



Working together for a safer London



Gun Crime in Brent

A report commissioned by the London Borough of Brent Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership

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March 2005



The views, findings and conclusions expressed in this report are those of the author, not necessarily those of Brent Council, the Metropolitan Police Service, or any of the other members of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership in the London Borough of Brent, nor do they necessarily reflect policy.

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i. Executive Summary

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A. Background

Since a series of fatal shootings in the London Borough of Brent in 1999, considerable efforts have been made to tackle gun crime in the borough against a background of limited strategic analysis. This paucity of research is reflected in the wider national picture, with minimal research evidence about 'gun crime' beyond the specific offence of armed robbery and the massacres at Hungerford and Dunblane.

In seeking to better understand the issues encompassed by 'gun crime' in Brent and address this knowledge gap, the London Borough of Brent 'Not Another Drop' Gun Crime Reduction Steering Group commissioned research to examine gun crime in the borough from a strategic perspective. Despite this focus on Brent, it is expected that this research will be of interest to a wider audience, notably those agencies and individuals tasked with tackling 'gun crime' in their communities.

The remit of the research did not encompass making recommendations about policy. Nor does this research describe the considerable efforts being made to tackle gun crime in the borough via the Not Another Drop project.

B. Methodology

This report, **Gun Crime in Brent**, presents evidence from a three-strand research project that has examined two longitudinal police data sets (recorded crime and calls to 999) and interviewed 15 convicted gun crime offenders from Brent. Each of these strands may be read singly or all three can be taken together. Below are presented *selected* key findings and policy questions, followed by summaries of the individual chapters.

For the purposes of this report, 'Gun Crime' is defined as **criminal activity involving the possession or use of an implement or object described by any party to the offence as a 'firearm' or 'gun', including imitations.**

C. Key Findings

1. Gun crime in Brent is **rare** – the police record less than one offence per day where a gun is used (fired, brandished, used to hit etc). Only a small minority of these crimes involve guns being fired and many involve imitation and toy guns (e.g. firing plastic or metal ball bearings). Examining 1999-2003, offences peaked significantly in 2002, as did the percentage of calls to 999 mentioning firearms.
2. Gun crime in Brent cuts across **most crime types** The single biggest group of offences involving guns is robberies (38.2%), followed by crimes of violence against the person (35.6%) and criminal damage (9.5%).
3. Gun crime in Brent encompasses **diverse symbolic and instrumental motivations**¹. It is not just committed by and against one ethnic group, is not just about young people, is not caused by gansta rap, is not just when guns are fired, and is not just about drugs. Furthermore, there is little evidence of gang activity in Brent. There is a need to move away from crude stereotypes and towards acknowledging the considerable complexity of the issues involved. Solutions must be sophisticated and long-term, and 'quick wins' are unrealistic.
4. Nevertheless, gun crime in Brent does **disproportionately** involve men, certain ethnic and age groups and certain geographic locations, although there are important differences by specific crime type and over time. Overall, the peak age group for both victims and offenders is 20-24 years.

¹ *Instrumental* pertains to use as a tool.

Spatially, the whole borough has been affected, although the greatest concentrations of gun crime occurred in Stonebridge (12.6%), Harlesden (12.3%) and Kilburn (7.8%) wards.

5. There is no such thing as a singular '**gun culture**'. Guns may have a symbolic value for certain individuals in certain settings, but there is no single cultural imperative that dominates these values. What does appear to exist, notably among the younger offenders, is a hyper-material culture that champions wealth and the conspicuous display of symbolically significant material goods (cars, clothes, jewellery).
6. Imitation firearms are easy to obtain, converted imitations less so, and manufactured for purpose firearms harder still. Nevertheless, **firearm ownership** appears relatively widespread within criminal circles. Criminal contacts appear significant in relation to procuring live-firing guns. The use of imitation and converted imitation firearms suggests that manufactured for purpose guns are not widely available and that the UK's tight firearms legislation is significantly limiting the supply of real guns.
7. A number of the offenders interviewed reported economically successful criminals in their neighbourhoods. **Criminal opportunities** notably in relation to drug dealing and robbery, are contrasted with what are perceived to be limited and unappealing opportunities in the legitimate economy. It is likely that the risks of criminal behaviour are under-estimated, while the rewards are over-estimated.
8. **Drug markets** are significant in relation to the possession and use of illegal firearms in Brent and in this regard the illegal status of drugs is important. The relationship between drugs and guns is nuanced, however. For example, dealers are targeted by other criminals and arm themselves for their own protection, firearms are used to enforce debts, and dependent drug users commit acquisitive crimes using firearms to fund their drug taking. Furthermore, while drug market participation may be significant in relation to the presence of firearms, such firearms may be used in non-drug market related contexts, such as disputes over girlfriends and retaliatory violence.
9. The distinction between **victims and offenders** may be significantly blurred in many cases. All of the 15 offenders interviewed for this research had been the victims of crime, only three of whom had reported their victimisation to the police. 11 had been the victims of gun crime personally, and seven reported friends and family members who had been shot and, in a number of cases, killed. Many reported an expectation of violence and robbery.
10. Three key themes emerged in relation to **policing**: (a) negative public attitudes towards the police, (b) the fear of being labelled 'a grass', and (c) attitudes that promote informal personal retribution. All three of these inter-related issues have significant implications for policing, and not just in relation to gun crime. In particular they may trigger or encourage cycles of violence.

D. Key Policy Questions

1. In light of evidence about the availability and criminal use of highly realistic imitation firearms such as blank firers and BB guns, including their conversion to fire live ammunition:
 - Is it appropriate that the sale of imitation firearms is largely unregulated, particularly when in some cases they are specifically marketed as accurately replicating lethal firearms?
2. In light of evidence about the criminal use of airweapons, particularly by teenagers damaging property and injuring members of the public:
 - Is it appropriate that airweapons can be purchased without proof of access to appropriate locations where these weapons can be used legally and responsibly?
 - Is it appropriate that airweapons can be purchased without proof of appropriate supervision?
3. In light of evidence about the complex links between drugs, drug markets and firearms:
 - Do conventional drug market disruption strategies make these markets more violent and encourage the procurement and use of firearms?
 - Can (or should) more be done to protect drug dealers (and other criminals) from violent victimisation and thus minimise drug market (and other criminal) violence?
 - Can more be done to limit the profitability of drug dealing?
 - Can more be done to deter young people from getting involved in drug dealing?

- Is there more that can be done to transfer control of proscribed drugs to the state and away from offenders?
4. In light of evidence about hostile attitudes towards the police, fears of being labelled a grass and attitudes that promote personal retribution:
 - Are there other ways of engaging communities in matters of crime than through the police? For example, more effective promotion of CrimeStoppers or the use of other independent intermediaries?
 - Can more be done to encourage co-operation with police investigations, for example extending provisions to protect the identity of witnesses and informants?
 5. In light of evidence about the feelings of empowerment related to gun possession:
 - Might there be mileage in efforts to influence the symbolic value of firearms, for example portraying them as signs of personal weakness and something to be ashamed of?
 6. In light of evidence about the range of criminal contexts within which firearms are used illegally:
 - To what extent do measures of gun crime (e.g. violent gun crime, gun-enabled crime) reflect the full impact of the illegal use of firearms? Is this a problem?

E. Summaries of Chapter Findings

Chapter 2: Police Crime Data (CRIS) 1999-2003

Five years of Police recorded crime data (CRIS) were obtained and analysed, encompassing offences, victims, suspects and those accused of gun crime offences (where a Firearms Feature Code was present). The key message from the analysis is that gun crime is complex, encompassing a diversity of offences, victims, offenders, firearms, locations and so on. It affects all ethnic groups, all parts of the borough and all age groups. Within that, however, certain groups and locations are disproportionately affected. The complexity must be acknowledged when discussing gun crime.

Offence Overview²

- 1,310 offences were recorded in Brent between 1999 and 2003 in which one or more of the gun-related Firearms Feature Codes were present.
- Over the same period there were 1,629 victims, 2,389 suspects and 317 individuals were accused of gun crime offences.
- Between 1999 and 2003, gun crime in Brent was highest in 2002 when 332 offences were recorded.
- The 1,310 offences recorded over five years were classified as follows:

Major Crime Type	Offences	% of Total
Robbery	500	38.2
Violence Against the Person	467	35.6
Criminal Damage	125	9.5
Other Notifiable Offences	113	8.6
Burglary	58	4.4
Other Accepted Crime	18	1.4
Theft and Handling	13	1.0
Sexual Offences	13	1.0
Fraud or Forgery	2	0.2
Drugs Offences	1	0.1
Total	1310	100.0

Table i: Gun Crime Offences 1999-2003 by Major Crime Type

- Gun crime affects the whole of the borough, but is notably concentrated in the south. Over five years, 12.6% of the offences were recorded in Stonebridge ward, followed by 12.3% in Harlesden, 7.8% in Kilburn, 6.3% in Kensal Green, 4.8% in Mapesbury and 4.7% in Wembley Central. Hotspot locations change from year to year, indicating that the location of gun crime is not static.
- There is some evidence of gun crime seasonality, with offences higher in the summer months.

² Note: for the purposes of the present analysis, one individual CRIS entry is described as one offence. It may, however, include more than one crime in line with Home Office crime counting rules. Hence, the 1,310 CRIS entries ('offences') include 1,353 crimes.

Victims and Offenders

- Looking at the 1,310 offences as a whole, a breakdown of the age, gender and ethnicity of those involved is as follows. Using five-year groupings, the modal age group (that with the most individuals in it) for victims, suspects and those accused is 20-24 years old.

	Number	Avg Age	% Male	% IC1/White	% IC3/Black	% IC4/Asian
Victims	1629	30.6	66.2	26.1	34.1	23.2
Suspects	2389	23.4	91.9	15.0	67.4	7.7
Accused	317	24.6	94.6	26.8	61.5	6.6

Table ii: Gun Crime Victims, Suspects and Accused – Summary

Firearms Feature Codes

- The 1,310 offences had 1,344 Firearms Feature Codes. Overall, 367 (27%) indicate a firearm being fired, of which 156 relate to air weapons. 714 (53.1%) of the Feature Codes indicate handguns being carried (not fired).
- The firing of air weapons is particularly associated with criminal damage offences, while the carrying (as opposed to firing) of handguns is particularly associated with robberies. Handguns are most commonly fired in the context of violent offences, as are 'other firearms' (such as BB guns).

Robbery

- Robberies of business property have fallen year on year. By contrast, the more numerous robberies of personal property rose to a peak in 2002, before falling back.
- Key differences exist in the spatial location of the two offence types.
- 60% of robberies of personal property occur in the street. By contrast, 11% of robberies of business property occur in betting shops, 9% in food shops, 7% in petrol stations and 7% in news/tobacco/book shops.
- Victims and offenders in robberies of business property are older than are those in robberies of personal property. In both cases, however, males predominate as both victims and offenders and IC4/Asians comprise the biggest group of victims.
- IC3/Black offenders predominate for both offence types except in relation to those accused of robberies of business property when IC1/White offenders are more numerous. Differential venue selection may be significant, IC1/White offenders appearing to disproportionately target venues with better security (such as banks and building societies).
- Firearms are rarely fired in the course of robberies (7%). Handguns appear to be the weapons of choice, comprising 82% of all Feature Codes.

Violence Against the Person

- A total of 467 offences of violence against the person involving a firearm were recorded between 1999 and 2003, peaking with 116 in 2002.
- During this period there were 16 murders (17 victims) and 49 attempted murders (69 victims).
- Spatially, these offences are concentrated in the south of the borough, most notably in Stonebridge and Harlesden, although the different constituent offences have differing distributions.
- Overall, IC3/Black individuals make up 48.7% of victims, 62.1% of suspects and 58.7% of those accused. These figures rise to 75.6%, 67.4% and 86.1% respectively in the case of murders and attempted murders.
- Nevertheless, in at least 17 out of 65 murders and attempted murders (26.2%) non-IC3/Black ethnic groups were involved.
- There seems to be a particular problem with teenagers (average 16.8 yrs) firing airguns at people.

Burglary

- 58 burglary offences where a firearm was present were recorded between 1999 and 2003, peaking with 18 in 2002.
- These offences are distributed across the south of the borough, with very few in the northern half.
- Overall, the victims were split equally between men and women and averaged 28.2 years old.
- IC3/Black individuals make up the largest group of victims (48.8%) and suspects (62.4%).
- Of 162 suspects, only 3 individuals have been accused of these offences. This ratio of 54:1 is the worst for any of the major crime types by a considerable margin.

Criminal Damage

- 125 criminal damage offences where a firearm was present were recorded between 1999 and 2003, peaking with 35 in 2002.
- Spatially, these offences are spread across the borough with residential dwellings most frequently targeted.
- Victims average 45.6 years old, in contrast to much younger suspects (20.6 years) and accused (19.3 years). IC1/White victims make up the single largest group, while IC4/Asian individuals are most numerous as suspects (a fact skewed by one offence with 20 IC4/Asian suspects).
- 97 of the 125 offences relate to airweapons being fired, 5 to handguns being fired, and one to a shotgun being fired.

Police Crime Data

- Numerous difficulties were encountered with the police crime data and are documented in full in Chapter 2. Wherever possible these have been resolved, however anyone using police data or reviewing analysis based on police data is advised to bear the limitations of the data in mind. Those with responsibility for overseeing the recording of crime data might wish to consider whether some of these limitations could be addressed in the future.

Chapter 3: Interviews with Convicted Offenders

15 offenders from Brent who had been convicted of Firearms Act offences were interviewed about a range of themes including their backgrounds, offending and victimisation, firearm, gun culture and preventing gun crime. The interviews were variously conducted at the offices of the Probation and Youth Offending Services in Brent and in a number of prison establishments. The interviews provided important contextual information, in particular about the contexts and motivations for firearm possession and use. In so doing, they go some way to dispelling a number of myths about gun crime and reinforce the messages of complexity, nuance and context that emerge from the analysis of police data.

Characteristics and Backgrounds of the Offenders Interviewed

The 15 offenders were all male and aged from 16 to the mid-50s. Three defined themselves as White British, one as Asian, nine as Black, and two as mixed race Black/White.

The picture that emerged highlighted the offenders' experiences of instability in their lives in a range of ways, including family disruption, exclusion from mainstream education and drug use. Although most had worked, this was typically in insecure or poorly paid occupations. For many, drug dealing was considered a viable and attractive alternative to legitimate employment and 13 of the 15 had either dealt drugs themselves or had associated closely with individuals who dealt drugs. Importantly, the distinction between offenders and victims is blurred; all 15 had themselves been the victims of crime, including 11 who had experienced gun crime as victims. Seven reported that friends or family members had been shot and injured or even killed. Only three of the 15 had reported their own victimisation to the police, and importantly a mutually reinforcing picture emerged of negative attitudes towards the police, a fear of being labelled "a grass" and a street criminal culture that promotes personal retribution. Inevitably, cycles of violence result.

Amongst the younger individuals in particular, an overriding concern was with money and symbolically significant material goods. Opportunities in relation to drug dealing or robbery were contrasted with what were perceived to be limited opportunities in the mainstream, reinforced through an informal social learning process by the visible signs of criminal affluence in their neighbourhoods.

There does not seem to be evidence of a persistent or clearly defined culture of gang membership. Instead, the picture is of peer networks providing localised social and criminal communities and in some cases providing safety in numbers, young men expecting to encounter violence in the course of their social lives in particular.

Offending, Guns and Gun Crime

Offending

The 15 had been convicted of offences ranging from possession of an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence to murder. Approximately seven of the offenders were what might be described as "career criminals" and two reported having specifically targeted drug dealers. One reported that his

offending was in part a symbolic defensive strategy, enabling him to develop a reputation as a “serious guy” not to be messed with, and two others reported the significance of dependent drug use.

Firearms

18 firearms were involved in the offences for which the 15 had been convicted. Of these, 10 were described as real (live-firing) firearms, including one that was home made. Two were confirmed converted imitations and the remaining six included two blank-firers, three BB guns (firing plastic or metal ball bearings) and one airgun. A number of the offenders reported previously having owned other firearms, and 12 reported knowing numerous other individuals with guns. The significance of imitation firearms begs the question whether their unregulated sale is appropriate.

Availability

Several older offenders provided important contextual information about changes to the availability of firearms, highlighting the demise of dominant organised crime firms and the increasing availability of converted imitation firearms. Whereas one offender reported a local armourer in Brent at the start of the 1980s who exerted a degree of informal social control over access to firearms, today it appears that firearms supply is less regulated. Although criminal contacts are important, particularly in relation to real firearms, motivation and money seem to be more significant. It appears that converted imitation firearms are more widely available, while accurate replica or imitation weapons such as blank firing handguns and BB guns can be purchased over the counter in high street shops.

Possessing a Firearm

While a couple of the offenders downplayed the personal impact of possessing their firearm, the general consensus was of empowerment, either in terms of self-image or violent potential. One individual suggested that the two might be different stages in the same process, with an initial feeling of power being replaced over time with a more neutral attitude.

Impact of Others on the Offender

It appears that an awareness of disapproval on the part of parents and partners did not strongly influence the offenders' behaviour, while the attitudes (expressed or expected) of friends and associates seem to have been consensual. There was a general awareness of the risks of being stopped in possession of a firearm by the police although this does not appear to have universally influenced the offenders' behaviour.

Attitudes Towards Firearms

Whilst some of the offenders – typically those who had imitation firearms – stated that there was never a time when it is acceptable to carry a gun, others were less proscriptive. In particular, a number of those interviewed stressed the acceptability of arming oneself in the case of a credible risk or threat, either in relation to direct violence or in the context of other criminal behaviour such as drug dealing.

