) who claimed that carrying/using a knife promoted an individual's status.

Naw well with us we never ever used knives, we always use our hands or our feet, I've never ever uses a weapon, I've never ever used a weapon… Aye well see when it's proper fighting it's never with weapons. (Sami, 16 years, Edinburgh)

It's a weakness to carry a knife. Younger ones might be impressed, but not the older kids. They would just think you were weak. (Peter, 18 years, Edinburgh)

You get more respect, if you're going in a fight with somebody you get more respect using your hands (Frank, 23 years, Dundee 7).

Conclusion

6.21 Attitudes towards weapon carrying and use varied enormously amongst the young people interviewed in this study, with no clear trend or pattern being evident. Many carried weapons, but many others were opposed to the idea. Young people reported using a wide variety of weapons, usually anything that was to hand. Those that carried knives did so for a variety of reasons, as a means of self protection (with no intention of use), as a weapon (with the intention of use) and to promote their reputation (use and non-use). Young people who carry knives with the intention of using them as a weapon tended to be engaged in serious individual (non-group) and collective (gang) violent behaviours

6.22 Most were aware of the physical and social risks of knife carrying and/or use. For some, this influenced the way in which they used a knife in that they held no intention to fatally wound or facially scar the person they were fighting. Others (the more serious offenders/prison interviewees) were less concerned or recognised their inability to control violent encounters.

6.23 Many (carriers and users) had been victims of knife attacks, were aware of risk of imprisonment and the longer term risks to their social and economic well-being. This led some to desist from knife carrying. Others chose to use alternate weapons. However, recognition of the risks appeared to hold a limited impact upon some from carrying or using knives.

7 DESISTANCE

Introduction

7.1 This chapter considers the exit strategies of young people wishing to desist gang membership and violent offending, inclusive of knife (weapon) carrying. It should be noted, however, that many of the interviewees were still active participants and had given little consideration to an exit strategy while others who stated that they had desisted from the gang were still very much in the process of withdrawal and had not stopped entirely. The chapter is structured in the following fashion. First, attention is paid to the factors cited as inhibiting desistance. Second, the chapter focuses on the awareness of interviewees of the negative impacts of gang membership and knife carrying. Finally, the chapter relates the reasons afforded by interviewees as to why they ceased gang membership and violent offending, inclusive of knife (weapon) carrying.

Barriers to Exit

7.2 Typically, though not exclusively, older interviewees (18 years and over) had considered withdrawing from gang membership and violent offending. Despite wanting to do so, however, numerous interviewees cited what they believed to be insurmountable barriers to desistance. Just as the intergenerational transmission of the normalisation of gangs served to prompt entry to gang membership, that gang membership and behaviours encompassed familial and friendship networks meant that withdrawal would also entail separation from friends, family and neighbourhood.

> *It's hard to walk away from your mates, and that. The people you grow up with and mucked about with from when you were kids. You go through a lot of stuff with people and you know their stuff and they know your stuff. Aye, it's hard to get away from it 'cos they're your mates. Even though you know its really bad for you. (Paddy, 23 years, West Dunbartonshire)*

7.3 For some, particularly core gang members, withdrawal was not a viable option as their 'enemies' would continue to operate and might target other family members as well as themselves. Continued membership afforded, the perception of, continued personal and familial protection. Those who had claimed to have withdrawn from gang membership noted the difficulty of maintaining such a stance in light of these factors.

> *Big boys at eighteen, nineteen tried to threaten my wee brother because they can't get a hold of me or my cousin or any of my pals…Aye, and because my wee brother's only fifteen he doesn't do anything, they threaten him Aye, as far as I'm concerned I've left it all, but I see the piss taken, try to take my cousin's life I'll take his (Bill, 17 years, Glasgow)*

7.4 Significantly, especially in areas synonymous with gang activity, the inability of gang members to move out of the area (or the inability of their wider family to

do so) served as a barrier to exit. Some wanted to move and understood their neighbourhood to be problematic.

> *Aye, I'd miss everything, man, but to be honest it's a better life away fae it aw. A better life, man, not f***ing seeing junkies and gang-fighting and all that, seeing people getting shopped by the polis in the street every f***ing day, know what I mean. I don't want, you see that all the time (Sarah, 19 years, Glasgow)*

7.5 However, interviewees also demonstrated significant attachment to place (West of Scotland), an attachment that would inhibit withdrawal. Allied to this, interviewees' identities or reputations were embedded in place, which also served to lessen the likelihood of a move away.

7.6 Even when individuals were able to move, they knew their chances of moving to a materially better neighbourhood were poor and so often the same pattern of events occurred over and over again. Gang membership was not always limited to one gang, but violence was endemic in the gang lifestyle. They might be forced to join another gang in another area just to continue living there without fear of retribution.

7.7 Another barrier to leaving the gang was increased reliance on money that was made through drug dealing. Some gangs and gang members (though by no means all) were involved in fairly heavy dealing that was very lucrative and made them sums of money that could not have been achieved through any regular form of employment that was available to them. Some gang members had got used to living a lifestyle that required having a large amount of money, but they would squander it easily on alcohol, gambling and more drugs.

> *You know the Roulette machines, like, people are putting in 20p and we used to walk in and it used to be £100 here, £100 there and it's just because we had money and we didn't know what to do with it so we might as well blow some of it on that. He was buying clothes and I'd pick up a t-shirt and be "it's quite nice, I don't know if I do it, but I'll still buy it because I've got the money to buy it" (Joe, 18 years, Edinburgh)*

Negative Outcomes

7.8 Interviewees were able to articulate a range of negative outcomes associated with gang membership and fighting, inclusive of knife (weapon) carrying. Participation in these activities was seen to curb other opportunities, most typically because gang members faced restricted mobility. Further, participation was recognised to hold the potential of physical harm, increase the likelihood of conflict with the police and imprisonment. Most interviewees were aware these negative outcomes, and for some (see Stopping below) when combined with lifestyle changes, this provoked the decision to withdraw from gang membership and fighting. For others, the attractions of gang membership (Chapter 4 Entry) and the Barriers to Exit (above) appeared to override these concerns.

Restricted Mobility and Opportunity

7.9 Gang membership, particularly for young men, often restricted mobility beyond the gang's territory. Quite literally, gang members could be trapped within very small neighbourhood spaces. Leaving the gang's territory, however, would entail crossing rival gang territories. Whether on foot or using public transport, being identified and captured on a rival gang's turf held the potential of a serious physical assault. Some young people talked about becoming virtually housebound when they left the gang, unable to go out and walk about their local area for fear of attack.

7.10 As indicated earlier (Chapter 4 Entry) gang territories were frequently associated with an absence of resources. Thus restricted mobility leads directly to restricted opportunities. Interviewees reported restrictions in attending school or other educational establishments, limited social and recreational opportunities, and decreased employment opportunities. Those that established links to other environments and opportunities did so as a consequence of family networks (not possible for some) or as a consequence of having spent time in a young offenders institution or prison, or having engaged with some form of intervention programme.

I didn't go to the school at the time because of the gang type and stuff. I mean, I could go but I just got bullied, it was a bit pointless (Stephen, 16 years, Glasgow)

You can't go places. You can't even go up on a bus or go on a bus or you'll get dragged off, don't you? If you're from another scheme, by a gang (Richard, 27 years, Glasgow)

You can't walk about. I didn't leave my house for months because I stayed in [place name]. [If I had] I wouldn't be here today taking this [interview] (Jodie, 14 years, Edinburgh)

7.11 There was also significant impact on longer term opportunities for those who had become deeply involved in gang culture and violent behaviour. Young women, in particular, talked about the detrimental effect of gang membership on the employment options of girls due to their involvement in violence.

I always wanted to be a children's nurse since I was six and now I can't be that because of all my charges, like because of brandishing a knife and that. It's too much of a serious charge and I can't have my dream any more (Jodie, 14 years, Edinburgh)

Stopping

7.12 Of those interviewees who claimed to have ceased gang membership, and/or knife carrying, numerous reasons were cited. Typically, maturity and lifestyle changes were identified as significant factors.

You'll not see people from like the age of sixteen to whatever out in the streets because they're all going out in the town. They're all in a pub or something' (Paul, 19 years, Dundee).

7.13 Recognition that involvement in gang fighting or fighting with a weapon might lead to imprisonment was also an important factor for some. Allied to this (and particularly cited by interviewees drawn from the West of Scotland) some policing practices were felt to have curbed gang fighting. Finally, some interviewees had grown increasingly concerned about the physical risks of gang membership and violent conflict. On the whole it was easier for females to stop being in the gang than males as they were usually not considered to be 'core' members.

Lifestyle Changes

7.14 Some interviewees reflected that they had simply grown-up and no longer found gang fighting exciting. Instead, and with growing awareness of the negative consequences of gang fighting and knife (weapon) carrying, these behaviours seemed increasingly pointless. New social activities, frequently beyond the neighbourhood, gained in appeal. Some claimed to have developed friendship bonds that crossed previous personal and gang rivalries. Of greatest significance, however, were the establishment of long-term relationships, the attainment of employment and/or a return to education. Simply put, interviewees didn't want gang fighting or knife (weapon) carrying to jeopardise these aspects of their lives. These changes were easier to facilitate for fringe gang members and girls.