Contexts and Motivations for Gun Possession and Use

The offenders were asked about both their own offending and other contexts they knew of when firearms had been present or used. The following broadly represent the scope of their answers, although it must be stressed that the themes overlap considerably:

- *Immature/Irresponsible Behaviour.* Behaviour either without specific criminal intent or lacking an awareness of illegality typically involving teenagers possessing BB guns or airguns.
- *Peer Pressure.* Carrying a gun in public to prove manliness to peers. Also offending to get money to buy symbolically significant material goods.
- *Drug Markets.* Criminal victimisation of drug dealers, dealers arming themselves for their protection and firearms used in the context of debt enforcement and threats.
- *Robbery and Burglary.* Firearms used as offence ‘enablers’ to ensure victim compliance, particularly when the intended target is a drug dealer who is likely to be armed.
- *Dispute Resolution.* Escalation of disputes in the context of firearm availability and a lack of exit strategies may result in trivial disputes leading to fatal violence.
- *Retaliation.* Firearms used to retaliate directly for prior offending in the context of a culture that champions personal retribution and shuns police involvement.
- *Fear and Protection.* Possession of firearms for protection in the case of actual or perceived threats or ‘just in case’ violence arises. Predicated on an expectation of disputes and violence and the belief, knowledge or expectation that other individuals are armed.

Gun Culture and Preventing Gun Crime

Gun Culture

By and large the offenders understood gun culture in terms of the normality of firearms, and also in terms of racial stereotyping. To a lesser extent, guns were referred to as accessories and signifiers of status. Another theme that emerged several times was the willingness of offenders to use guns when in the past scores would have been settled differently – a fight, for example – and at least one offender highlighted the increased availability of converted imitation firearms, suggesting that this had fuelled the changes. Overall, however, it is argued that there is a significant relationship between deprived inner-city communities and a criminal economy that thrives in the absence of credible alternatives. This relationship is reinforced by a hyper-material culture on the one hand and opportunities available in particular in drug markets on the other. Guns are an accepted feature of these drugs markets.

Preventing Gun Crime

There was little consensus among the offenders, reflecting the complexity of the issues. One of the more prominent themes concerned education and the need to set young people on the right path from a very young age, perhaps engaging ex-offenders to assist. Attitudes concerning the criminal justice system were generally constructive, focussed on the need for greater sensitivity and a better grasp of community relations on the part of the police, and improved resettlement capacity in relation to prison. Other themes included better community facilities, legalising drugs and enhanced political representation.

Concluding Remarks

The interview material situates guns in a complex interaction between the criminal economy, personal and collective experiences and attitudes, mainstream authorities such as the police, popular and criminal cultures, developmental factors such as family life and education, firearms availability, the debilitating effects of dependent drug use and a whole host of other factors. Guns and gun crime are both a symptom and a cause of violent criminality.

The most significant relationship, however, appears to be between guns and drugs markets, gun-related violence being symptomatic of an unregulated market whose participants cannot call on the legal structures that underpin the mainstream economy and maintain order. In the absence of a hegemonic criminal organisation, once firearms have been introduced into such an environment, the unregulated illegal market seems to lack the capability to eliminate them and participants are forced towards the lowest common denominator. Inevitably, it appears that this spills over into wider society, fuelling a fear of violence and prompting defensive strategies including firearm procurement. Meanwhile, negative attitudes towards the police interact with a culture of not “grassing” and an expectation of informal retribution to not only hamper efforts to curtail violence but indeed to fuel cycles of violence.

Chapter 4: Police CADMIS Data Jan 1998 – Sep 2003

The CADMIS database records 999 calls to the Police; the analysis presented considers all calls to the police in Brent from January 1998 to September 2003 inclusive. CADMIS calls are coded twice according to the description received, firstly from the member of public who called 999 (the Type) and secondly from the police officer(s) attending the call (the Class). The code 65 indicates that a firearm (or information about firearms) has been mentioned. The data relating to firearms have been analysed quantitatively and spatially, the latter using GIS mapping technology.

Increase in Firearms Incidents

In general, the number of CADMIS calls in Brent has been falling since a peak in August 1999. By contrast, calls mentioning firearms have increased over the same period, particularly post-March 1999. The summer of 1999 is characterised by a clear change from the previous year and marks the start of a seasonal trend with peaks in spring/summer seen in all subsequent years. CADMIS calls mentioning firearms have increased as a percentage of all CADMIS calls over the same period, in the case of the Type classification peaking at 1.64% of all calls in April 2003, and in the case of the Class classification peaking at 0.59% in June 2002.

Attrition

There is a considerable attrition in the recording of firearms using the code 65 between the Type and Class classification of CADMIS calls. In general there are two to three calls with a Type 65 code to every call with a Class 65 code. The ratio between the two has generally been closing over time. Several

explanations are offered to understand this attrition. In particular it is suggested that a failure to systematically record a response to an initial report relating to a firearm by using the D/O/N/T³ suffixes in the Class fields may be responsible.

Response Time Effect

There is some evidence that there may be an interaction between police response times and incident classification. Calls for which both the initial Type classification and the subsequent Class classification mentioned firearms are on average responded to faster than calls for which only the initial Type classification mentioned firearms. This is the case even when controlling for the Incident Grade (the speed of response required).

Spatial Changes

The total area in Brent affected by firearms as registered in calls to 999 has been increasing over time. The spatial distribution of Type 65 and Class 65 calls is largely consistent, although 2002 is an important exception. Within these two processes there have been changes in the location of firearms incidents from year-to-year, although two types of location – deprived housing estates and major high streets – appear to be consistently important.

Concluding remarks

CADMIS contains a wealth of information about crime and disorder in general and gun crime in particular. More specifically, it is informative about the scale of gun crime in its impact on policing, public perceptions, and the way that the latter may deviate from reality. From an analytical point of view, the utility of CADMIS is severely undermined by the structure of the database and what appear to be considerable limitations in the way data are entered.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

A large body of analysis is presented that takes stock of formal police data and the accounts of some of those actually involved in gun crime as offenders. The crime data highlights the range of crime types in which firearms feature and points to important differences between men and women and between ethnic groups in relation to both offending and victimisation. It illustrates the fact that gun crime impacts on all groups, albeit not proportionately.

The illegal use of firearms cuts across the criminal spectrum and defies simple deconstruction, encompassing both symbolic and instrumental functionality⁴. As such it is not conceptually straightforward. It follows that there is no such thing as a singular 'gun culture', although that is not to suggest that firearms do not carry significant cultural weight in certain settings. Rather, the issue is that the various motivations and contexts for firearm possession and use are not all manifestations of the same cultural imperative. In acknowledging this complexity, it inevitably follows that any efforts to tackle gun crime must also be complex. While efforts to curtail firearm availability will cut across the full range of gun crime offences, approaches concerned with particular contexts, particular attitudes, particular groups or particular areas will not, and they will need to be nuanced appropriately.

³ Firearm Discharged, Observed, Not observed, Taken into police possession.

⁴ *Instrumental* pertains to use as a tool.

ii. Acknowledgements

There are inevitably many people without the assistance of whom this research would not have been possible.

First and foremost, thanks must go to Valerie Jones, Head of Community Safety for Brent Council, Detective Chief Superintendent Glen Allison, formerly Deputy Borough Commander of the Metropolitan Police Service in Brent, and Bethan West, co-ordinator of the Not Another Drop anti-gun crime initiative, for their support of this research from day one.

At the University of Portsmouth, Dr Tom Williamson has provided expert guidance and not a little moral support along the way. Dr Daniel Silverstone excelled in conducting the interviews presented in Chapter 3 and without his expertise and hard work the material could not have been as comprehensive or the interviews as engaging. Many hours of discussions with both Tom and Daniel have informed the analysis of the interview data. Professor Chris Lewis commented on an earlier draft and his attention to detail has been greatly appreciated in improving the analysis.

At Brent Council, thanks to all the other members of the Community Safety Team, including in particular Maureen Flannery, Martin Gormlie and Anita Dickinson. Patrick Lewis, Head of the Harlesden and Stonebridge Neighbourhood Renewal Team, was unwaveringly supportive.

In relation to the Metropolitan Police Service, thanks to Mark Parkinson, Diane Southgate and especially Pretesh Halai at the Brent Borough Intelligence Unit (BIU). Aziz Rahman and his colleagues at the corporate Performance Information Bureau (PIB) assisted in every way possible in relation to the crime data and their patience and efforts are greatly appreciated.

Particular thanks to Mr Kola Williams for his time and patience, helping educate an outsider about some of the realities of life “on road” and discouraging any complacency on the part of the researcher. Thanks also to Ms Cheryl Townsend for her time and insight into the challenges facing many of the families with whom she has worked in Brent.

Thanks to Will Jones, Head of Service Delivery for the Probation Service in Brent, and his colleagues, and Peter Sutcliffe, Head of the Youth Offending Service in Brent, and his colleagues, for their assistance in identifying and facilitating the offender interviews. Without their support the interviews could not have happened.

At HM Prison Service, thanks to Professor David Crighton of the Applied Psychology Group for considering and approving the application to conduct interviews in prisons. Particular thanks to the Prison Governors and Prison Service staff who made the interviews in prisons possible.

Finally, thanks to the 15 unnamed individuals who gave up their time to be interviewed and who were willing to share their experiences and knowledge with a wider audience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Defining 'Gun Crime'
- 1.3 Overall Aims & Hypotheses
- 1.4 Overview of Brent

1.1 Introduction

From April 2001 to March 2004, the London Borough of Brent had the fifth highest total number of recorded 'violent gun crime' offences in London⁵, and since a series of gun murders in 1998 and 1999 has been designated a 'Trident borough'⁶. More recently, Brent became the focus of national attention in September 2003, when a seven year old girl called Toni-Ann Byfield was shot dead along with her father Bertram⁷. They were respectively the fourth and fifth victims of gun murder in Brent that year. Such events in Brent have occurred in the context of rising levels of gun-related crime across London and other major urban centres across the UK such as Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham.

Increased coverage of gun-related violence by the media and in political discourse has been characterised by the use of language that arguably has come to define how the illegal use of firearms is understood. "Operation Trident", "Black on Black", "Bad on Bad", "Gun Culture", and indeed the phrase "Gun Crime" suggest singular phenomena. The stereotypical gun criminal has become defined as a young black male drug (specifically crack) gang member settling a score with someone just like him. With headline news stories and government legislation⁸, 'gun crime' discourse has all the hallmarks of a moral panic⁹.

Against this backdrop, considerable and diverse efforts have been expended in 'tackling gun crime', both in Brent in particular (e.g. the Not Another Drop campaign) and across the UK's cities in general. What might be described as a 'gun crime industry' has developed, characterised by numerous conference and seminar events targeted in particular at public sector practitioners struggling to understand and combat serious criminality in the communities that they serve.

What in many ways defines recent discourse around the illegal use of firearms, and has proved to be a major obstacle to efforts to combat such behaviours, is the relative absence of objective UK-focussed research literature on this subject. Whilst subjects like the mass murders at Hungerford (1987) and Dunblane (1996), have been extensively written about¹⁰, their relevance to the kind of chronic inner-city gun violence seen in areas such as Brent is limited to the impact these events had on firearms legislation¹¹ – although that importance is not negligible. Similarly, research into armed commercial robbery can only reflect on one aspect of what is a much more complex picture¹², and research into drugs markets in the UK often mentions violence¹³, but rarely, if ever, with a focus on the use of firearms¹⁴.

Where stronger evidence on the illegal use of firearms is available, it tends to be centred on the US, although again this tends to be in the context of research on issues such as drug markets¹⁵. The relevance of this literature to the UK is limited, however, when one considers the systematic differences in firearms – and importantly ammunition – availability and legislation between the two countries. The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey, for example, estimates 'civilian firearms ownership' rates, including legally and illegally-held firearms, of 10 per 100 persons in the UK and 83-96 per 100 persons in the US¹⁶. Evidence about the importance of imitation and converted firearms in London (for example, see Chapter 3) supports an assertion that made-for-purpose firearms are not widely available to criminals in the UK. By contrast, literature on firearm-related violence in the US does not mention conversions – the market in made-for-purpose firearms is too large and accessible for anyone to go to such efforts.

One consequence of this paucity of UK-specific research literature has been a reliance on police data sources, which whilst providing an invaluable resource – police data will be considered in the present

⁵ Source: Various MPS Monthly Management Reports. Excludes City of London, Heathrow and Special Operations. See Appendix A. The four boroughs with higher levels of 'violent gun crime' were Lambeth, Hackney, Southwark and Haringey.

⁶ Operation Trident was established by the Metropolitan Police to tackle rising levels of gun-related violence and poor detection rates in London's black communities. For further details see: <http://www.met.police.uk/trident>

⁷ E.g. see BBC (2003)

⁸ E.g. The Criminal Justice Act 2003, which introduced a five-year minimum mandatory prison sentence for certain Firearms Act offences. See The Stationary Office (2003a).

⁹ Cohen (1972)

¹⁰ See e.g. Josephs (1993), North (2000), Squires (2000)

¹¹ E.g. see Cullen (1996)

¹² On armed robbery, see e.g. Morrison & O'Donnell (1994) and Matthews (2002)

¹³ E.g. see Edmunds et al. (1996), Pearson and Hobbs (2001), Lupton et al. (2002)

¹⁴ Exceptions focussed on drug users include McKeganey et al. (2000) and Bennett & Holloway (2004)

¹⁵ E.g. see Bourgois (2003) or Jacobs (1999 and 2000)

¹⁶ Graduate Institute of International Studies (2003) which further states (p.61) that "By any measure, the United States is the most armed country in the world" with firearms ownership rates at least twice as high as second placed Yemen.

research – tends to be limited in terms of evidence about causes of crime, offender motivation and situational factors. Where police intelligence can help fill this void it is, in the experience of the author, very rarely available to non-police sources, particularly not in a way that provides a systematic overview of the issues in an area such as Brent. Police analysis tends to focus on tactical applications – intelligence on individuals and their networks – rather than strategic assessments¹⁷. Indeed, this gap is reflected in the comments of one senior police officer in Brent who admitted that if asked what were the causes of gun crime in Brent, he would be unable to provide an answer. Against this background, explanations of the causes of inner-city gun related crime tend to be dominated by anecdote.

One of the obstacles to anyone seeking to understand ‘gun crime’ in an area such as Brent is the need to acknowledge the sheer complexity of the issues involved. Whereas an offence such as burglary can generally be understood in straightforward instrumental terms and tackled through improved security, the focus on firearms cuts across crime types and can therefore lose the clarity of analysis that is otherwise possible. In conceptual terms, a firearm may have instrumental or symbolic significance, or indeed a combination of the two. That is to say that it can be a tool, a socially or culturally significant symbol, or both – much in the same way that people buy and use cars for a range of reasons from the simple instrumental need to get from A to B to the conspicuous statement of status conveyed by driving a particularly expensive or desirable model.

This research attempts to do justice to the complexities of gun crime in Brent. To do so, it draws on a combination of longitudinal police data sources and interviews with convicted firearms offenders from Brent, seeking to scrutinise the relatively objective evidence of formal bureaucratic data and the subjective attitudes of those involved as offenders. At times, this is also supplemented with the author’s own qualitative evidence, collected over a period of nearly two years working with the council and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) partners in Brent in a strategic research capacity. This experience has included attending public meetings and talking to many individuals interested in, concerned with, and in some cases involved in the illegal use of firearms in their communities.

In doing so, a picture is emerging of some of the key issues effecting Brent today. Taking firearms as a starting point, themes such as drugs and drug markets, violent crime including robbery and murder, social and economic exclusion, fearful communities, attitudes towards the police and firearms availability are touched on. As such, this research should be of interest to a wide audience, both within and outwith Brent. It should be remembered, however, that context is critical – the picture emerging from the present research is intentionally focussed on Brent. Anyone seeking lessons for other locations should bear in mind the significance of regional disparities: social and economic composition, criminal markets, cultural trends and physical infrastructure are but five variables that display considerable variance within Brent, never mind between Brent and other areas.

One final note that must be impressed upon the reader at this stage is to highlight two things that this research is **not** attempting to do. First and foremost, it does not reflect the considerable efforts being made by Brent’s statutory, voluntary and community sectors to combat the illegal use of firearms under the umbrella of the ‘Not Another Drop’ campaign that is co-ordinated by Brent’s Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Secondly, this research does not explicitly make recommendations about ‘what needs to be done’ to tackle the illegal use of firearms. Questions are posed where appropriate, and readers are invited to consider in their own terms how the issues raised might be challenged.

Research Conditions:

As per the research contract, this research has been conducted on the conditions of (a) independence, and (b) that the report would be placed in the public domain. To this end, while members of Brent’s CDRP ‘Not Another Drop’ Gun Crime Reduction Steering Group were invited to comment on an earlier draft, this was on the basis that any objections about the content would be either acted on or noted in the text, at the researcher’s discretion. It is worth noting that at no stage beyond formulating the original aims and hypotheses have any of the CDRP partners in Brent (or indeed anyone else) attempted to influence the research in any way.

¹⁷ For an exception, see Chapter 7 of NCIS (2003)

1.2 Defining 'Gun Crime'

The language of 'Gun Crime' is highly problematic, mixing legal terminology with emotive language and a lay vernacular in a manner that leaves considerable ambiguities about what exactly is being discussed. For the purposes of measuring the scale of 'gun crime', organisations such as the Home Office and Metropolitan Police Service have their own rules and definitions, which will be discussed later. For the present research, however, it was felt that these definitions are too narrow.

For the purposes of this report, 'Gun Crime' is defined as **criminal activity involving the possession or use of an implement or object described by any party to the offence as a 'firearm' or 'gun', including imitations.**

In this holistic definition, such implements may be used to fire projectiles (e.g. pellets or bullets), to cause fear (e.g. by being brandished) or as a blunt instrument (e.g. to strike someone). This definition also includes the possession of such implements or objects as covered by the 'Offensive Weapon' offence type. It is not therefore a definition contingent on the 'lethality' of the weapon, as used in legal definitions of 'firearms', and excludes legal behaviours, such as firing an air weapon on private land or possessing a ball bearing gun in a private property. Where appropriate, however, this report will discuss the different ways in which 'guns' are used in Brent – focussing in particular on the differences between such weapons being fired or merely carried. The terms 'firearm' and 'gun' will be used interchangeably.