You either just get sick chasing them or you just stop because you end up talking to them (Stephen, 16 years Glasgow)

It's just a waste of time. Nobody fights any more. Nobody does it any more…Aye, Gang fighting, know what I mean. What's the point in it? (Bill, 17 years, Glasgow)

Well, obviously if you get a girlfriend you could bump into somebody you did fight years ago and they've got a grudge against you. You don't want to walk about with your girlfriend and fight (Scott, 25 years, Glasgow)

Aye, if one of my mates got caught and I was there then, that kind of thing, when it happens, you know, I'd need to go and help and that's the way that I was brought up, but I don't – my children, my workmates, you know, I need to try and keep it under control because one mad step out of place and I've lost my job. I love what I do, and it's not worth me losing my job...I just keep myself to myself and just stay away from it (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

I've grown up. I've not drunk in about a year. I broke up with them about seven months ago and I've just become more sensible and I'd missed, like, half a year of school just due to skiving. Half a year is

quite a long time just to skive and stuff, eh, and I just buckled down and just got my life back together and stayed with my friends and stuff like that (Davina, 16 years, Edinburgh)

7.15 Some had experienced specific events or turning points that had made them think differently about their lives and their own futures. Coming to the realisation that the gang members they considered to be 'friends' were not positive influences in their lives, and unable to give them the support they needed, was also a factor.

7.16 Having strong family bonds was both a factor that encouraged desistance amongst gang members, but also acted as a protective factor amongst those who only hung about the fringes of the gang. Many young people did not want to let their families down, and some gang members were bitterly disappointed that they had done so.

I think because I've got the support of my family that some people don't have. I mean, not saying that my wee cousin doesn't have the support from my family, I think she just went off the rails and started doing whatever she wanted because she's an only child, you see, whereas I wouldn't do that to my mum. I couldn't do that to my mum (Christina, 15 years, Edinburgh)

Having to watch my ma coming to hospital to come and get me and that after I've had that stitched up, like, my ma, what if I had to, like, say, what if the polis come to the door and have to say "your son's deid because he's been stabbed" and that? It's just quite bad getting threats and listening to people on the phone saying "you're getting stabbed". That was kind of what kind of stopped me, helped me get away from it (Mark, 17 years, West Dunbartonshire)

7.17 It was evident that stopping was not a discrete event, however, but more of a process that might involve recurrences of periodic violence. Some young people stated that, while they did not seek to engage in violence any longer they were not averse to participating in it if required. Others had stopped for a certain period, but then other factors resulted in a relapse into gang violence.

Aye, they had sorted, like calmed everyone down. That stopped me drinking and that. I stopped drinking for, what, three months. Stopped fighting for three months, stopped everything and then when I just, I just don't know, I just went wild again and started going back uptown. Things happened in my family and that just blew me away and I just wanted to go back uptown fighting again because everything got hard. That's how I solve everything, just go up fighting with people (Karen, 16 years, West Dunbartonshire)

Punishment

7.18 The risk of imprisonment was typically cited by respondents who were over 18 years old (though not exclusively), and/or who had experienced prison, as a reason for withdrawing from violent encounters (with or without a weapon).

That said, however, it should be stressed that the research also interviewed those over 18 years old who were in prison, and for whom (at least currently) the experience of imprisonment did not appear to act as a deterrent. This latter group tended to hold a violent offending profile that extended beyond gang fighting. For some, spending time in prison served to fuel their reputation as a 'hard man' and seemingly held no impact upon the nature of their offending behaviour. This group of interviewees had faced imprisonment numerous times.

*I just couldn't be arsed. What's the point in going to the jail man. Jail was all right, it wisnae alright, you cannae say it was alright 'cos it was s**te. (Sarah, 19 years, Glasgow)*

I came out [of prison] and I got right into a bottle of Buckfast, know what I mean, and I remember just coming out of the jail and I thought I was this big hard man and that, "I can do this and I can do that". People wouldn't say anything about me and all that, and I felt as if, "aw, I'm the man". With people doing that, obviously I took it all in my stride and made myself look big and went out and battered people on a Friday night because I'd been in the jail, know what I mean? (Luke, 19 years, Glasgow)

When I was doing it and I was still a stupid boy I was still fighting and I made too many enemies that were ending up in the jail that would, like, say "you're getting stabbed when I find you" and the thought of me going in the jail and being with all of them together made me stop. That's what's made me stop gang-fighting and that, but now I've stopped gang-fighting and stopped mucking about certain people, it's like I've started solving my own problems (Joe, 18 years, Edinburgh)

*'If you're in jail you've got nowhere to go. You can't go anywhere. You can't go and do something. You're doing nothing, just sitting there rottin', know what I mean? F*** all to do. Smoking on pure rollies and get the odd couple of joints and that, f***ing s**te' (David, 16 years, Aberdeen).*

7.19 The prospect of a prison sentence was a deterrent for some, but being in custody did not necessarily restrict people's involvement with the gang or their offending activities. Within the prison, individuals from different parts of Scotland would form 'gang's and, ironically, those who were normally rival gang members within one city might support each other, even if they were from a different local gang.

Policing

7.20 Some gang members, particularly those from gangs with a history of territorial rivalries, suggested that gang fighting was more infrequent than in previous eras. This observation can be explained in two ways. In part, these interviewees were themselves moving away from gang membership and, as a consequence, might have been less engaged with current gang activities.

However, interviewees also cited a combination of policing practices and the widespread deployment of closed circuit television (CCTV) as a deterrent to gang conflict. CCTV was felt to increase the likelihood of an individual being identified as participating in a gang fight or other violent act and the police were perceived to be intervening in gang conflicts more vigorously than in the past. It is possible, of course, as one interviewee noted that the presence of CCTV in one location may simply displace the intended activity to another location.

Just there was fighting, every day they were running about throwing bricks at each other and all that and then the polis just started getting heavy on top so it just stopped (Chris, 19 years, Glasgow)

Physical Harm

7.21 Most active gang members appeared unconcerned about the physical risks of violent encounters. Some even reported their injuries with a degree of pride. However, those withdrawing from gang membership or other violent behaviours reported growing concern about the risk of physical harm to themselves or others. Many appeared relieved to have avoided serious injury and tended to recount tales of their friends and/or family being stabbed or slashed, and in extreme instances killed. For some, the risk of physical harm remained even though they had chosen to withdraw from gang membership and/or knife (weapon) carrying.

7.22 With regard to the nature of the wounding (typically from a knife), most were particularly concerned about the prospect of being slashed, of having their faces scarred. Though being stabbed might pose a more life threatening act it tended to provoke less concern, at least amongst some interviewees.

Conclusion

7.23 This chapter has probed the withdrawal of young people from gang membership and violent behaviours (associated with knife carrying). Whilst many had not (yet) considered withdrawal, those that had were aware of there being significant barriers to exit. The intertwining of individual and gang (inclusive of neighbourhood identities in the West of Scotland) acts as a significant inhibitor of withdrawal; to break from the gang requires a break from some of the key relationships in a gang member's life.

7.24 A significant proportion of interviewees were, however, able to articulate a range of negative outcomes that were associated with gang membership and/or engaging in violent behaviours (associated with knife carrying). These negative outcomes centred on restricted physical mobility. Gang members felt unable to travel outwith their gang territory for fear of assault by a rival gang. As gang territories are characterised (by gang members and area experts) as lacking recreational, social and economic resources, restricted mobility essentially restricts the opportunities open to a young person engaged in gang activity.

7.25 Those interviewees who claimed to have withdrawn from gang membership and/or knife carrying reported significant lifestyle changes. Some had simply

grown out of gang fighting; it no longer held the excitement that (at least in part) attracted them in the first instance. Others were increasingly aware of the negative consequences of gang fighting and other violent behaviours. The physical dangers of a violent encounter and the prospect of (a return to) imprisonment had grown in significance for these individuals. Crucially, a seemingly successful exit strategy rested in the establishment of new social and economic experiences and relationships within and outwith the neighbourhood. The development of long term relationships and the securing of employment created ties that interviewees did not want to endanger through continued gang membership and violent behaviours.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Background and Aims

8.1 Recent years have witnessed growing concern about the existence of youth gangs and the engagement of their members in violent conflict involving knives and other weapons. Though vigorous claims have been made about the scale of gang activity, there is limited reliable evidence relating to the nature, form and prevalence of youth 'gangs'. Official statistical sources of youth offending, inclusive of gang activity, are scarce. Likewise, it is difficult to determine the extent of knife carrying and the qualities of knife carriers from official statistical sources.

8.2 Recognising these information shortfalls, the research reported here set out to:

- Provide an overview of what is known about the nature and extent of youth gang activity and knife carrying in a set of case study locations across Scotland.
- Provide an in-depth account of the structures and activities of youth gangs in these settings.
- Provide an in-depth account of knife carrying in these settings.
- Offer a series of recommendations for interventions in these behaviours based on this evidence.

8.3 The research was conducted in 5 case study locations, namely: Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire. There were two major data collection components. First, the research interviewed those engaged in the delivery of services designed to manage and challenge problematic youth behaviours, inclusive of youth gangs and knife carrying. Second, the research gained access (via these services) to a large sample of young people engaged in youth gangs, most of whom were knife (weapon) carriers. Data collected from interviews with these young people provide the major findings of this report. Despite the intention to interview a sample of knife carriers who had no connection to a troublesome youth group or gang context, this did not prove possible with this research design. In response to this information shortfall, McVie (2010) undertook a detailed analysis of the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC). This study, which adopts a distinct quantitative methodology, enabled access to a sample of young people who admitted to carrying a knife (or other weapon) but claimed to hold no troublesome youth group or gang affiliation.