'Gun Crime', Firearms and the law: The Law concerning firearms is complex. 'Firearms' are defined by Section 57 of the Firearms Act 1968 (as subsequently amended) on the basis of 'lethality' (which is in itself a complex and subjective matter). This legislation further defines 'ammunition', 'shot guns', 'deactivated firearms', 'readily convertible replica firearms', and 'antiques' and encompasses a range of other weapons including CS gas and pepper spray. A full discussion of Firearms Law is published by the Home Office, and will not be reproduced here¹⁸. More recently, Part 5 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 has created a new offence of "Possession of Air Weapon or Imitation Firearm in a Public Place", in addition to modifying the law surrounding air weapons¹⁹.

¹⁸ Home Office (2002)

¹⁹ The Stationary Office (2003b)

1.3 Overall Aims & Hypotheses

This research came about in response to the combination of a number of factors:

- (i) Relatively high levels of illegal firearm use in Brent, and in particular a series of firearms murders;
- (ii) A desire to tackle that illegal firearm use;
- (iii) A lack of strategic analysis of the illegal use of firearms – analytical work within the police has tended to focus on supporting tactical interventions, that is to say targeted operations against particular individuals and their associates²⁰;
- (iv) Little knowledge or understanding about the attitudes and motivations of those involved in the illegal use of firearms in Brent;
- (v) An absence of UK-specific research into the kind of inner-city gun crime being experienced in Brent;
- (vi) The employment by Brent Council of a Criminologist on secondment from the University of Portsmouth.

The principle overarching aim of this research therefore was to produce a strategic overview of the illegal use of firearms in Brent. A number of specific research questions (with associated hypotheses) were formulated as follows, intended to guide rather than limit the scope of enquiry:

1. Is gun crime a growing problem in Brent?
Hypothesis: Gun Crime is a growing problem in Brent
2. Profiling Offences, Offenders and Victims
Hypothesis: There is a relationship between individual characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity and the illegal use of firearms/victimisation
3. Is the location at which an offence takes place significant? Does this differ by offence type?
Hypothesis: Location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal firearms
4. Why do certain individuals in Brent carry and/or use firearms (including imitations)?
Hypothesis 1: Firearms may have symbolic and/or instrumental importance to the possessor.
Hypothesis 2: Illegal firearm possession is limited by availability rather than demand.

²⁰ The police analysts in Brent working on gun crime have considerable insight into the individuals involved in the illegal use of firearms in Brent, for example their lifestyles. However, they have commented that they lack the time necessary to undertake detailed strategic analysis. Examples of such work do exist, however, for example drawing together intelligence material about inter-gang conflict into a strategic narrative, thus making sense of a series of apparently irrational events.

1.4 Overview of Brent

The London Borough of Brent is a richly diverse outer-London borough located in Northwest London. Some highlight facts and figures include²¹:

- Brent's 263,464 residents (as at 2001) comprise the second most diverse Local Authority in England and Wales.
- 54.7% of Brent's residents are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, of which 18.5% are Indian, 10.5% Black Caribbean, 7.8% Black African and 4% Pakistani.
- Nearly half of Brent's residents were born outside the UK, 38.2% having been born outside the EU.
- Of the White ethnic population, 7% were born in Ireland.
- Almost one quarter of Brent's residents live in overcrowded conditions – Brent has the third largest average household size of any English or Welsh Local Authority.
- At the Local Authority level, Brent ranks as the 81st most deprived in England out of 354.
- Within Brent there are extremes of deprivation. At what is called the Lower Level Super Output Area (LLSOA)²², of which there are 174 in Brent and 32,482 in England,
 - The most deprived LLSOA in Brent ranks 1,360th worst overall, and least deprived 26,248th
 - When only examining crime and disorder, the worst is 296th and best 28,133rd

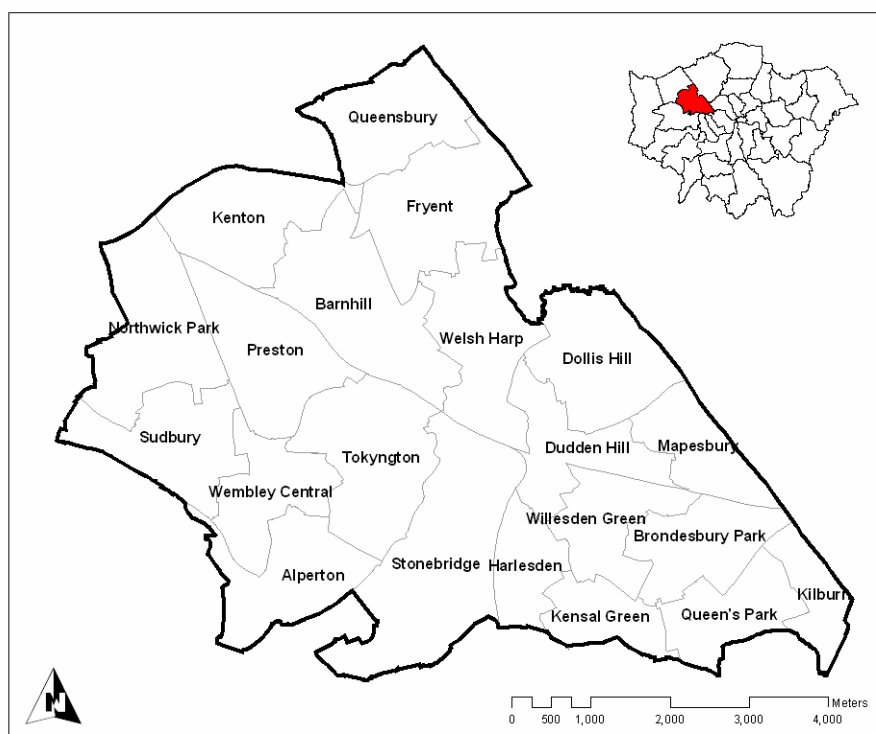


Figure 1.1: Brent's Electoral Wards (Greater London inset)

It is impossible here to fully reflect the diversity of Brent, although it is fair to remark that the borough includes areas which are 'inner-city' by any definition, as well those which are conspicuously suburban. The borough is comprehensively bisected by a major arterial road (the A406) splitting into a northern half (in reality a north western half) and a southern (south eastern) half. In simple terms, the South of the borough in particular includes large areas of social housing, much of which is currently being rebuilt, and which contrast sharply with areas of considerable affluence, notably towards the North of the borough. This economic segregation is reflected in a degree of racial segregation with the residents of the most deprived areas being disproportionately from Black ethnic groups, while Brent's ethnically Asian communities tend to live in more affluent areas. There is not, however, a clear socio-economic demarcation between North and South: the South of the borough includes pockets of considerable affluence, and the North areas of deprivation.

²¹ Fuller details can be found at: 'Profile of Brent' – <http://www.brent.gov.uk/demographic.nsf> and 'Indices of Deprivation 2004' – <http://www.odpm.gov.uk>

²² The Lower Level Super Output Areas are based on groups of the Census 2001 Output Areas. Each LLSOA covers a residential population of approximately 1,500 people.

Chapter 2: CRIS data 1999-2003

- 2.1 Chapter Summary
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Aims
- 2.4 Methodology
- 2.5 Findings
- 2.6 Conclusions

2.1 Chapter Summary

Five years of Police recorded crime data (CRIS) were obtained and analysed, encompassing offences, victims, suspects and those accused of gun crime offences (where a Firearms Feature Code was present). The key message from the analysis is that gun crime is complex, encompassing a diversity of offences, victims, offenders, firearms, locations and so on. It affects all ethnic groups, all parts of the borough and all age groups. Within that, however, certain groups and locations are disproportionately affected. The complexity must be acknowledged when discussing gun crime.

*Offence Overview*²³

- 1,310 offences were recorded in Brent between 1999 and 2003 in which one or more of the gun-related Firearms Feature Codes were present.
- Over the same period there were 1,629 victims, 2,389 suspects and 317 individuals were accused of gun crime offences.
- Between 1999 and 2003, gun crime in Brent was highest in 2002 when 332 offences were recorded.
- The 1,310 offences were classified as follows:

Major Crime Type	Offences	% of Total
Robbery	500	38.2
Violence Against the Person	467	35.6
Criminal Damage	125	9.5
Other Notifiable Offences	113	8.6
Burglary	58	4.4
Other Accepted Crime	18	1.4
Theft and Handling	13	1.0
Sexual Offences	13	1.0
Fraud or Forgery	2	0.2
Drugs Offences	1	0.1
Total	1310	100.0

Table 2.1: Gun Crime Offences 1999-2003 by Major Crime Type

- Gun Crime affects the whole of the borough, but is notably concentrated in the south. Over five years, 12.6% of the offences were recorded in Stonebridge ward, followed by 12.3% in Harlesden, 7.8% in Kilburn, 6.3% in Kensal Green, 4.8% in Mapesbury and 4.7% in Wembley Central. Hotspot locations change from year-to-year indicating that the location of gun crime is not static.
- There is some evidence of gun crime seasonality, with offences higher in the summer months

Victims and Offenders

- Looking at the 1,310 offences as a whole, a breakdown of the age, gender and ethnicity of those involved is as follows. Using five-year groupings, the modal age group (that with the most individuals in it) for victims, suspects and those accused is 20-24 years old²⁴.

	Number	Avg Age	% Male	% IC1/White	% IC3/Black	% IC4/Asian
Victims	1629	30.6	66.2	26.1	34.1	23.2
Suspects	2389	23.4	91.9	15.0	67.4	7.7
Accused	317	24.6	94.6	26.8	61.5	6.6

Table 2.2: Gun Crime Victims, Suspects and Accused – Summary

Firearms Feature Codes

- The 1,310 offences had 1,344 Firearms Feature Codes. Overall, 367 (27%) indicate a firearm being fired, of which 156 relate to air weapons. 714 (53.1%) of the Feature Codes indicate handguns being carried (not fired).

²³ Note: for the purposes of the present analysis, one individual CRIS entry is described as one offence. It may, however, include more than one crime in line with Home Office crime counting rules. Hence, the 1,310 CRIS entries ('offences') include 1,353 crimes.

²⁴ Suspects are as described by victims and witnesses. Those Accused have been charged with an offence.

- The firing of air weapons is particularly associated with criminal damage offences, while the carrying (as opposed to firing) of handguns is particularly associated with robberies. Handguns are most commonly fired in the context of violent offences, as are 'other firearms' (such as BB guns).

Robbery

- Robberies of business property have fallen year-on-year. By contrast, the more numerous robberies of personal property rose to a peak in 2002, before falling back.
- Key differences exist in the spatial location of the two offence types.
- 60% of robberies of personal property occur in the street. By contrast, 11% of robberies of business property occur in betting shops, 9% in food shops, 7% in petrol stations and 7% in news/tobacco/book shops.
- Victims and offenders in robberies of business property are older than are those in robberies of personal property. In both cases, however, males predominate as both victims and offenders and IC4/Asians comprise the biggest group of victims.
- IC3/Black offenders predominate for both offence types except in relation to those accused of robberies of business property when IC1/White offenders are more numerous. Differential venue selection may be significant, IC1/White offenders appearing to disproportionately target venues with better security (such as banks and building societies).
- Firearms are rarely fired in the course of robberies (7%). Handguns appear to be the weapons of choice, comprising 82% of all Feature Codes.

Violence Against the Person

- A total of 467 offences of violence against the person involving a firearm were recorded between 1999 and 2003, peaking with 116 in 2002.
- During this period there were 16 murders (17 victims) and 49 attempted murders (69 victims).
- Spatially, these offences are concentrated in the south of the borough, most notably in Stonebridge and Harlesden, although the different constituent offences have differing distributions.
- Overall, IC3/Black individuals make up 48.7% of victims, 62.1% of suspects and 58.7% of those accused. These figures rise to 75.6%, 67.4% and 86.1% respectively in the case of murders and attempted murders.
- Nevertheless, in at least 17 out of 65 murders and attempted murders (26.2%) non-IC3/Black ethnic groups were involved.
- There seems to be a particular problem with teenagers (average 16.8 yrs) firing airguns at people.

Burglary

- 58 burglary offences where a firearm was present were recorded between 1999 and 2003, peaking with 18 in 2002.
- These offences are distributed across the south of the borough, with very few in the northern half.
- Overall, the victims were split equally between men and women and averaged 28.2 years old.
- IC3/Black individuals make up the largest group of victims (48.8%) and suspects (62.4%).
- Of 162 suspects, only 3 individuals have been accused of these offences. This ratio of 54:1 is the worst for any of the major crime types by a considerable margin.

Criminal Damage

- 125 criminal damage offences where a firearm was present were recorded between 1999 and 2003, peaking with 35 in 2002.
- Spatially, these offences are spread across the borough with residential dwellings most frequently targeted.
- Victims average 45.6 years old, in contrast to much younger suspects (20.6 years) and accused (19.3 years). IC1/White victims make up the single largest group, while IC4/Asian individuals are most numerous as suspects (a fact skewed by one offence with 20 IC4/Asian suspects).
- 97 of the 125 offences relate to airweapons being fired, 5 to handguns being fired, and one to a shotgun being fired.

Police Crime Data

- Numerous difficulties were encountered with the police crime data and are documented in full in Chapter 2. Wherever possible these have been resolved, however anyone using police data or reviewing analysis based on police data is advised to bear the limitations of the data in mind. Those with responsibility for overseeing the recording of crime data might wish to consider whether some of these limitations could be addressed in the future.

2.2 Introduction

Analysing police recorded crime data forms an essential component of researching the illegal use of firearms in an area like Brent, as it is the only place where the details of such offences are systematically recorded. In keeping with all bureaucratic data, however, it is not perfect and the limitations will be discussed.

The data being analysed here covers a five-year period from 1999 to 2003 (inclusive) and is derived from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Crime Recording Information System (CRIS). This database is used for recording crime incidents and producing recorded crime statistics, including those involving firearms, at a variety of levels including beats, boroughs and for the MPS region as a whole²⁵. In addition to producing counts of crime, however, CRIS also contains a wealth of information including temporal data, victim and offender demographics, addresses, and, importantly here, firearm type. This analysis explores many of these variables in relation to offences, victims, suspects and those accused of offences involving firearms.

Recording the Involvement of Firearms: Firearms Feature Codes

The involvement of firearms in crime is captured in CRIS using what are called Firearms Feature Codes. These describe both the type of firearm used, for example whether handgun or shotgun, and also how it was used – whether it was merely carried, or fired. The Feature Codes will be described in more detail in the Methodology below. In summary, however, there is a degree of subjectivity in deciding which Feature Codes to use and not all of the Feature Codes relate directly to guns, so for the purposes of the present analysis only a subset of the codes will be considered.

This analysis will consider the Firearms Feature Codes in use until March 2004 after which they were superseded by a new group of Codes (see Appendix D). As it will not be possible to compare the pre-April 2004 Feature Codes with those post-March 2004, this is an appropriate moment to take stock of the data available to date.

Defining ‘Gun Crime’

At this point it is worth commenting briefly on how ‘gun crime’ is defined for the purposes of official statistics, and how the present analysis relates to such definitions. Prior to April 2004, the MPS reported on what they called ‘Violent Gun Crime’, defined as incidents of Violence Against the Person (not Offensive Weapon offences), Sexual Offences, Robbery, Burglary and Theft & Handling, where one or more from a subset of the Firearms Feature Codes was present²⁶. This has now been replaced with a new ‘Gun Enabled Crime’ definition that excludes Theft & Handling offences and which is based on a new set of Firearms Feature Codes. These definitions do not therefore include all crime types where the presence or use of firearms has been recorded, nor all Firearms Feature Codes. This analysis ignores these definitions and does not seek to recreate ‘official’ published crime data – although the underlying data set is the same as that used for generating such statistics. Instead, data will be presented in a way that allows the relationship between the Firearms Feature Codes and offence types to be considered in much greater detail than simple counts allow.

²⁵ Note: The Metropolitan Police Service covers the Greater London area, except the City of London, and London Underground and mainline rail trains, tracks or stations. These are policed respectively by the City of London Police and the British Transport Police. Although BTP data was sought, none was made available.

²⁶ Source: Communication with PIB, August 2004. This definition is not entirely consistently understood, however. Earlier correspondence with the PIB in May 2004 did not mention the inclusion of Theft and Handling offences in the ‘Violent Gun Crime’ definition.

2.3 Aims

The principle aim of analysing CRIS data is to develop a strategic overview of the illegal use of firearms in Brent. In addition to looking at five years' worth of data as a whole, such analysis also allows a consideration of trends over time. This will include exploring the types of offences, types of firearms, age, gender and ethnicity of victims and offenders, and location of offences.

In doing so, three of the research questions will be addressed, namely:

1. Is gun crime a growing problem in Brent?
Hypothesis: Gun Crime is a growing problem in Brent
2. Profiling Offences, Offenders and Victims
Hypothesis: There is a relationship between individual characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity and the illegal use of firearms/victimisation
3. Is the location at which an offence takes place significant? Does this differ by offence type?
Hypothesis: Location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal firearms

This will be complemented with interviews with convicted offenders (Chapter 3) and finally a consideration of CADMIS data (Chapter 4).

2.4 Methodology

As already mentioned, the data considered here is derived from the MPS Crime Recording Information System, generally known by its acronym CRIS. This section will detail the data involved, how it was obtained, discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of the data, and then explain how the analysis was undertaken.

The structure of this Methodology section is as follows:

- 2.4.1 Firearms in CRIS: The Firearms Feature Codes**
- 2.4.2 Datasets**
- 2.4.3 Counting Crimes**
- 2.4.4 Data Procurement**
- 2.4.5 Generic Limitations of the Data**
- 2.4.6 Specific Problems with the Data**

2.4.1 Firearms in CRIS: The Firearms Feature Codes

NOTE: This section and subsequent analysis in this chapter is based on the Firearms Feature Codes in use until March 2004. These have now been superseded with much more detailed codes (see Appendix D for details).