Agency Perspectives

Troublesome youth groups and gangs

8.4 In each case study area 'troublesome youth groups', comprising young people who engage in low level anti-social behaviour, were recognized to exist. The scale of this activity varied from area to area. The tendency to regard these

groups of young people as symptomatic of a youth gang problem, however, was variable. In contrast, youth gangs were typically identified as engaging in violent conflict, or gang fighting. However, everywhere there was a lack of a tight definition of a troublesome youth group or gang. Differences in definition seemed to arise, at least in part, out of the perceived political and resource (dis)advantages of recognizing gangs (or not) locally and not purely the reality of the behaviours of groups of young people.

Variable monitoring

8.5 In–line with the mixed recognition of troublesome youth groups or gangs, there was variable monitoring of problematic youth behaviours across the case study settings. In Glasgow, for example, there was evidence of significant endeavour by the police to gather and collate intelligence on 'gangs'. This gave the impression of an apparent precision, but interviewees recognised that the numbers of young people identified as being in gangs were an artefact of the focus of this aspect of police intelligence gathering and the design of the databases. In particular, there was a concern amongst some interviewees that the policing 'focus' on youth gangs in Glasgow might lead to the 'over identification' of gang membership. Thus, the criminal and/or anti-social behaviour of an individual might be recorded as part of their on-going gang profile even though the behaviour was perpetrated outwith a gang context. In other areas, such as Edinburgh, police intelligence on potential gang members was collected; however, this did not form the core evidence base for developing police strategies for dealing with young people.

Geographical variance and definitions of troublesome youth groups and gangs

8.6 Based on the views of agency representatives, troublesome youth groups or gangs across Scotland are not all the same. In the West of Scotland interviewees defined youth gangs according to their strong territorial affiliations and rivalries manifest in gang fighting. In contrast, and interviewees in the East of Scotland mainly, interviewees identified troublesome youth groups that were engaged in (relatively) low-level antisocial behaviour. Neither youth gangs nor troublesome youth groups held other criminal behaviours as a reason for their existence. Far more youth gangs were identified in the West of Scotland than troublesome youth groups in the East.

8.7 Youth gangs and troublesome youth groups were identified as sharing a set of common features, namely that they were based on friendship (and kinship) groups and were used to achieve social goals such as protection and personal identity. In general, troublesome youth groups and gangs were identified as being concentrated in areas of multiple deprivations.

8.8 Troublesome youth groups and gangs were suggested to hold a destructive influence in certain communities and to bring substantial disadvantages and adversities for their members in terms of embroiling them in a web of violence, personal risk, lack of mobility and criminalisation.

Violence and knife carrying

8.9 Of those young people that were identified as engaging in violence, most did so collectively via gang fighting. Fighting was associated with alcohol consumption and / or drug taking, though these were not seen as causal factors. Knife (and other weapon) carrying and use was closely, though not exclusively, associated with those who engaged in gang fighting.

8.10 The type of weapon used in gang fighting was reported to vary by age. Younger participants were suggested to rely on throwing weapons such as bricks and bottles; older participants were more likely to use knives. Knives tended to be of the domestic or lock back varieties, reflecting easy availability and low cost. Those youth gang members who carried a weapon did not exclusively do so for its use in a gang fight. Some young people were identified by police as holding offending profiles, inclusive of violent / weapon carrying offences that were not linked to group activity.

Young People's Views and Experiences

Group structures and characteristics

8.11 Whilst some young people referred to the groups they were involved with as 'gangs', in general they resisted the gang label, preferring to talk about the people they hung about with in terms of an 'area', a 'team' or a 'group'.

8.12 The groups were mostly small, with relatively narrow age ranges, without sub-grouping. On the weekends these groups might consist of as many as 30 to 60 young people in size. During the week, however, the groups tended to fragment into smaller friendship groups who met on the street or at one another's homes.

8.13 The vast majority of the groups were mixed-gender, but predominantly male. These groups were frequently (especially in the West of Scotland), though not exclusively framed by a territorial identity, some evolved out of friendships forged in local authority care settings (e.g. residential schools). The groups can best be characterised as fluid, messy (frequently comprising numerous sub-groups), informal friendship networks that got together regularly, but not in any formal capacity.

8.14 Both male and female respondents reported that young men, in general, were more heavily involved in offending and violence than young women. Young women, in contrast, were perceived primarily as gang associates, particularly by young men who often referred to gang-involved girls in derogatory and disparaging ways. That said, young women often fulfilled (not without physical and sexual risk) a range of tasks in support of the group.

8.15 Despite the adoption of multiple group labels, evidence of varied group characteristics and intensities of association, the generic features ascribed to these groups by the young people themselves hold a resonance with the Eurogang network definition of a gang.

Entry

8.16 Gang membership and, for some, violent group behaviour were regarded as a normal part of growing up in particular families and neighbourhoods. Further, it is evident how gang membership and violent behaviours are learned, both from family members and peer associations. Young people point to their observing and hearing stories of gangs and gang members as part of their childhood experiences.

8.17 Young people articulated an interweaving of individual, friendship and gang identities, which in the West of Scotland were further underwritten by place attachment or territoriality. In other words, young people defined themselves in terms of their friendships (and not other activities), which might in turn be informed to some extent by particular territorial boundaries. In a sense, the individual shares a common identity with the gang, and the gang with the neighbourhood. The significance of 'place attachment' was not nearly so strong in the East of Scotland.

8.18 Young people reported a sense of belonging associated with gang membership, the interlocking of friendship and gang identities taking place at an early age (at primary school), that gang membership was sought for self protection and entailed backing-up your friends, and that fighting was seen as a way of developing a reputation and gaining respect from friends and other gang members.

8.19 The accounts of young gang members did not distinguish distinct pathways for those who carried / used knives. In other words, knife carriers and users shared similar backgrounds to those gang members who engaged in violent behaviours without using knives.

Group activities

8.20 Essentially, gangs are not organised (criminally or otherwise), but remain groups of adolescents looking for friendship, something to do, belonging, status and identity. Many aspects of their lifestyle are conventional and reflect those of other young people who do not associate with gangs.

8.21 Nevertheless, members reported participating in a range of anti-social and criminal behaviours including property damage, theft and public disorder offences, as well as violence. Drinking alcohol was a commonly identified pastime and recognised precipitator (though not a cause) of violence. Drugs were readily available to young people but not everyone reported taking them. Drug dealing (excluding opiates) was reported by some older gang members (though NOT as a gang activity). Very serious offending (including violent offending with or without a weapon) was the preserve of a few 'core' gang members and did not take place within the frame of the youth gang.

8.22 Territorial fighting was the most common type of violence reported, particularly in the West of Scotland. Longstanding traditions and historical arguments were often mentioned as precursors to violence with a rival gang. In the East of Scotland, gang identities were constructed around historical gang names;

however, there was not the same degree of focus on past battles and longstanding feuds. In addition, fights in the west were often orchestrated and planned, whereas violence in the east was more often described as opportunistic.

8.23 Most fights were not serious and instead involved a great deal of bluster, posturing and stand-off. However, young people also reported occasions in which gang fights had led to serious injuries for participants. For some young people, fighting provided a certain degree of excitement and thrill which they thrived on.

8.24 There was a certain degree of sex difference, with young women tending to be very much on the periphery of violent encounters and no expectation that they would participate. However, a small number of young women did report involvement in extreme violence and were clearly just as animated about it as young men. Both males and females appeared to operate according to an unspoken set of rules of engagement, which defined who fought with whom and how many young people were involved.

Knife (weapon) carrying

8.25 Attitudes towards weapon carrying and use varied enormously, with no clear trend or pattern being evident. Many carried weapons, but many others were opposed to the idea. Young people reported using a wide variety of weapons. Those that carried knives did so for a variety of reasons, as a means of self protection (with no intention of use), as a weapon (with the intention of use) and to promote their reputation (use and non-use).

8.26 Most were aware of the physical and social risks of knife carrying and/or use. For some, this influenced the way in which they used a knife in that they held no intention to fatally wound or facially scar the person they were fighting. Others (the more serious offenders/prison interviewees) were less concerned or recognised their inability to control violent encounters.

8.27 Many (carriers and users) had been victims of knife attacks and were aware of risk of imprisonment (associated with being caught using a knife in a fight) and the longer term risks to their social and economic well-being. This led some to desist from knife carrying. Others chose to use alternate weapons. However, recognition of the risks appeared to hold a limited impact upon some from carrying or using knives.

8.28 It was not possible to ascertain the views of knife carriers / users who were not gang members, as these are a particularly hidden group not known to many agencies. Most of those young people interviewed in prison, who had been incarcerated for violent offences (inclusive of knife / weapon use) reported an association with a gang.

Desistance

8.29 Whilst many of those young people interviewed had not (yet) considered withdrawal, those that had were aware of there being significant barriers to exit.

The intertwining of individual and gang identities (inclusive of neighbourhood identities in the West of Scotland) acts as a significant inhibitor of withdrawal; to break from the gang requires a break from some of the key relationships in a gang member's life and significant personal risk.

8.30 A significant proportion of interviewees were, however, able to articulate a range of negative outcomes that were associated with gang membership and/or engaging in violent behaviours (inclusive of knife carrying / use). These negative outcomes centred on restricted physical mobility. Gang members felt unable to travel outwith their gang territory for fear of assault by a rival gang. As gang territories (those based on residential neighbourhoods) are characterised (by gang members and area experts) as lacking recreational, social and economic resources, restricted mobility essentially restricts the opportunities open to a young person engaged in gang activity.