Most crime involving firearms is recorded for crime counting purposes in CRIS on the basis of the primary (most serious) offence, rather than on the presence of a firearm²⁷. For example, an armed robbery of a bank would be recorded as a 'Robbery of Commercial Property', and a murder in which the weapon was a firearm would simply be recorded as a 'Murder'. In neither case can the involvement of a firearm be known from the classification of the offence. The notable exception to this rule is where the primary offence relates to the Firearms Act (1968 & Amendments), (for example, 'Possession of Firearm or Imitation Firearm with Intent to Cause Violence') or the more Recent Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (for example, 'Possession of an Air Weapon or an Imitation Firearm in a Public Place')²⁸.

Where the involvement of firearms is recorded in a systematic way in CRIS is with the Firearms Feature Codes that can be applied to individual CRIS entries (of which there is generally one per criminal incident). These indicate the carrying or firing of one or more firearms, differentiated roughly by firearm type, and are generally based on the description given by victims or witnesses, or in the case that a firearm is recovered at the scene of a crime on the perception of the police officers present. As such they can be extremely subjective, particularly when the firearm in question is not fired²⁹. The advent of highly accurate replica weapons, including airguns designed to imitate in appearance 'lethal barrelled' firearms, makes classification of firearms that are in some way implied, shown, or used as blunt instruments, but not fired, highly problematic. This is a common feature, for example, of robberies in Brent involving firearms (see Chapter 3). The 'weapon' produced may appear to be a lethal barrelled handgun capable of firing live ammunition, but in fact be an airgun, or even a purely decorative imitation. Furthermore, whilst more than one Firearms Feature Code can be recorded when more than one code applies, the data does not indicate when more than one firearm of a particular type is used in the same way during a crime. For example, where two handguns were carried during a robbery only one 'FG – Handgun Carried' code would be applied³⁰. Conversely, in the case for example of a group of five offenders with one firearm, all five would be recorded as having had (been party to) a firearm. A final limitation is that the Firearms Feature Codes do not capture instances when an offender threatened to use a gun but did not show one, for example in the course of a telephone conversation³¹. Any counts based on the Firearms Feature Codes may not therefore reflect the wider impact in terms of victim perceptions and fear of crime that may result.

²⁷ For further detail on crime counting, see Home Office (2004).

²⁸ On the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, see The Stationary Office (2003b).

²⁹ Advice received from the Borough Intelligence Unit (BIU) in Brent suggests that Firearms Feature Codes are normally amended as necessary to reflect forensic evidence if and when it arises.

³⁰ Information about multiple firearms may be contained in free-text fields in the CRIS crime database, but these cannot be strategically analysed and were not made available to the author.

³¹ It is worth bearing in mind that such threats may be more credible in an area known for having a gun crime problem.

The full list of Firearms Feature Codes in use up until March 2004 is as follows³²:

<i>BP – CS Gas or Pepper Spray Used*</i>	FH – Handgun Fired
<i>BQ – CS Gas or Pepper Spray Carried*</i>	FJ – Rifle Carried
FA – Shotgun Carried	FK – Rifle Used
FB – Shotgun Fired	<i>FL – Explosive Used*</i>
FC – Sawn-off Shotgun Carried	<i>FM – Incendiary Used*</i>
FD – Sawn-off Shotgun Fired	FO – Other Firearm Carried
FE – Airweapon Carried	FP – Other Firearm Fired
FF – Airweapon Fired	FR – Firearm Converted/Adapted
FG – Handgun Carried	<i>* - Not considered in the present analysis</i>

For the purposes of the present analysis, all codes have been considered except BP, BQ, FL and FM. In the case of BP and BQ, although CS Gas and Pepper Spray are covered by the Firearms Act 1968 (as amended), they are not firearms in the sense being considered here. Whilst their deployment may involve the use of a propellant, they do not look like guns, nor do they fire a projectile.

The 'Other Firearm' feature codes FO and FP require a brief discussion. They include a range of guns, including ball bearing (or 'BB') guns and makeshift or home made weapons. As such, these categories are problematic for strategic analysis, particularly when – as in the case of the present research – fuller descriptions of the firearms involved are not available to the researcher³³.

Interestingly, the 'Violent Gun Crime' definition used by the MPS for measuring levels of 'gun crime' in London until March 2004 did not include the 'FR – Firearm Converted/Adapted' Feature Code. In March 2003 an attempted murder in Brent was recorded as having involved such a firearm as the sole Firearms Feature Code, but would not have been counted as a 'Violent Gun Crime' offence. This anomaly may relate to the fact that the Firearms Feature Code FR appears to have been introduced during 2002³⁴, some time after the 'Violent Gun Crime' definition was introduced, and is generally used in conjunction with other Firearms Feature Codes. However, it seems difficult to justify the decision not to include it, and the evidence from Brent suggests that published data may represent a slight undercount as a result³⁵.

2.4.2 Datasets

Four data sets were requested from the police, each to cover the period January 1999 to December 2003 (inclusive), including all entries where one or more of the Firearms Feature Codes above was present. In the first instance this included all of the Firearms Feature Codes for completeness. It was, however, subsequently decided to exclude codes BP, BQ, FL and FM from the analysis in order to narrow the focus to guns. The data sets obtained were:

- Offences
- Victims
- Suspects
- Accused

The five-year time-scale allows for meaningful strategic analysis, and avoids complications arising from the substantial changes to crime recording rules introduced in 1998³⁶. It does, however, include the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in April 2002, which will be discussed in more detail below when considering the limitations of the data.

³² From April 2004 these have been supplemented with a new and much more comprehensive and informative list of Firearms Feature Codes – see Appendix D.

³³ The existence of a 'free-text' firearm description field was only mentioned in passing to the researcher in August 2004, too late to be incorporated into the analysis.

³⁴ The first record of the FR Feature Code in the data being considered here was in June 2002.

³⁵ It is not known definitively whether the FR code (or for that matter any of the Firearms Feature Codes) has been applied consistently either over time or from one London Borough to the next. However, evidence that the PIB reviews all uses of the Firearms Feature Codes suggests that there should be an acceptable level of consistency for the purposes of this research.

³⁶ On the changes to crime recording practices in 1998, see Povey and Prime (1999)

The variables obtained are presented in more detail in Appendix C, but in summary included, where appropriate:

- CRIS reference numbers (crime numbers)
- Dates and times of offences (when they occurred, when they were recorded by the police, when they were solved (“cleared up”)).
- Crime Allegation and Classification codes, including Major and Minor Crime Types and Home Office Classification Codes
- Firearms Feature Codes*
- Location codes*
- Branch Flags, including Domestic Violence and Racially motivated*
- Age, gender and ethnicity

Those marked with an asterisk (*) could include more than one code.

2.4.3 Counting Crimes

In relation to the Offence data, an important point needs to be made about the relationship between CRIS entries and numbers of crimes. A single CRIS entry (one unique CRIS number) can involve more than one crime being recorded for crime counting purposes, indicated by a value greater than one in the Code Count field. For example, in the case of two people murdered at the same time by a single offender, there will be a single CRIS entry, but two crimes for the purposes of counting. There is not, however, a straightforward relationship between the number of victims and the number of crimes counted, and readers wishing to know more are encouraged to refer to the Home Office Crime Counting Rules³⁷.

In relation to the analysis presented here, the term ‘Offence’ is used to mean a single entry in CRIS. The 1,310 CRIS entries considered here include a total of 1,353 crimes. In addition to 1,279 CRIS entries with one crime, there were 25 CRIS entries where two crimes were recorded, three CRIS entries where three crimes were recorded, and one CRIS entry each of four, five and six crimes. This methodology explains the anomaly that there are 16 murder offences recorded with 17 victims (a total of 17 crimes for crime counting purposes).

2.4.4 Data Procurement

In the first instance, an approach was made to the Brent police Borough Intelligence Unit (BIU) for the data required. However, because of concerns that any data provided by them might differ from the data used to produce official crime statistics, the author was referred to the MPS Performance Information Bureau (PIB), the corporate-level department of the MPS responsible for producing ‘official’ statistics and whose data is considered to be more reliable³⁸. This introduced delays into the process of obtaining data, and then resolving any queries about it, because of considerable demands on the PIB’s resources. In general, any requests from the author were subject to at least a two-week turn-around. So a data request followed by queries about the data would take at least a month to resolve.

In the first instance, however, a more serious problem was encountered, with the PIB refusing to supply the data because of ‘data protection concerns’. This was despite the data request being supported by a Detective Superintendent from Brent, and the fact that the author had been security cleared by the police for the express purpose of facilitating data sharing for analytical purposes. In addition, no personalised data was requested, such as the name or address details of victims or offenders – although this introduced the limitation that it is impossible to know when multiple offences, for example, have been committed by the same individual(s)³⁹. These data protection concerns were resolved after two and a half months with the personal intervention of the Detective Superintendent with the lead on tackling gun crime Brent at the time. Having overcome that barrier, the PIB were extremely helpful and patient.

³⁷ Home Office (2004)

³⁸ In the case of non-aggregate data however, such as was obtained and analysed here, it is unlikely that any differences would have arisen between the borough and PIB data as the data would be obtained from the same source by both groups.

³⁹ This is an important point in terms of drawing conclusions from the data analysis. The question of disproportionality is discussed in section 2.4.5 below.

Four Excel spreadsheets were received, each covering the five-year period from 1999 to 2003. These were securely stored by the author, using both a password-protected hard disk, and with additional password protection for the data files.

Finally, for the purposes of mapping the data using the ArcMap 8.2 Geographical Information System (GIS) software, this data was linked (in Microsoft Access on the basis of the Crime Number) to a geocoded crime database covering the same period. The latter, provided by the police in Brent, includes depersonalised data, but does not include many of the fields essential to this analysis, including Victims, Suspects, Accused and the Firearms Feature Codes.

2.4.5 Generic Limitations of the Data

➤ Under-Reporting

The first comment to make is that police crime data generally represents an undercount of true levels of crime. In the case of the year to September 2003, the British Crime Survey estimates that around 74% of all crimes were reported to and recorded by the police, although this was 62% for violent crime⁴⁰. In light of evidence presented in the qualitative interview section of this research (see Chapter 3), it may well be the case that rates of reporting of 'gun crime' in Brent are even lower than this, at least in relation to certain offence types and victims from certain communities.

➤ Data Quality Control

Many of the variables considered here and detailed above are not subject to being published, and are not therefore quality controlled in the way that the crime classification is. Furthermore, many do not have prescribed values: the person entering the data can type what they want rather than being restricted to a pre-determined list of possible values. As a result, poor data quality can compromise the reliability and validity of any strategic analysis of this data. To avoid this, the data was carefully scrutinised, and a number of problems discovered. Wherever possible these were resolved in consultation with the PIB. Anyone using CRIS data for strategic analysis would be advised to bear these problems in mind and consider the reliability and validity of any findings, particularly where there is no evidence of quality control at the analysis stage.

➤ Disproportionality

It is imperative to consider a significant limitation of data on the individuals concerned as victims, suspects or accused, which arises because of the absence of personal information such as names and dates of birth. This limitation applies equally to analysis of activities such as Stop and Search as to the present analysis, and is most pertinent when variables such as gender and ethnicity are being considered. The problem is that in the absence of personal data, it is not possible to know when an individual has, for example, been accused more than once. E.g. has one person committed two offences or have two people each committed one? This has important implications in terms of debates around disproportional offending and victimisation rates, for example between men and women, or between one ethnic or racial group and other ethnic or racial groups.

To illustrate, imagine a hypothetical population of 1000 people in which 500 are from ethnic group A and 500 are from ethnic group B. 100 crimes are committed in a year, each with 1 suspect. In 20 offences the suspect is described by the victim as being from ethnic group A and in 80 offences the suspect is described as ethnic group B. It does not necessarily follow that 80% of the offenders are from ethnic group B. It may be, for example, that 20 offenders from ethnic group A each committed one offence, and 20 offenders from ethnic group B each committed four offences. Hence, although 80% of the offences were committed by a suspect from ethnic group B, only 50% of the offenders were from group B. The issue then is one of a differential *offending* rate amongst offenders, rather than disproportionate *offender* rates in the populations as a whole. If any disproportionality is found in the present analysis, it will not be possible to know which applies, and this important limitation should be borne in mind throughout.

⁴⁰ Dodd et al. (2004: 31)

➤ Duplicate Entries

In the case of variables where more than one code could be applied, for example the Firearms Feature Codes, multiple lines of data were received for individual offences. For example, for an offence in which a handgun was carried (Feature Code FG) and a handgun was fired (FH), two lines of data would appear in the data for the same offence, as illustrated in rows two and three in this fictional example:

Crime Number	Reported Month	Major Crime Type	Minor Crime Type	Feature Code
9876543/03	200301	Robbery	Personal Property	FG - Handgun Carried
9654321/03	200307	Violence Against the Person	GBH	FG - Handgun Carried
9654321/03	200307	Violence Against the Person	GBH	FH - Handgun Fired

Figure 2.1: Example crime data showing multiple feature codes

This also applied to the Location, Branch Flag (racial motive, domestic offence), and Repeat Victimization fields. One offence involving two feature codes and two locations would appear in the original Offences data set as four rows of data; where there were also two victims, eight rows would appear in the Victims data set (2 victims x 2 Firearm Feature Codes x 2 Location Codes).

In order to cope with this problem, a number of different data sets had to be produced depending on the variables being examined. So, if examining the relationship between Crime Type and victims' gender, all entries for which there was more than one feature code had to be rationalised down to single entries so that each victim only appeared once. By contrast, if examining the relationship between Firearms Feature Codes and victims' gender, the multiple Feature Codes were left in.

➤ Changes to police recording practices

National Crime Recording Standard: In April 2002, police crime recording practices changed in England and Wales with the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)⁴¹. This was introduced to improve the consistency of crime recording practices and to make the process more victim-focussed, as more incidents became 'notifiable' crimes. The overall effect has been to increase the number of crimes recorded by the police, in the case of the Metropolitan Police Service by 12% between 2001/02 and 2002/03⁴². How these changes have impacted on recording the illegal use of firearms is unknown, but it is expected that any impact will probably be more significant in relation to the less serious offence types. At the very least, these changes should be borne in mind when considering any crime data covering the period from before and until after April 2002. For example, increases in recorded crime between the period pre-April 2002 and the period post-April 2002 may have arisen purely as a result of the NCRS changes and may not reflect an underlying increase in crime levels.

Firearms Feature Codes: The other area where changes may have occurred during the period under consideration is in relation to the Firearms Feature Codes. As has already been mentioned, these codes are optional, subjective, and their application can be imperfect. It is possible that the consistency of the use of these codes may have changed during the five-year period, for example as 'gun crime' has assumed a higher priority and been scrutinised in greater detail. The latter might include, for example, ad-hoc periods when the borough police have been obliged to report data directly to the MPS centrally. It is worth noting, however, that according to the Brent Borough Intelligence Unit (BIU), the central Performance Information Bureau (PIB) reviews all uses of Firearms Feature Codes, including checking for missing Feature Codes by searching for key words in free-text fields. This should ensure an acceptable level of consistency for the purposes of the present analysis. However, a separate review of the relationship between the free-text 'Modus Operandi' field and Firearms Feature Codes in the data presently being considered suggests that some anomalies do nevertheless remain and that any key-word search used by the PIB may need to be revisited⁴³.

⁴¹ Although the changes were supposed to have come into immediate effect in April 2002, there is some evidence that this has not been the case. For example, Dodd et al. (2004: 42) note in relation to NCRS that, "...it appears that on-going auditing and continuing improvements may be resulting in further inflation in the recording of crimes."

⁴² The Home Office published research estimating the impact of the changes on recorded crime (Simmons et al., 2003a). The estimates for the Metropolitan Police Service can be found in Simmons et al., (2003b).

⁴³ E.g. an entry in CRIS in 2002 without a Firearms Feature Code that includes the following description: "By suspects discharging two firearms causing the victim to believe that unlawful violence would be used against him." Another in 2003 without a Firearms Feature Code states, "By suspect approaching victim, asking for money, threatening the victim with a gun and then taking her mobile phone."

2.4.6 Specific Problems with the Data

The problems detailed here are covered in detail that may go beyond the interest of most readers, although all should bear in mind the limitations of this formal data set. These issues should, however, be of interest to a police audience, particularly where individuals are concerned with analysing CRIS data, data quality, using analysis based on CRIS data etc.

➤ Offences Data Set

No obvious problems, other than the generic issues already discussed.

➤ Victims Data Set

Age: This should be the age in whole years. The data included entries with an age of 0, and a number where the age was 'Unknown'. On the advice of the PIB, 0s were treated as Unknown rather than <1 year old. The number of victims whose age was Unknown included four victims of Robbery of Business Properties. These give rise to a concern about how thoroughly this data is recorded – are victims refusing to give their age, or are police officers failing to record it? By definition a Robbery must have a victim and the victim must have an age.

Gender: Entries recorded included Male, Female, Unknown and 'blank'. On the advice of the PIB, blanks were treated as 'Unknown'. Again, by way of an example, it is not clear how victims of Robberies of Business Property can have an unknown gender.

Ethnicity: The police use fairly basic ethnic appearance 'Identity Codes', of which there are six:

- IC1 – White European
- IC2 – Mediterranean / Dark Skinned European
- IC3 – African / Afro-Caribbean
- IC4 – Asian
- IC5 – Oriental
- IC6 – Arab

This is not the place to get into a discussion about the appropriateness of the six categories. However, the data received included entries recorded as IC0, IC8, Unknown and blank. The advice received from the PIB was to treat all as 'Unknown'. It should be noted, however, that it has subsequently emerged that another London borough uses the code IC8 locally to indicate Somali ethnicity. Needless to say, locally defined practices such as this undermine regional analysis and skew data and should be avoided if at all possible.

Feature Code: In the case of one offence (one CRIS Number), the Victims file had 3 Feature Codes present, whereas only 2 appeared in the Offences file for the same CRIS Number. Regrettably, this was left unresolved.

Victim Reported Crime in Past 12 Months: Essentially covers repeat victimisation, based on the victim's perception of the 12-months prior to the present offence. Six codes are used:

- D – Repeat Domestic
- H – Holding
- N – No
- R – Repeat Racial
- X – Unknown
- Y – Yes

The victim is asked by the officer(s) attending/recording the offence whether they have been victimised in the previous 12 months. Compared to relying on police records, this is both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, the victim may not have reported previous victimisation to the police, but on the other hand the officer may not be aware of previous reported victimisation that the victim has chosen not to mention or has forgotten. Furthermore, this variable indicates *any* victimisation in the previous 12 months, not just of the same type as the present offence.

The 'H – Holding' code is used in the case that the officer forgot to ask the victim, and should be amended as soon as possible – normally within 24 hours. In the case of one victim in the present data, an 'H' code was applied in January 2002 and not subsequently rectified.

➤ Suspects Data Set

Age: The data included entries listed with the following ages: 0, 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, ... Unknown, blanks. Entries with ages 0 and left blank were treated as 'Unknown'. The others were left to stand, although it is difficult to imagine a Kidnapping Suspect aged 1 – a victim aged 1 is more likely, and a typographical error the most likely explanation for the apparent anomaly. It has not, however, been possible to quality control every single piece of data.

Gender: The comments above for the Victims data apply

Ethnicity: Unknown and 'blanks' have both been treated as Unknown.

Suspect Count: The Suspect Count indicates the number of suspects relating to the individual offence and ranged from 0 to 11. Where a Suspect Count of 0 was found, that entry was deleted as there were no suspects. The remaining Suspect entries were then disaggregated, so that for example a single entry with a Suspect Count of 3 was divided into three entries each with a Suspect Count of 1. This was to allow the use of pivot tables to analyse the data.

➤ Accused Data Set

Cleared Up Month: For eight accused (five CRIS entries), more than one Cleared Up Month was present for what appeared to be individuals (accused with the same age, gender and ethnicity listed under the same Crime Reference number). These instances were referred to and investigated by the PIB. Their advice was that "The month represents when the proceedings code (cleared up) was entered and this can change"⁴⁴. As a result, there were a number of accused who appeared twice. In order to avoid double counting, these were rationalised on the basis that the most recent was retained and the earlier entry deleted.

Code Count: The Code Count indicates the number of accused in a single entry and ranged from 1 to 4 in the original data. As with the Suspects file, these were disaggregated so that a single line of data related to a single accused.

➤ Geocoded Data for Mapping

Geocoding involves assigning spatial co-ordinates (e.g. Eastings and Northings) to specific objects, events and so on so that they can be mapped. In the case of crime this can be done using computer software on the basis of the address information contained within CRIS. This software may not always be able to recognise the address information, however, at which point the offence in question can be geocoded manually. A combination of these processes was used by the Brent Police Borough Intelligence Unit (BIU) to ensure that the crime data could be geocoded and mapped. 12 offences, however, were not geocodable and cannot be mapped:

- 10 offences were classified as '**CCC**'. That is to say that the caller reporting the offence was unable or unwilling to provide a specific location for the offence. Of these, four were Robberies of Personal Property, three were Sexual Offences, and two were Violence Against the Person Offences. The final CCC entry is Classified as 'Possessing or Distributing Prohibited Weapons or Ammunition (Group I)'
- 2 offences were classified as '**Restricted**' and the address information was not available to the police analyst conducting the geocoding. These were both Violence Against the Person Offences.

2.4.7 Data Analysis Methodology

Two principle methods have been used to analyse the data, namely the application of Pivot Tables (supplemented with graphs where appropriate) in Microsoft Excel and mapping using the ArcMap 8.2 GIS software. In the case of the mapping, hotspot data (Kernel Density Hotspot Surfaces) were generally generated where there were 100 or more data points using the CrimeStat II software⁴⁵. Where there was

⁴⁴ Correspondence with PIB, 10th May 2004.

⁴⁵ Levine, N. (2002)

less than 100 data points, 'point data' maps are generally presented. The scale used ensures that individual addresses cannot be identified, protecting the identity of individuals.

Kernel Density Hotspot Mapping works by looking at the spatial relationship between points distributed over a two-dimensional surface. Where points are more clustered, higher intensity values (the Z-score density indicated in the legend on the maps) are recorded. The use of a quartic interpolation kernel density methodology means that as points get closer together the clustering 'score' is exponentially weighted. This reflects a phenomenon called spatial auto-correlation, which essentially implies that the presence of point A makes it more likely that future point B will be nearer rather than further away. More prosaically, the darker areas on the maps indicate that incidents are numerous and relatively highly clustered in those areas.

It should be noted that not all possible analysis is presented here, in the interests of not overwhelming the reader. Readers with a specific interest in analysis not presented should contact the author.

2.5 Findings

A central dilemma with presenting this analysis has been whether to focus on the offence type, the firearm type, or indeed groups of victims and offenders. It was felt that none of these approaches in isolation would be appropriate. Instead, the approach that has been adopted is to try and give an overview of the data and then follow this up with a series of sections exploring specific issues.

The structure of this Findings section is as follows:

- 2.5.1 Introduction**
- 2.5.2 Overview of Offences, Victims, Suspects and Accused**
- 2.5.3 Overview of Firearms Feature Codes**
- 2.5.4 Robbery**
- 2.5.5 Violence Against the Person**
- 2.5.6 Burglary**
- 2.5.7 Criminal Damage**

2.5.1 Introduction

With a large body of data such as has been analysed here, it is always a challenge to know how much analysis to present. Too much and it appears unwieldy, too little and the reader is left unsatisfied. A balance between the two has been sought, focussing in the main body of the Findings on key data, graphs and maps, initially providing an overview of the data, and then exploring specific crime types.

Before presenting the findings, it is worth reiterating an important point about the data. Some of the variables being considered can have more than one value entered in CRIS for an individual crime, victim etc. These are:

- The Firearms Feature Codes
- Branch Flags, such as Domestic Violence and Racial Motive
- Offence Location Codes

Where these variables are being considered, the duplicate entries have been left in. So for example, an offence for which two Firearms Feature Codes were recorded will appear twice when the Firearms Feature Codes are being considered. When they are not, for example when only the Crime Type is being considered, one of the two entries has been deleted.

As a result, for the five-year period from 1999 to 2003 there were:

	Offences	Victims	Suspects	Accused
Individual Entries	1,310	1,629	2,389	317
Feature Codes	1,344	1,671	2,456	338

Table 2.3: Offences, Victims, Suspects and Accused – Individual Entries and Feature Codes

2.5.2 Overview of Offences, Victims, Suspects and Accused

A consideration of the data viewed in its simplest form (Table 2.4) shows that the number of Offences, Victims and Suspects peaked in 2002. By contrast, the number of Accused rose sharply in 2003, perhaps in part reflecting a time lag between offences occurring and offenders being charged. It can be seen that overall Victims are six years older than those Accused of gun crime, and 7.2 years older than those Suspected of these offences. The average ages have changed slightly from year to year, although there is no evidence of a clear trend.

		Year					
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
Offences	Number	234	226	256	332	262	1310
Victim	Number	294	296	328	403	308	1629
	Avg. Age	30.4	30.3	29.6	30.5	32.1	30.6
Suspects	Number	374	415	480	651	469	2389
	Avg. Age	24.6	23.5	22.9	22.9	23.4	23.4
Accused	Number	69	54	52	60	82	317
	Avg. Age	26.7	24.1	24.8	25.8	22.0	24.6

Table 2.4: Offences, Victims, Suspects and Accused by Year

Spatial Distribution: Figure 2.2 shows the spatial distribution of the 1,310 gun crime offences recorded over the period 1999-2003 (of which 1,298 could be mapped). The darker colours on this 'kernel density' hotspot map indicate a greater concentration of offences. It can be seen that the most significant concentrations of gun crime offences are located in the South of the borough in Stonebridge (12.6% of all gun crime) and Harlesden (12.3%) wards, spilling into Kensal Green (6.3%). Other notable hotspots include the south of Kilburn (7.8% for the whole ward), Wembley Central (4.7%) and Mapesbury (4.8%) wards⁴⁶. Discussion below will highlight the fact that this overall picture masks considerable variance in the underlying spatial distribution of different offence types.

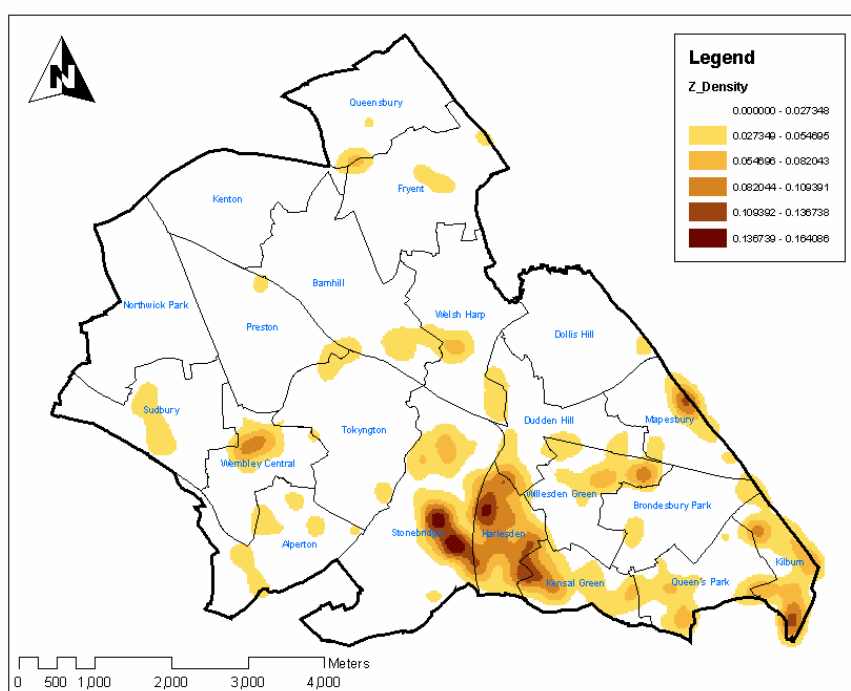


Figure 2.2: Hotspot Map – All Gun Crime 1999 – 2003
n=1,298. Bandwidth = 300m

More immediately, Figures 2.3 to 2.7 below illustrate the way that the spatial distribution of gun crime offences in Brent has changed from year to year over this five year period, most notably in relation to the location of the darkest hotspots (where the greatest concentration of offences has occurred). This highlights the fact that any location-specific efforts to tackle gun crime, such as situational crime prevention measures, must be sufficiently dynamic to accommodate these changes. Observing that spatial changes have happened begs the question, why? Is it that enforcement activities have displaced gun crime? Do these changes reflect the shifting locus of Brent's drugs markets or feuding groups? Regrettably, the present analysis cannot answer these questions. Overlaying these maps with police intelligence, the location of police operations, and other sources of data about gun crime in the borough might go some way to doing so, however. This in turn would contribute to a better understanding about the dynamics of gun crime and the impact of enforcement and other factors.

⁴⁶ See Appendix B for a full breakdown of Major Crime Types by Ward and all Gun Crime by Ward by Year.

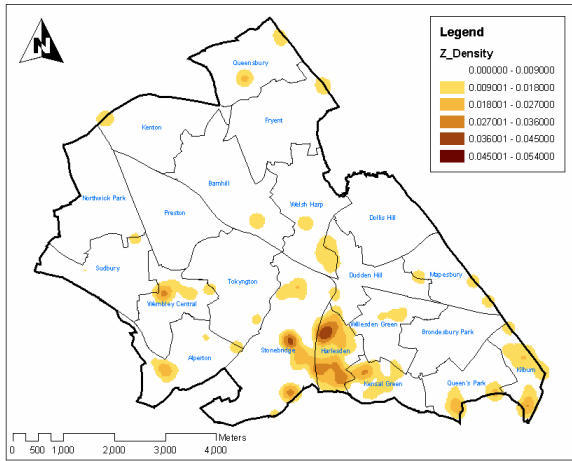


Figure 2.3: Hotspot Map – All Gun Crime 1999
n=231. Bandwidth = 300m

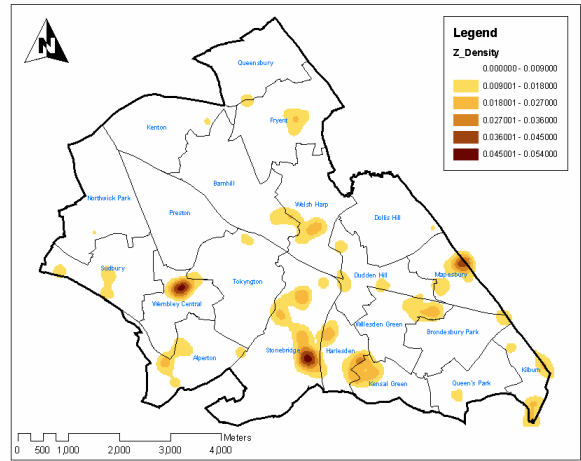


Figure 2.4: Hotspot Map – All Gun Crime 2000
n=224. Bandwidth = 300m

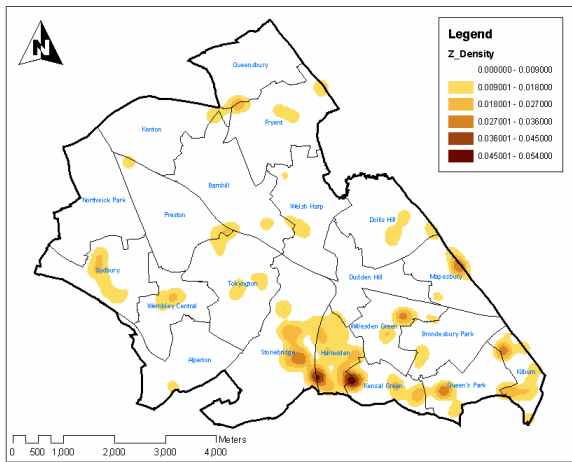


Figure 2.5: Hotspot Map – All Gun Crime 2001
n=254. Bandwidth = 300m

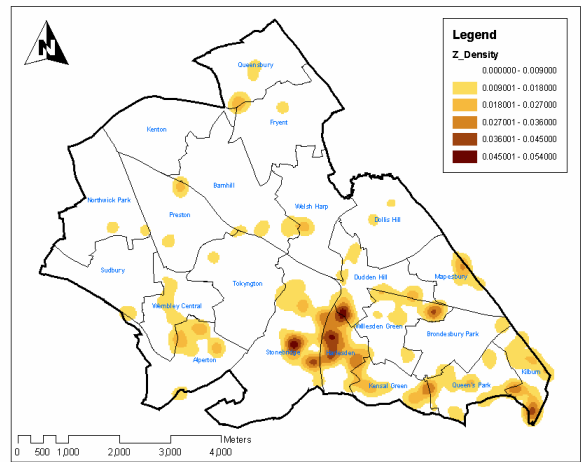


Figure 2.6: Hotspot Map – All Gun Crime 2002
n=331. Bandwidth = 300m

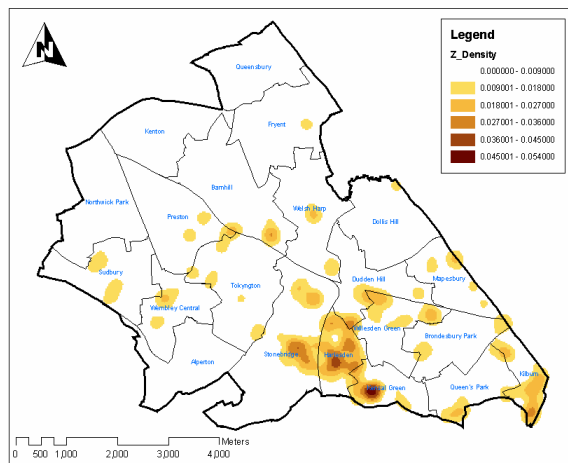


Figure 2.7: Hotspot Map – All Gun Crime 2003
n=258. Bandwidth = 300m

Crime Type by Year: Table 2.5 illustrates the trend of gun crime offences over the five-year period, broken down into Major and Minor Crime Types. Offences of Robbery (38.2%) and Violence Against the Person (35.6%) make up the majority of all gun crime offences and both peaked in 2002.

Major Crime Type	Minor Crime Type	Reported Year					Grand Total	% of Total
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003		
Burglary	Burglary in a Dwelling	8	6	17	17	5	53	4.0
	Burglary in Other Buildings		3		1	1	5	0.4
	TOTAL	8	9	17	18	6	58	4.4
Criminal Damage	Criminal Damage To a Dwelling	12	7	14	20	19	72	5.5
	Criminal Damage To M/V	3	1	3	5	9	21	1.6
	Criminal Damage To Other Bldg	4	6	9	7	1	27	2.1
	Other Criminal Damage	1		1	3		5	0.4
	TOTAL	20	14	27	35	29	125	9.5
Drugs	Drug Trafficking	1					1	0.1
	TOTAL	1					1	0.1
Fraud or Forgery	Counted per Victim				2		2	0.2
	TOTAL				2		2	0.2
Other Accepted Crime	Others - Other Accepted Crime	5	5	3	4	1	18	1.4
	TOTAL	5	5	3	4	1	18	1.4
Other Notifiable Offences	Going Equipped					1	1	0.1
	Other Notifiable	19	11	22	35	25	112	8.5
	TOTAL	19	11	22	35	26	113	8.6
Robbery	Business Property	55	50	33	31	22	191	14.6
	Personal Property	43	55	59	86	66	309	23.6
	TOTAL	98	105	92	117	88	500	38.2
Sexual Offences	Other Sexual	1	1	1		1	4	0.3
	Rape	1	3	1	2	2	9	0.7
	TOTAL	2	4	2	2	3	13	1.0
Theft and Handling	Snatches			1	1		2	0.2
	Theft From M/V	1					1	0.1
	Theft From Shops	1		1			2	0.2
	Theft/Taking of M/V		1	1	2	4	8	0.6
	TOTAL	2	1	3	3	4	13	1.0
Violence Against the Person	ABH	7	11	5	4	7	34	2.6
	Common Assault	8	4	6	11	12	41	3.1
	GBH	2	7	5	7	2	23	1.8
	Harassment	2		2	2	1	7	0.5
	Murder	7	2	2	1	4	16	1.2
	Offensive Weapon	26	23	39	41	46	175	13.4
	Other violence	27	30	31	50	33	171	13.1
	TOTAL	79	77	90	116	105	467	35.6
OVERALL TOTAL		234	226	256	332	262	1310	100.0
% Change on Previous Year			-3.4	13.3	29.7	-21.1		

Table 2.5: Gun Crime Major and Minor Crime Type by Year 1999 - 2003

Indeed, it can be seen that the following all peaked in 2002: Burglary, Criminal Damage, Fraud or Forgery, Other Notifiable Offences (which includes offences such as possession of a firearm without a certificate), Robbery and Violence Against the Person. Robbery Offences fell 25% in 2003 to their lowest level over the five-year period being considered, with Robberies of Business Property falling year-on-year for five years. This compares with a fall of only 9.5% for Violence Against the Person, to a level still above 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Offensive Weapon Offences are worth commenting on further, having risen year-on-year since 2000 (only Common Assault has shown such a consistent increase, but at much lower levels). Overall, of 175 such offences, 102 (58%) were for 'Possession of a Firearm or Imitation Firearm With Intent to Cause Fear of Violence (Group I)'. This may suggest increasing levels of firearms possession, if not actual use. It may also reflect changes to policing activity, for example greater use of stop and search tactics (e.g. in conjunction with Automatic Number Plate Reader (ANPR) technology as has been used in Brent).