8.31 Those interviewees who claimed to have withdrawn from gang membership and/or knife carrying reported significant lifestyle changes. Some had simply grown out of gang fighting; it no longer held the excitement that (at least in part) attracted them in the first instance. Others were increasingly aware of the negative consequences of gang fighting and other violent behaviours. The physical dangers of a violent encounter and the prospect of (a return to) imprisonment had grown in significance for these individuals. Crucially, a seemingly successful exit strategy rested in the establishment of new social and economic experiences and relationships within and outwith the neighbourhood. The development of long term relationships or re-establishment of family bonds and the securing of employment created ties that interviewees did not want to endanger through continued gang membership and violent behaviours.

Recommendations

Data

8.32 The collection of evidence and data about gang membership and knife crime is patchy but largely poor across Scotland. There is a clear need to develop shared definitions of the youth groups that fall under the umbrella term 'gang'. This report identifies the key characteristics that should be contained in these definitions, which are based on a strong resonance between the views of agencies engaged in managing and challenging the troublesome behaviours of young people and young people themselves. Allied to this observation there would be value in developing a simple typology of gang fighting, or collective violence, enabling the distinction between escalating levels of violence to be recorded.

8.33 There is a need to improve official data sources on youth crime, inclusive of knife (weapon) carrying, in Scotland. National standards will discourage the maintenance of local monitoring practices (the data from which are unable to be integrated nationally). Without national data about the extent, nature and underlying causes of gang membership and weapon related offending, it is difficult to say whether there is an actual qualitative difference in these behaviours between the East and West of Scotland or whether it is merely a

differential perspective based on perceived political and resource considerations. The recent launch of the VRU's National data Collection Plan for incidents of serious violence will, at least in part, address this information shortfall.

8.34 Improving data on the nature of youth crime and knife carrying could be achieved via the development of national self-report studies, which might usefully be informed by existing tools such as the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (see McVie 2010). This approach should be augmented through in-depth interviews with young people at their point of contact with the criminal justice system.

8.35 Improving the nature of youth crime and knife carrying data collated (inclusive of the qualities gang members and knife carriers) will enable a more nuanced probing of the aetiologies of these behaviours to be achieved. This task is of fundamental importance for the design and delivery effective intervention strategies.

Interventions

8.36 The evidence collated in this study demands the development of area and group (age and nature of offending/anti social behaviour) sensitive intervention strategies. Not all youth gangs are the same, nor do their members always engage in similar behaviours. Interventions with some youth gang members will be more appropriately framed according to their individual rather than group offending behaviour.

8.37 A core finding of this report is that gang members (inclusive of those who carry /use knives and other weapons) are drawn from areas of multiple deprivations. This setting evidently shapes the behaviours that young people engage in as part of their search for identity. In other words, residential environments with limited resources and few (social) links to resources outwith the neighbourhood serve to channel some young people toward negative behaviours. This suggests that strategies involving socio-economic improvement and increased opportunities for young people might be particularly beneficial. Further, that socio-economic improvement strategies require integrating with gang intervention strategies.

8.38 The evidence presented in this report suggests that youth gang members are likely to be highly visible as problematic individuals, in terms of their tendency to hang about the streets and their frequent alcohol consumption. Moreover, many of those known to the police and the children's hearing system are at high risk of being in a gang. Therefore, there are a number of channels through which intervention strategies could be directed, including youth street work and the police, schools and social workers.

8.39 Policy initiatives targeted at 'core' gang members, those identified as engaging in the more serious and risky behaviour may have a much wider impact on reducing youth disorder in terms of dispersing the gang through removing its central focus.

8.40 Criminal Justice strategies (policing and punishment) appear to influence the decision-making of some, particularly older, gang members and knife carriers. Significantly, younger gang members / weapon carriers are less concerned by policing and punishment. This is a consequence, not just of their differential risk of punishment (according to their age), but of their stage of social development. For some, criminal justice strategies appeared to offer limited influence at best irrespective of their age.

8.41 The ease with which young people reported gaining access to knives and their ability to substitute a knife for another weapon suggests that knife amnesties will have a limited impact on violent behaviours using weapons. There was some evidence that young people were aware of, and modified their behaviour as a consequence of, stop and search strategies. Some ceased to engage in negative behaviours whereas others chose, for example, to carry alternate weapons.

8.42 Many of those young people interviewed were well aware of the negative consequences (physical, social and economic) of youth gang membership and violent behaviour. This implies that stand alone and one-off awareness-raising (educational) strategies will have a limited impact in changing behaviours.

8.43 Agency interviewees in the East of Scotland drew an association between an apparent decrease in territorially based youth conflict and the redevelopment of housing areas and the reorganisation of educational provision at the city-level. Increasing the catchment areas of schools may have had an impact on the relation ship between territory and friendship networks. Some reorganisation of educational provision is underway in the West of Scotland and has been inclusive of strategies designed to support the integration of children from different neighbourhoods.