Crime Type Seasonality: Overall, examining the five years of data as a whole, it can be seen from Table 2.6 that gun crime displays a slight seasonal trend in Brent, with peaks in May, August and November. Violence Against the Person offences have the most pronounced seasonal trend of the Major Crime Types, with a peak around July and August, and significantly lower levels around December and

January. By contrast, the Robbery trend is erratic, with a peak in November, and lesser peaks in March, May and August.

Major Crime Type	Month												Grand Total
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Burglary	3	3	4	1	8	8	5	5	6	4	4	7	58
Criminal Damage	15	7	10	14	17	12	6	7	10	11	10	6	125
Drugs							1						1
Fraud or Forgery	1			1									2
Other Accepted Crime		1	1	1	1	3	2	3	3	1	1	1	18
Other Notifiable Offences	12	9	8	7	10	8	6	9	10	14	11	9	113
Robbery	45	43	50	33	45	37	40	46	35	29	57	40	500
Sexual Offences	1		1	2		2	1	1	1	3	1		13
Theft and Handling	3				3	2	1	2			1	1	13
Violence Against the Person	28	33	34	44	38	39	53	51	44	42	33	28	467
Grand Total	108	96	108	103	122	111	115	124	109	104	118	92	1310
Avg Per Day	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.9	3.7	3.7	4.0	3.6	3.4	3.9	3.0	3.6

Table 2.6: Major Crime Type by Month

Victims, Suspects and Accused by Crime Type: Table 2.7 below shows aggregated data for the full five year period, broken down by major and minor crime type. The oldest group of Victims relate to Criminal Damage offences (45.6 yrs), committed by the youngest Accused offenders (19.3 yrs). By contrast, Violence Against the Person offences had the oldest Accused offenders overall, with those involved in Murder being particularly old. The data illustrates some significant differences between minor crime types. For example, Robbery of Business Property victims and offenders are older than those for Robbery of Personal Property.

Major Crime Type	Minor Crime Type	Offences	Victims		Suspects		Accused	
		n	n	Avg.Age	n	Avg.Age	n	Avg.Age
Burglary	Burglary in a Dwelling	53	117	27.3	148	23.5	2	20.5
	Burglary in Other Buildings	5	12	40.4	14	33.0	1	31.0
	TOTAL	58	129	28.2	162	24.3	3	24.0
Criminal Damage	Criminal Damage To a Dwelling	72	78	48.6	38	21.2	6	19.5
	Criminal Damage To M/V	21	25	39.0	10	19.5		
	Criminal Damage To Other Bldg	27	29	42.0	10	18.9	2	18.5
	Other Criminal Damage	5	5	38.3	2	40.5		
	TOTAL	125	137	45.6	60	21.3	8	19.3
Drugs	Drug Trafficking	1			6	21.8	1	21.0
	TOTAL	1			6	21.8	1	21.0
Fraud or Forgery	Counted per Victim	2			4	28.3		
	TOTAL	2			4	28.3		
Other Accepted Crime	Others - Other Accepted Crime	18	10	26.6	13	23.1	9	24.6
	TOTAL	18	10	26.6	13	23.1	9	24.6
Other Notifiable Offences	Going Equipped	1	1	N/A			1	12.0
	Other Notifiable	112	56	30.0	231	25.5	56	25.1
	TOTAL	113	57	30.0	231	25.5	57	24.8
Robbery	Business Property	191	366	34.2	363	24.6	39	29.7
	Personal Property	309	356	27.2	748	21.7	54	20.7
	TOTAL	500	722	30.3	1111	22.6	93	24.5
Sexual Offences	Other Sexual	4	4	17.0	6	21.7		
	Rape	9	9	25.6	13	22.4	2	23.0
	TOTAL	13	13	22.9	19	22.1	2	23.0
Theft and Handling	Snatches	2	2	16.0	3	19.3		
	Theft From M/V	1			1	26.0		
	Theft From Shops	2	3	29.0	5	18.4		
	Theft/Taking of M/V	8	12	31.1	17	22.5	1	22.0
	TOTAL	13	17	28.8	26	21.4	1	22.0
Violence Against the Person	ABH	34	39	26.0	65	23.2	4	20.3
	Common Assault	41	48	26.0	52	17.9	13	16.1
	GBH	23	28	27.0	36	24.1	4	25.5
	Harassment	7	9	31.2	13	22.9	1	32.0
	Murder	16	17	29.4	41	28.1	20	29.5
	Offensive Weapon	175	192	28.7	242	24.4	56	25.2
	Other violence	171	211	30.8	308	24.6	45	25.3
	TOTAL	467	544	29.1	757	24.0	143	24.9
Grand Total		1310	1629	30.6	2389	23.4	317	24.6

Table 2.7: Offences, Victims, Suspects and Accused by Crime Type and Average Age

Age Profile of Victims, Suspects and Accused: Figure 2.8 below illustrates the differences in the age profiles of the gun crime Victims, Suspects and Accused in Brent. Interestingly, the peak age group for all three categories is 20-24 yrs. It is notable that the age profile for Suspects is skewed somewhat more towards the younger age categories than is the case for those Accused. This may reflect a number of possible factors, including higher offending rates among the younger age groups or higher conviction rates amongst older age groups who may for example be better known to the police. In addition, although not shown here, there are substantial differences in the age profiles of different ethnic groups (see e.g. Table 2.8).

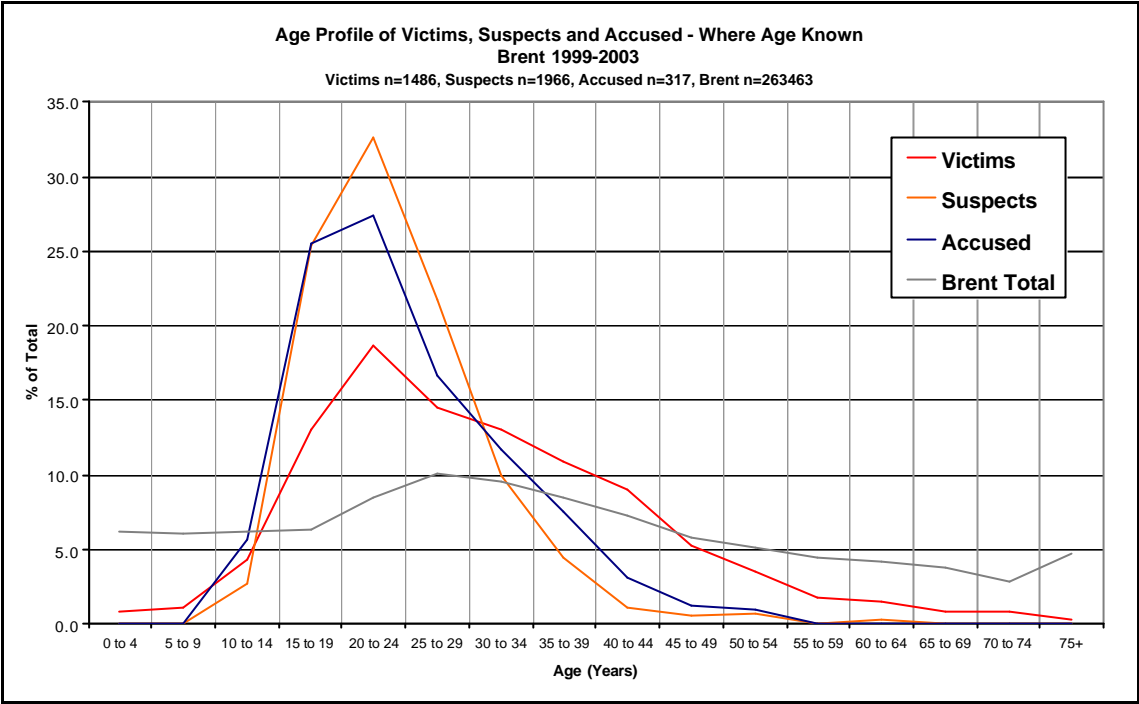


Figure 2.8: Age Profile of all Victims, Suspects and Accused (where age known)

Sex, Ethnicity and Average Age of Victims, Suspects and Accused: Table 2.8 below represents the data in a way that allows a consideration of the significance of Sex and Ethnicity, examining all Victims, Suspects and Accused as a whole.

Sex	Ethnicity	Victims			Suspects			Accused		
		Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total
Female	1	143	34.0	8.8	25	26.5	1.0	5	25.8	1.6
	2	14	33.2	0.9	1	21.0	0.0			
	3	180	29.0	11.0	37	25.2	1.5	12	29.2	3.8
	4	54	35.6	3.3						
	5	5	29.2	0.3	1	29.0	0.0			
	6	4	30.0	0.2						
	Unknown	16	37.9	1.0	1	24.0	0.0			
All	416	32.1	25.5	65	25.7	2.7	17	28.2	5.4	
Male	1	282	31.0	17.3	334	25.6	14.0	80	28.3	25.2
	2	54	29.2	3.3	37	24.1	1.5	13	21.6	4.1
	3	377	28.7	23.1	1575	22.7	65.9	183	23.1	57.7
	4	324	30.8	19.9	184	23.8	7.7	21	22.2	6.6
	5	15	27.5	0.9	5	34.4	0.2	2	28.5	0.6
	6	16	32.8	1.0	20	23.5	0.8	1	21.0	0.3
	Unknown	10	22.7	0.6	40	22.6	1.7			
All	1078	30.0	66.2	2195	23.3	91.9	300	24.4	94.6	
Unknown	1				3	16.3	0.1			
	3				13	19.8	0.5			
	4				2	17.5	0.1			
Unknown	135	N/A	8.3	111	26.1	4.6				
All	135	N/A	8.3	129	23.1	5.4				
Grand Total		1629	30.6	100.0	2389	23.4	100.0	317	24.6	100.0

Table 2.8: Victims, Suspects and Accused by Sex, Ethnicity and Average Age

It can be seen that women make up 25.5% of Victims, 2.7% of Suspects and 5.4% of Accused. Gun crime offences are therefore very much committed by men, and to a less significant but nevertheless disproportionate extent committed against men.

Whilst acknowledging the potential short-comings of the police ethnic identity codes, it can be seen that Gun Crime offenders in Brent are overwhelmingly male 'IC3 – African / Afro-Caribbean'. This group makes up 65.9% of Suspects and 57.7% of those Accused (23.1% of Victims). They are followed by 'IC1 – White European' men, who comprise 14.0% of Suspects and 25.2% of Accused (17.3% of Victims), and then 'IC4 – Asian' men who make up 7.7% of Suspects and 6.6% of Accused (19.9% of Victims). Examining the ratio of Suspects-to-Accused, it appears that male IC1 offenders (4.2:1) are approximately twice as likely to be accused as male IC3 (8.6:1) and IC4 offenders (8.8:1). The reasons for these differences are likely to be complex, and cannot be fully resolved here. However, it may be that the age profiles of these different groups are significant: male IC1 offenders are several years older than their IC3 and IC4 counterparts. Interestingly, for IC1 and IC3 males, those suspected are on average younger than those accused, while the opposite is true for IC4 males. The oldest offenders (both suspected and accused) are a small number of 'IC5 – Oriental' males. With the exception of a single 'IC6 – Arab' male, the youngest Accused are 'IC2 – Mediterranean/Dark-Skinned European'. The relationship between ethnicity and offence type will be seen below in the discussion of particular offence types to be important, and this may also be significant in relation to conviction rates.

As Victims, men show a more even distribution between ethnic groups, and in relation to the offenders IC4 male victims are significantly over-represented. Of the more numerous groups of victims, IC3 males are the youngest on average, IC1 the oldest.

Where women are involved, as victims and as offenders, they are older than their male counterparts. The groups of women most likely to become victims, 'IC3 – African / Afro-Caribbean' followed by 'IC1 – White European', are also the groups most likely to be involved in offending.

2.5.3 Overview of Firearms Feature Codes

Firearms Feature Codes by Year: As with the data for Offences, Victims and Suspects above, it can be seen that the number of Firearms Feature Codes recorded in Brent peaked considerably in 2002, with a 30.8% increase overall on the previous year. This was then followed by a 19.1% fall in 2003.

Firearms Feature Code	Reported Year					Total	% of Total
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003		
FA - Shotgun carried	3	4	2		2	11	0.8
FB - Shotgun fired		2	2	2	1	7	0.5
FC - SO Shot carried	5	4	5	4	3	21	1.6
FD - SO Shot fired	2					2	0.1
FE - Airweapon carr	13	8	5	9	2	37	2.8
FF - Airweapon fired	25	29	28	35	39	156	11.6
FG - Handgun carried	136	111	138	189	140	714	53.1
FH - Handgun fired	18	26	29	27	22	122	9.1
FJ - Rifle carried			1	2	1	4	0.3
FO - Oth F'arm carr'd	24	38	35	37	39	173	12.9
FP - Oth F'arm fired	10	11	15	29	15	80	6.0
FR - F'arm Conv/Adapt				6	11	17	1.3
OVERALL TOTAL	236	233	260	340	275	1344	100.0
<i>% Change on Previous Year</i>		-1.3	11.6	30.8	-19.1		

Table 2.9: Firearms Feature Codes by Year

A summary of the data in the table includes the following:

- 367 Feature Codes (27%) indicate a firearm being fired, of which 156 were air weapons. The significant majority of Feature Codes (960 or 71%) relate to firearms merely being carried.
- Shotguns appear relatively rarely in the data, although it is worth noting that the sawn-off shotgun Feature Codes FC and FD are slightly more numerous than full-length shotguns. The latter appear

more likely to be fired. The numbers are too small to discern any significant trends over the five-year period.

- 81% of air weapon Feature Codes relate to these weapons being fired. Overall, the number of air weapons being carried seems to have fallen slightly, whilst the number being fired has steadily increased.
- Handgun Feature Codes are by far and away the most numerous, comprising 62.2% of the total. Of these 836 Feature Codes, 85% relate to handguns being carried. Whereas the carrying of handguns appears to have peaked in 2002, the most handguns were fired in 2001. The ratio of handguns carried to handguns fired has seen substantial changes, having been lowest in 2000:

	Reported Year					Total
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
FG - Handgun Carried	136	111	138	189	140	714
FH - Handgun Fired	18	26	29	27	22	122
Ratio FG:FH	7.6	4.3	4.8	7.0	6.4	5.9

Table 2.10: Ratio of Handguns Carried to Handguns Fired Feature Codes

- There have been no instances of rifles being fired and only four instances where rifles have been carried. It might be speculated that these were air rifles rather than anything more powerful for the simple reason that air rifles are comparatively easy to obtain.
- The 'Other Firearms' Feature Codes indicate that, as with handguns, they too are carried more often than fired. However, with a carried-to-fired ratio of 2.2:1 they are more likely to be fired than handguns. It is entirely plausible, however, that many of the firearms recorded as FG – Handgun Carried may in fact have been things like ball bearing guns that would otherwise be recorded as Other Firearms. The issue is one of appearance – many ball bearing guns, as well as other imitations, are copies of made-for-purpose 'lethal barrelled' firearms.
- Finally, the numbers of 'FR – Firearm Converted/Adapted' are too small to analyse in a meaningful way.

Feature Codes by Crime Types: Table 2.11 below (over page) allows a consideration of the relationship between the Firearms Feature Codes and Crime Types. It can be seen that Airweapons being fired are most commonly associated with Criminal Damage offences, while Handguns being carried are associated in particular with Robbery offences.

Major Crime Type	Minor Crime Type	Firearms Feature Code											Total	% of Crime Types	
		FA - Shotgun carried	FB - Shotgun fired	FC - SO Shot carried	FD - SO Shot fired	FE - Airweapon carr	FF - Airweapon fired	FG - Handgun carried	FH - Handgun fired	FJ - Rifle carried	FO - Oth F arm carr d	FP - Oth F arm fired			FR - F arm Conv/Adapt
Burglary	Burglary in a Dwelling	1		1				43	4		4		1	54	4.0
	Burglary in Other Buildings							4			1			5	0.4
	TOTAL	1		1				47	4		5		1	59	4.4
Criminal Damage	Criminal Damage To a Dwelling		1				60	1			10			72	5.4
	Criminal Damage To MV							11	4		6			21	1.6
	Criminal Damage To Other Bldg					1	22		1		1	2		27	2.0
	Other Criminal Damage					1	4							5	0.4
TOTAL		1			2	97	1	5		1	18		125	9.3	
Drugs	Drug Trafficking			1										1	0.1
	TOTAL			1										1	0.1
Fraud or Forgery	Counted per Victim			1				1						2	0.1
	TOTAL			1				1						2	0.1
Other Accepted Crime	Others - Other Accepted Crime					7	4	2			3	2		18	1.3
	TOTAL					7	4	2			3	2		18	1.3
Other Notifiable Offences	Going Equipped										1			1	0.1
	Other Notifiable	1	6			3	1	57	7	3	32	4	5	119	8.9
	TOTAL	1	6			3	1	57	7	3	33	4	5	120	8.9
Robbery	Business Property	6		5		2		151	8	1	20	2	3	198	14.7
	Personal Property	1	2	1		1	5	249	10		40	2	2	313	23.3
	TOTAL	7	2	6		3	5	400	18	1	60	4	5	511	38.0
Sexual Offences	Other Sexual							1			3			5	0.4
	Rape							8	1					9	0.7
	TOTAL							1	9	1	3			14	1.0
Theft and Handling	Snatches							2						2	0.1
	Theft From M/V							1						1	0.1
	Theft From Shops							2						2	0.1
	Theft/Taking of M/V							8						8	0.6
	TOTAL							13						13	1.0
Violence Against the Person	ABH					1	16	15			2			34	2.5
	Common Assault					2	19	2			5	13		41	3.1
	GBH		1	1			2	3	10		7			24	1.8
	Harassment							4			3			7	0.5
	Murder				2				10		5			17	1.3
	Offensive Weapon	1	1	3		16	7	88	15		44	5	3	183	13.6
	Other violence	1	2	2		3	4	72	52		16	20	3	175	13.0
	TOTAL	2	4	6	2	22	48	184	87		68	52	6	481	35.8
OVERALL TOTAL	11	7	21	2	37	156	714	122	4	173	80	17	1344	100.0	
% of Feature Codes		0.8	0.5	1.6	0.1	2.8	11.6	53.1	9.1	0.3	12.9	6.0	1.3	100.0	

Table 2.11: Firearms Feature Code by Major and Minor Crime Types

Victims, Suspects and Accused by Feature Code: Table 2.12 (over page) illustrates the fact that by far and away the most numerous Firearms Feature Codes recorded over the five-year period relate to Handguns. Furthermore, it can be seen that the characteristics of victims, suspects and accused differ by Feature Code. For example, the FF – Airweapon Fired Feature Code has the second oldest victims and the youngest offenders, while the oldest offenders are associated with the Sawn-off Shotgun Feature Codes (FC and FD).

Firearms Feature Codes	Offences		Victims		Suspects		Accused	
	n		n	Avg. Age	n	Avg. Age	n	Avg. Age
FA - Shotgun carried	11		18	34.0	28	24.6	4	25.8
FB - Shotgun fired	7		16	28.5	23	24.5	1	19.0
FC - SO Shot carried	21		14	36.3	34	26.3	12	31.1
FD - SO Shot fired	2		2	39.5	7	33.6	9	31.3
FE - Airweapon carr	37		28	28.5	46	25.9	18	23.8
FF - Airweapon fired	156		175	36.9	92	17.0	30	18.0
FG - Handgun carried	714		967	30.1	1561	23.6	142	25.2
FH - Handgun fired	122		156	28.8	219	24.5	35	26.2
FJ - Rifle carried	4		8	30.4	8	22.4	4	22.8
FO - Oth F'arm carr'd	173		178	28.1	292	23.2	64	25.7
FP - Oth F'arm fired	80		88	31.3	111	22.0	14	22.4
FR - F'arm Conv/Adapt	17		21	32.7	35	26.2	5	22.0
Grand Total	1344		1671	30.5	2456	23.4	338	24.8

Table 2.12: Offences, Victims, Suspects and Accused by Firearms Feature Code

The relationship between Sex, Ethnicity, Age and Firearms Feature codes will be explored in relation to handguns and airweapons in the appropriate sections below. Suffice to say that there are some significant differences in relation to ethnicity. Table 2.13 below, showing the data relating only to those Accused, illustrates this point. For example, In relation to 'FG – Handgun Carried', the 31 IC1/White males are on average 33.1 years old, while their 96 IC3/Black contemporaries average only 22.6 years old.

Gender	Ethnicity	Data	Firearms Feature Code											Grand Total	% of All	% of Sex				
			F - A - Shotgun carried	F - B - Shotgun fired	F - C - SO Shot carried	F - D - SO Shot fired	F - E - Airweapon carr	F - F - Airweapon fired	F - G - Handgun carried	F - H - Handgun fired	F - J - Rifle carried	F - O - Oth F'arm carr'd	F - P - Oth F'arm fired				F - R - F'arm Conv/Adapt			
Female	1	Avg. Age			27.0													25.8		
		n			1													5	1.5	27.8
	3	Avg. Age																28.8		
		n																13	3.8	72.2
	All	Avg. Age			27.0													27.9		
		n			1													18	5.3	100.0
Male	1	Avg. Age	27.0		32.2		30.5	18.1	33.1	25.7		26.9	17.0	28.0				28.3		
		n	3		6		6	13	31	3		22	1	1				86	25.4	26.9
	2	Avg. Age					35.0	20.3	27.5			16.3						21.6		
		n					1	7	2			3						13	3.8	4.1
	3	Avg. Age	22.0	19.0	30.6	31.3	14.8	14.3	22.6	26.3	22.5	25.0	20.4	20.5				23.5		
		n	1	1	5	9	6	4	96	31	2	28	10	4				197	58.3	61.6
	4	Avg. Age					16.0	15.8	18.0	24.0	23.0	26.2	31.0					22.2		
		n					2	5	2	1	2	6	3					21	6.2	6.6
	5	Avg. Age					29.0	28.0										28.5		
		n					1	1										2	0.6	0.6
	6	Avg. Age					21.0										21.0			
		n					1										1	0.3	0.3	
	All	Avg. Age	25.8	19.0	31.5	31.3	22.9	18.0	25.1	26.2	22.8	25.4	22.4	22.0			24.7			
		n	4	1	11	9	17	30	131	35	4	59	14	5			320	94.7	100.0	
	Total Avg. Age	25.8	19.0	31.1	31.3	23.8	18.0	25.2	26.2	22.8	25.7	22.4	22.0				24.8			
	Total n	4	1	12	9	18	30	142	35	4	64	14	5				338	100.0		
	% of All	1.2	0.3	3.6	2.7	5.3	8.9	42.0	10.4	1.2	18.9	4.1	1.5				100.0			

Table 2.13: Accused Feature Codes by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

2.5.4 Robbery

Robbery Offences Robberies are the single biggest gun crime offence group, making up 38.2% of all offences under consideration. Table 2.14 illustrates a couple of important characteristics of these Robbery offences. Firstly, 62% of all Robbery offences are Robberies of Personal Property. Secondly, while Robberies of Business Property have seen consistent falls over the five-year period, Robberies of Personal Property have generally been increasing, with a notable peak in 2002.

Minor Crime Type	Reported Year					Grand Total
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
Business Property	55	50	33	31	22	191
Personal Property	43	55	59	86	66	309
TOTAL	98	105	92	117	88	500
% Change on Previous Year		7.1	-12.4	27.2	-24.8	

Table 2.14: Robbery Offences by Year

Spatial Location: These differences in terms of overall numbers and trends are reflected in different spatial distributions, as illustrated in the hotspot maps, Figures 2.9 and 2.10, below.

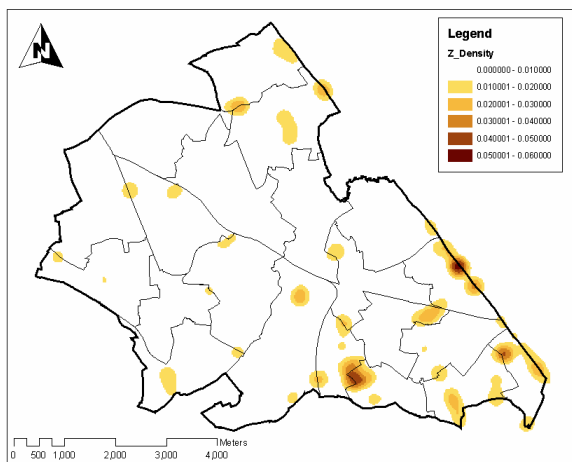


Figure 2.9: Robbery of Business Property 1999-2003, n=191, bandwidth=300m

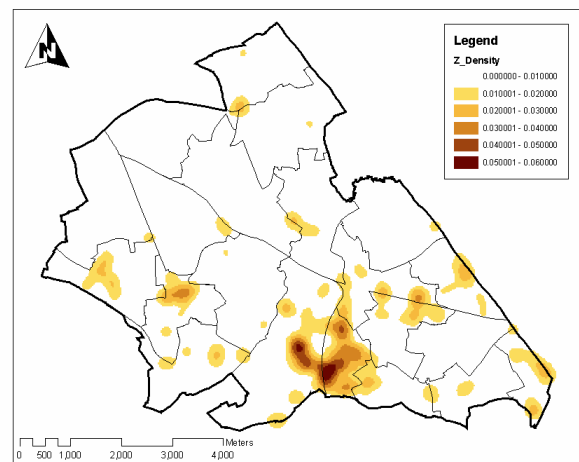


Figure 2.10: Robbery of Personal Property 1999-2003, n=309, bandwidth=300m

Some very marked differences can be seen, most notably in relation to the South of the borough. It is especially notable that the Robbery of Business Property hotspot on the border of Harlesden and Kensal Green is adjacent to, but not co-located with, the Robbery of Personal Property hotspots seen in Harlesden and Stonebridge wards. Such differences can also be seen in other parts of the borough, such as Wembley Central where, despite the large numbers of shops and businesses, it is Robberies of Personal Property that predominate.

Unsurprisingly, an examination of the CRIS Location Codes (of which there can be more than one per offence) also reflects important differences. Robberies of Business Property are most likely to occur in (in descending order) Betting Shops (11% of location codes), Food Shops (9%), Petrol Stations (7%), News/Tobacco/Book Shops (7%) and the Street (6%). By contrast, Robberies of Personal Property are most likely to occur in the Street (60%), Parks/Commons/Heaths (4%), Flats/Maisonettes (4%) and Alleyways/Footpaths (2%).

Victims, Suspects, Accused – By Sex, Ethnicity and age: Tables 2.15 and 2.17 below present the data firstly for Robbery of Business Property and then for Robbery of Personal Property. Important differences can be seen both between the crime types and within them.

Sex	Ethnicity	Victims			Suspects			Accused		
		Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total
Female	1	20	38.4	5.5	2	27.0	0.6			
	2	5	31.0	1.4						
	3	13	36.2	3.6	2	30.0	0.6			
	4	22	38.5	6.0						
	5	1	44.0	0.3						
	6	1	50.0	0.3						
	Unknown	1	22.0	0.3						
All	All	63	37.4	17.2	4	28.0	1.1			
Male	1	61	32.1	16.7	73	26.7	20.1	24	32.1	61.5
	2	10	35.4	2.7						
	3	23	29.2	6.3	256	23.7	70.5	13	26.9	33.3
	4	117	35.2	32.0	6	29.5	1.7	2	19.5	5.1
	5	7	30.3	1.9	1	32.0	0.3			
	6	1	28.0	0.3						
	Unknown	4	16.0	1.1	14	29.5	3.9			
All	All	223	33.3	60.9	350	24.5	96.4	39	29.7	100.0
Unknown	3				1	N/A	0.3			
	Unknown	80	N/A	21.9	8	42.0	2.2			
	All	80	N/A	21.9	9	42.0	2.5			
Grand Total		366	34.2	100.0	363	24.6	100.0	39	29.7	100.0

Table 2.15: Robbery of **Business** Property Victims, Suspects and Accused by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

In relation to Robberies of Business Property, female victims make up 17.2% of the total, and are on average 4.1 years older than male victims who make up 60.9% of the total. The residue of 21.9% is problematic because Robbery offences must, by definition, have victims, and those victims must have a sex, ethnicity and age.

The largest single group of Victims of Robbery of Business Property are IC4 males (32%), and indeed overall it is IC4 individuals who are most likely to be victimised (38%). This may in part reflect the large number of shops and businesses in Brent owned and run by Asians. The group next most at risk are IC1, comprising 22.2% of all victims. Again, the majority of IC1 victims are male.

Those suspected of Robbery of Business Property are overwhelmingly male (96.4%) and an average of 9.6 years younger than their victims. The vast majority are IC3 males (70.5%), followed by IC1 males (20.1%) who are on average three years older. Overall, female Suspects are 3.5 years older than their male counterparts. In terms of venue selection

Examining the venue (location) data and focussing on the two most significant Suspect ethnic groups, it appears that IC1/White Suspects disproportionately targeted petrol stations, banks and post offices, while IC3/Black Suspects disproportionately targeted betting shops, news etc. shops and restaurants⁴⁷.

Rank	IC1				IC3			
	Location	n	%	Location	n	%		
1	Petrol Stations	15	14.9	Betting Shops	43	11.7		
2	Hotspot Locations	13	12.9	Hotspot Locations	42	11.4		
3	Food Shops	10	9.9	News/Tobacco/Book Shops	39	10.6		
4	Off Licences	8	7.9	Off Licences	37	10.1		
5	Banks	7	6.9	Food Shops	33	9.0		
6	Post Offices	6	5.9	Street	26	7.1		
7	Privately Owned Businesses	5	5.0	Restaurant/Café	22	6.0		
8	News/Tobacco/Book Shops	5	5.0	Petrol Stations	13	3.5		
9	Car/Lorry Parks	4	4.0	Post Offices	11	3.0		
10	Street	4	4.0	Other Shops	11	3.0		
	Total	101		Total	367			

Table 2.16: Robbery of Business Property – Venue Location by Suspect Ethnicity

⁴⁷ Note: Please remember that more than one Location Code can be attached to a single offence/suspect. E.g. a Bank in a Hotspot would result in two location codes for a single offence.

In contrast to Suspects, those Accused of Robbery of Business Property are all male, significantly older, and predominantly IC1 (61.5%). Interestingly, the ratio of Suspects to Accused is only 3:1 for IC1 men, whereas it is 19.7:1 for IC3 men. In other words, although far fewer offences are committed by IC1 men than IC3 men, they are approximately 6 times as likely to be charged. It may well be that these differences are due to the types of targets chosen. Overall the IC1 men Accused had targeted traditional armed robbery venues where security measures were likely to be relatively sophisticated, whereas the IC3 Accused had typically targeted shops and other 'softer targets':

- Of the 24 IC1 men Accused, 8 had robbed banks, 5 had robbed Post Offices, 3 had robbed betting shops, and 1 had robbed a building society. The remainder is made up of 2 food shops, 1 petrol station, 1 'News/Tobacco/Book shop', 1 'Car/Lorry park - Open' and 1 'Restaurant/Café/Takeaway'.⁴⁸
- By contrast, of the 13 IC3 men Accused, 2 had robbed betting shops, 3 'other shops', 2 supermarkets, 2 department stores, 1 food shop, 1 'News/Tobacco/Book shop', 1 'Restaurant/Café/Takeaway' and 1 'Hairdresser/Barber'.
- The two remaining IC4 Accused had respectively targeted a supermarket and a 'News/Tobacco/Book shop'.

A somewhat different picture emerges from the Robbery of Personal Property data, although there are also some notable similarities (Table 2.17).

Sex	Ethnicity	Victims			Suspects			Accused		
		Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total
Female	1	27	31.9	7.6	9	21.2	1.2	2	20.0	3.7
	2	4	33.5	1.1	10	22.8	1.3	2	27.0	3.7
	3	12	25.8	3.4						
	4	8	30.5	2.2						
	5	1	29.0	0.3						
	6	2	20.0	0.6						
	Unknown	4	18.3	1.1						
All	58	29.1	16.3	19	22.0	2.5	4	23.5	7.4	
Male	1	66	26.7	18.5	79	24.1	10.6	2	26.5	3.7
	2	15	27.5	4.2	9	24.1	1.2	1	20.0	1.9
	3	99	26.9	27.8	572	21.4	76.5	47	20.2	87.0
	4	107	26.6	30.1	38	22.0	5.1			
	5	4	26.8	1.1						
	6	3	30.3	0.8	3	22.0	0.4			
	Unknown	1	15.0	0.3	4	11.5	0.5			
All	295	26.8	82.9	705	21.7	94.3	50	20.5	92.6	
Unknown	3				2	17.0	0.3			
	Unknown	3	N/A	0.8	22	20.3	2.9			
	All	3	N/A	0.8	24	19.0	3.2			
Grand Total		356	27.2	100.0	748	21.7	100.0	54	20.7	100.0

Table 2.17: Robbery of **Personal** Property Victims, Suspects and Accused by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

Again, female Victims are in the minority (16.3%), and again they are older than their male counterparts (by 2.3 years). With only 3 'Unknown' victims, 82.9% of the total are recorded as male, and again the largest single group is 'IC4 – Asian' (overall 32.3%).

With an average age of 27.2 years, Victims of Personal Robbery are 7 years younger than Victims of Business Robbery. Those Suspected and Accused are also younger, by 2.9 years and 9.0 years respectively. Indeed, it is the youthfulness of Personal Robbery Offenders that stands out, particularly those recorded as IC3 who comprise 76.5% of all Suspects and 87.0% of all Accused. An older group of IC1 Suspects and Accused make up respectively 10.6% and 3.7% of the totals, while an IC4 group is closer in age to the IC3 offenders.

The ratio of Suspects to Accused at 13.9:1 is significantly higher than the 9.3:1 figure for Robberies of Business Property, suggesting that Personal Robbery offenders are significantly less likely to be brought to justice. The absence of security devices such as CCTV and panic alarms often found in business premises may in part explain this difference. It may also be the case that offending in larger groups is

⁴⁸ This leaves a residual of one offender, whose offence was committed in 1998, before the data available here.

important in relation to Personal Robbery, where there is an average of 2.4 Suspects per offence, as compares with 1.9 Suspects per offence for Business Robberies.

Robbery and Feature Codes: Overall it can be seen that 511 Feature Codes were recorded in relation to the 500 offences recorded between 1999 and 2003.