8.44 A major thrust of the evidence collated in this study is that gang membership and violent behaviours (inclusive of weapon carrying / use) are normalised at a very young age as part of family and community life. Further, and particularly in the West of Scotland, that friendship, neighbourhood and gang identities are interwoven at this point in a young person's life. This suggests the need to develop longer term and early interventions, such as family and neighbourhood (anti-territorial) based intervention projects. Any such strategies must be long term and slow burn as it is evident that change at both the individual level, and in the context of communities with long historical and cultural traditions, can not be a discrete event but rather involves a long process of gradual reform.

APPENDIX: VIGNETTE DATA ANALYSIS

The research employed vignette data analysis to explore the prevalence and nature of youth gangs and their membership across the case study locations. The vignettes (presented below as Gang type A and Gang type B) were constructed with reference to the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) database on youth 'gangs'. The database records multiple personal and offending characteristics of individuals identified (by police intelligence) as gang members in a particular part of the city of Glasgow. The vignettes were framed according to the qualities of this data and insights offered by representatives of the VRU.

Vignettes provide hypothetical case studies, or examples of people, situations and/or events on which interviewees can offer comment and opinion. This technique allows for the discussion of concepts on a more abstract level by drawing on particular issues / events outlined in the vignette. Given that the research was located across different settings with interviews being the primary data collection tool, using vignettes enabled a standardised assessment (via a qualitative approach) of the qualities of youth gangs and the activities of their membership inclusive of knife (weapon) carrying / use.

Vignettes: Gang types A and B

Gang type A

Membership: Approximately 50 individuals. The gang is all male. Some females may claim membership, but this is essentially a cheerleading role. There is a broad age range of gang members (approximately12-26), but the peak age of membership is 17-19.

History and territorial basis: The gang's history can be traced back to the building of the housing estate in which it is based (50-60 years). Several families have strong links to the gang, with participation being noted across 3 or more generations. The gang has a precisely defined (i.e., clear boundaries) territory encompassing an area of approximately 10 streets, matching the bounding of the estate or a phase of building in the estate.

Identity: The gang has a name. Younger members engage in 'tagging'. Older members (literally) carry the scars of violent conflict. The gang has a strong identity, which is reaffirmed through conflict with other gangs and the police. Police interventions appear to strengthen gang identity. The gang has rivalries and affiliations with other gangs. Gang members feel unable to move freely outwith the gang area.

Offending: The vast majority of gang members are identified (by police intelligence) as being 'active' (having an offending profile, though not necessarily charged) within the last 6 months. Offending can be traced to individuals and/or small groups (rather than the gang as a whole). Offending behaviours include acquisitive crime, breach of the peace, drug dealing, weapon carrying, serious assault with a weapon, and attempted murder. On some occasions the whole gang engages in violent conflict

with other gangs involving weapons (inclusive of knives). Gang fighting can occur on a weekly basis. 70 % of members have a significant 'arrest' profile leading to court appearances. 20 % of members have received a custodial sentence.

Example Gang Member A: 19 years old. Just received custodial sentence for serious assault (3rd time in prison). Period 04-08 charged for 41 offences: carrying offensive weapons, B of P, acquisitive crime, resisting arrest, serious assault. Gang member A has been a victim of serious assault on numerous occasions.

Example Gang Member B: 14 years old. Identified fighting with other gangs. Caught carrying a knife to school. Caught tagging. Recently assaulted with a bottle.

Gang type B

Membership: A maximum of 20 members. The gang is predominantly youth based with an age range of 14-20, though peak membership is 17-19 years old. The gang is all male (smaller and narrower age range).

History and territorial basis: The gang's history can be traced back 50-60 years, if not more. Several families have strong links to the gang, with participation being noted across 3 or more generations. The gang has a precisely defined (i.e., clear boundaries) territory encompassing a handful of streets (smaller territory).

Identity: The gang has a name. Younger members engage in 'tagging'. Older members (literally) carry the scars of violent conflict (though extreme violence is less common than that exhibited by Gang Type A). The gang's identity is weak in comparison to Gang Type A. A concerted police intervention can serve to splinter the gang. Affiliations and rivalries held with other gangs show some flexibility.

Offending: Individual members drift in and out of the gang. A small core has an active offending profile. Most are less active than members of Gang Type A. Approximately 40% develop individual/small group arrest profiles. The occasional gang member may receive a custodial sentence. The gang engages in conflict with other gangs on a sporadic basis (not weekly).

Example Gang Member C: The gang leader. Caught on 2 separate occasions with a weapon (wood/machete). Arrested for serious assault and hate crime in last 6 months.

Example Gang Member D: Caught tagging and some problems at school.

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