Minor Crime Type	Firearms Feature Code											Total	
	FA - Shotgun carried	FB - Shotgun fired	FC - SO Shot carried	FD - SO Shot fired	FE - Airweapon carr	FF - Airweapon fired	FG - Handgun carried	FH - Handgun fired	FJ - Rifle carried	FO - Oth F arm carr'd	FP - Oth F arm fired		FR - F arm Conv/Adapt
Business Property	6		5		2		151	8	1	20	2	3	198
Personal Property	1	2	1		1	5	249	10		40	2	2	313
TOTAL	7	2	6		3	5	400	18	1	60	4	5	511

Table 2.18: Firearms Feature Codes by Robbery Type

Of these, 477 (93%) of the Feature Codes relate to firearms merely be carried, as opposed to 29 (6%) of the Feature Codes relating to firearms being fired (the 1% residue arises because the Feature Code FR does not differentiate between carrying and firing). However, the way the firearms are used differs very slightly between the two constituent offences of Robbery of Personal Property (93% carried, 6% fired) and Robbery of Business Property (93% carried, 5% fired). Overall, the weapon of choice appears to be the handgun (82% of all Feature Codes). It would appear, therefore, that at least in the case of Robberies, firearms are used as enablers, and the threat of the firearm is sufficient.

Table 2.19 below presents the relationship between sex, ethnicity and Firearms Feature Codes in relation to those Suspected of Robbery. The reasons for considering Suspects rather than those Accused is because the Suspects are more numerous and this data is not subject to problems arising from differential detection rates (although it is acknowledged that other factors may be involved, for example relating to bias in describing Suspect ethnicity).

	Sex	Ethnicity	FA - Shotgun carried		FB - Shotgun fired		FC - SO Shot carried		FE - Airweapon carr		FF - Airweapon fired		FG - Handgun carried		FH - Handgun fired		FJ - Rifle carried		FO - Oth F arm carr'd		FP - Oth F arm fired		FR - F arm Conv/Adapt		TOTAL				
			No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age			
			Business Property																										
Female	1													2	27.0												2	27.0	
	3													1	N/A					1	30.0						2	30.0	
	All													3	27.0					1	30.0					4	28.0		
	1													55	26.9					4	27.0	1	19.0			75	26.7		
	3		8	26.8			7	26.3					214	23.4			16	24.5	2	25.0	21	25.4	1	35.0	3	27.7	266	23.8	
	6		6	30.0					3	18.0			5	27.4							1	40.0					6	29.5	
	4												1	32.0													1	32.0	
	5												12	29.3	1	N/A					4	N/A			1	38.0	19	31.2	
	Unknown												8	26.9		3	18.0								1	38.0	19	31.2	
	All		14	27.4			8	26.9		3	18.0			287	24.2	17	24.5	2	25.0	30	26.3	2	27.0		4	30.3	367	24.6	
Unknown	3																										1	N/A	
	Unknown												6	42.0	1	N/A					1	N/A			1	N/A	9	42.0	
	All												6	42.0	1	N/A					1	N/A			1	N/A	10	42.0	
	All		14	27.4			9	26.9		3	18.0			296	24.3	18	24.5	2	25.0	32	26.4	2	27.0		5	30.3	381	24.7	
	Personal Property																												
Female	1													1	14.0	8	22.1										10	20.5	
	3													8	21.4											1	28.0	10	22.8
	All													1	14.0	16	21.8									2	21.0	20	21.6
Male	1													7	15.3	59	25.5										81	23.7	
	2													9	24.1											9	24.1		
	3		1	22.0		14	35.0			3	15.0	4	19.5	449	21.4	18	24.9			80	20.5	3	29.3	2	31.0	574	21.4		
	4							3	25.0					28	22.8					10	18.5					41	22.3		
	6													2	18.0		1	30.0								3	22.0		
	Unknown		1	N/A										3	11.5												4	11.5	
	All		2	22.0	14	35.0	3	25.0	3	15.0	11	16.8	550	21.8	20	26.1					104	20.3	3	29.3	2	31.0	712	21.7	
	Unknown	3													1	16.0												2	17.0
		Unknown							1	N/A					21	20.3												22	20.3
		All							1	N/A					22	19.3												24	19.0
All		2	22.0	14	35.0	3	25.0	4	15.0	12	16.6	588	21.8	20	26.1					107	20.3	4	28.2	2	31.0	756	21.7		
Grand Total			16	26.5	14	35.0	12	26.3	7	15.8	12	16.6	884	22.6	38	25.5	2	25.0	139	21.6	6	28.2	7	30.5	1137	22.6			

Table 2.19: Robbery Suspects and Feature Codes, by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

It can be seen that by far the most numerous group of Suspects relates to IC3 men carrying handguns, and that on the whole they are also the youngest offenders. Shotguns are most likely to be used by IC1 males. Airweapons present an interesting picture because, although they have only been carried by IC3 males, they have been fired by 7 IC1 males with an average age of only 15.3 years old. The Other Firearm Feature Codes share a similar pattern to Handguns, being carried predominantly by IC3 males.

Overall, it would appear that the ‘typical offender’ differs both by offence type and indeed by ethnicity. Those involved in Robberies of Business Property are typically older than those involved in Robberies of Personal Property, and are also more often IC1, who in turn are more likely to be Accused. By contrast, the vast majority of those offenders Suspected and Accused of Robberies of Personal Property are IC3 males. In the case of both offence types the most common method is the carrying of a handgun which is rarely fired. This leaves open the possibility that very few of these handguns are in fact capable of firing live ammunition, although in the absence of retrieved weapons or forensic evidence determining the extent to which this is the case is impossible. Nevertheless, the ready availability of realistic replica and imitation weapons and evidence that they are considered sufficient to ensure victim compliance (see Chapter 3) suggests that a significant proportion of these offences do not involve real guns. That guns are occasionally fired, however, should counsel against complacency.

2.5.5 Violence Against the Person

Violence Against the Person Offences: Violence Against the Person offences are the second most numerous gun crime group after Robbery, comprising 35.6% of all offences where one or more Firearms Feature Codes were recorded. It can be seen from Table 2.20 that these offences peaked in 2002, notably in relation to the most numerous minor crime types, Offensive Weapon and Other Violence (which combined make up 74.1% of all Violence Against the Person offences).

Minor Crime Type	Reported Year					Grand Total	% of Total
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003		
ABH	7	11	5	4	7	34	7.3
Common Assault	8	4	6	11	12	41	8.8
GBH	2	7	5	7	2	23	4.9
Harassment	2		2	2	1	7	1.5
Murder	7	2	2	1	4	16	3.4
Offensive Weapon	26	23	39	41	46	175	37.5
Other violence	27	30	31	50	33	171	36.6
TOTAL	79	77	90	116	105	467	100.0
% Change on Previous Year		-2.5	16.9	28.9	-9.5		

Table 2.20: Violence Against the Person Offences by Year

The 171 “Other Violence” offences are significant both numerically and in their impact, being comprised of the following:

- 49 offences of “Attempted Murder”
- 67 offences of “Making Threats To Kill”
- 52 offences of “Possession of Firearms Etc With Intent To Endanger Life Or Damage Property Etc”
- 2 offences of “Using Etc Firearms Or Imitation Firearms With Intent To Resist Arrest”
- 1 offence of “Abduction Of Child By Another” (i.e. not a parent)⁴⁹

Of these, the 49 Attempted Murder offences (69 victims) would appear to be particularly significant, all relating to firearms actually being fired. Of these, there were 3 in 1999, 10 in 2000, 8 in 2001, 16 in 2002, and 12 in 2003. Add these 69 potential deaths to the 17 individuals murdered by firearms over the five year period, and Brent could have seen as many as 86 gun-related deaths between 1999 and 2003 (and these are just the offences that came to the attention of the police – see Chapter 3).

Finally, it is worth noting that of the 175 Offensive Weapon offences, 126 were for “Possession Of Firearm Or Imitation Firearm With Intent To Cause Fear Of Violence”.

⁴⁹ The 113 Other Notifiable Offences include a further 18 offences of Kidnapping and one of False Imprisonment where one or more Firearms Feature Codes have been recorded.

Spatial Distribution: Overall, it can be seen from Figure 2.11 that offences of Violence Against the Person have been particularly concentrated in Stonebridge and Harlesden wards. Bearing in mind the differences between the constituent offences, it is important to view them separately.

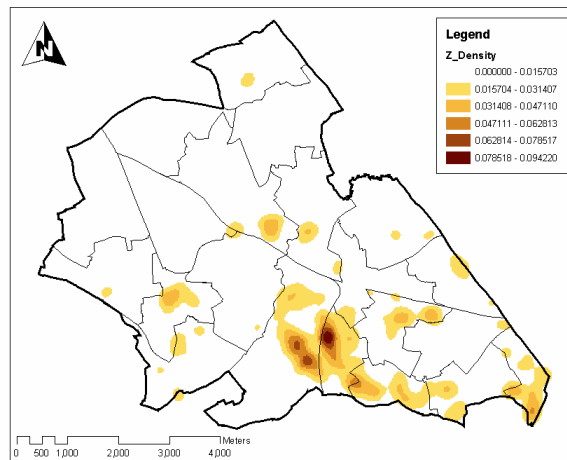


Figure 2.11: All Violence Against the Person 1999-2003, n=467, bandwidth=300m

Figure 2.12 illustrates the fact that Offensive Weapon offences where a Firearms Feature Code was recorded are more widely distributed, perhaps in part reflecting concentrations of police activity. By contrast, the very serious Other Violence offences are heavily concentrated around Harlesden and Stonebridge, with a number of lesser hotspots scattered around the borough (Figure 2.13).

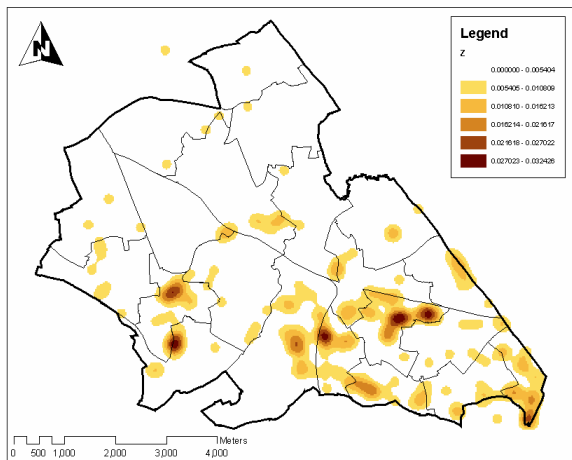


Figure 2.12: Offensive Weapon Offences 1999-2003, n=175, bandwidth=300m

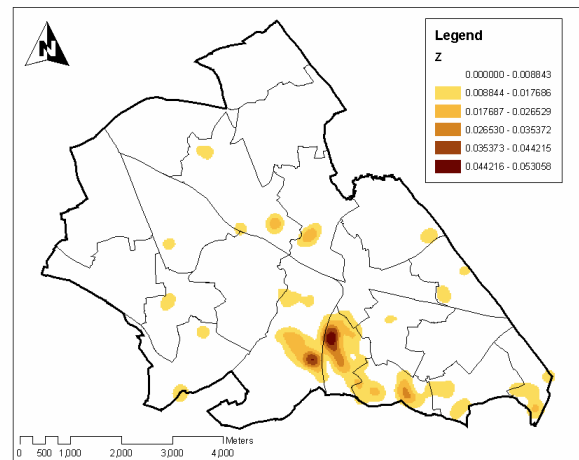


Figure 2.13: Other Violence Offences 1999-2003, n=171, bandwidth=300m

Figures 2.14 to 2.18 below show some fascinating differences in the spatial distribution of different violent crime types. The 16 Murders (Figure 2.14) are predominantly strung out in a line across the South of the borough, following the route of the A404 Harrow Road, while the 49 Attempted Murders (Figure 2.15) are slightly more dispersed. By contrast, GBH (Grievous Bodily Harm) offences (Figure 2.16) can be seen to cluster remarkably in the Stonebridge ward where it is bisected by the A404. Meanwhile ABH (Actual Bodily Harm) and Common Assault offences (respectively Figures 2.17 and 2.18) show much more diffuse distributions. Indeed, the relative absence of these offences in particular from the centre of the Stonebridge ward where such a noticeable concentration of GBH offences is found raises the question whether they are not happening there, or whether they simply are not being reported to the police. By contrast, GBH offences frequently require medical attention and may therefore come to the attention of the police through, for example, the emergency medical services.

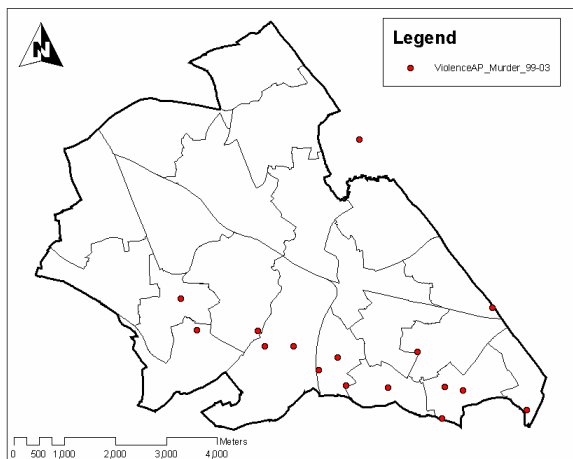


Figure 2.14: **Murder** Offences
1999-2003, n=16

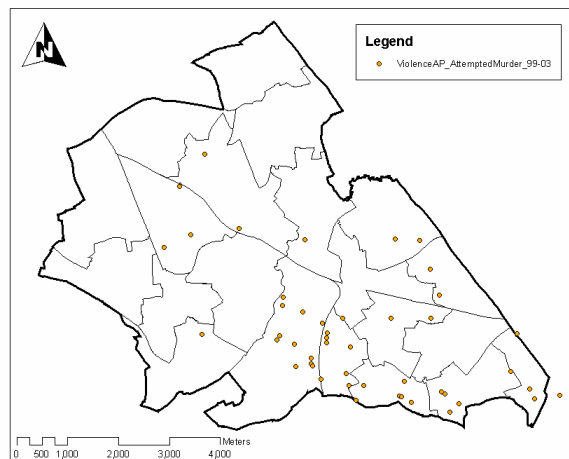


Figure 2.15: **Attempted Murder** Offences
1999-2003, n=4

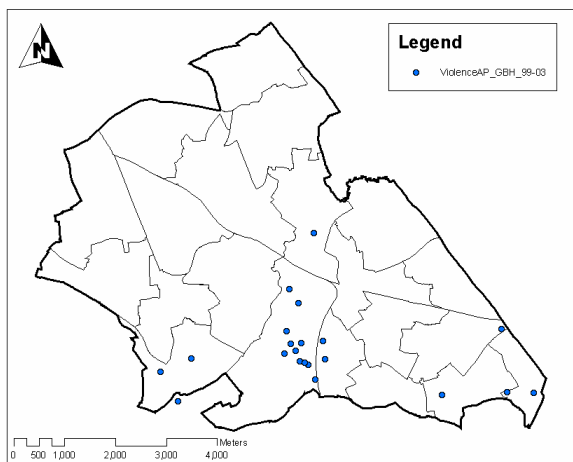


Figure 2.16: **GBH** Offences
1999-2003, n=23

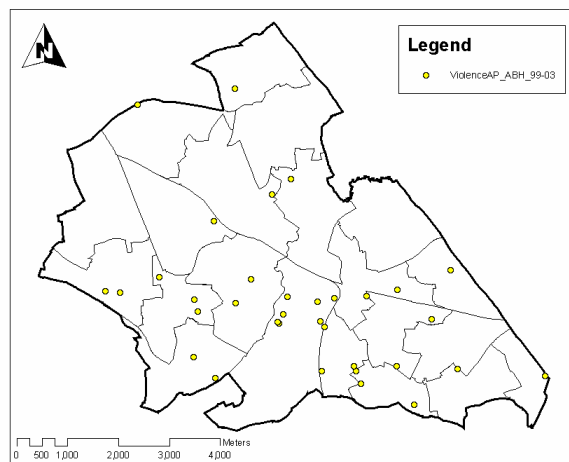


Figure 2.17: **ABH** Offences
1999-2003, n=34

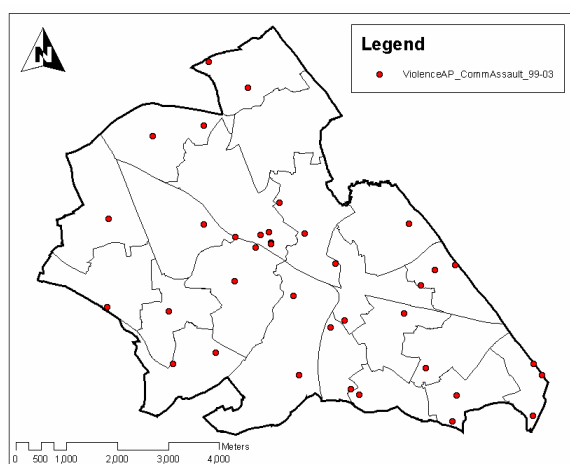


Figure 2.18: **Common Assault** Offences
1999-2003, n=41

Victims, Suspects and Accused: Examining all Violence Against the Person offences together (see Table 2.21 over page), it can be seen that 544 Victims had an average age of 29.1 years, compared with 757 Suspects averaging 24.0 years old and 143 Accused with an average age of 24.9 years.

Sex	Ethnicity	Victims			Suspects			Accused		
		No.	Avg. Age	% of Total	No.	Avg. Age	% of Total	No.	Avg. Age	% of Total
Female	1	48	30.2	8.8	5	24.4	0.7	1	23.0	0.7
	2	4	35.5	0.7	1	21.0	0.1			
	3	81	27.1	14.9	9	25.9	1.2	4	29.8	2.8
	4	9	30.6	1.7						
	5	3	24.3	0.6	1	29.0	0.1			
	6	1	30.0	0.2						
	Unknown	3	49.0	0.6						
All		149	29.0	27.4	16	25.3	2.1	5	28.4	3.5
Male	1	100	30.4	18.4	103	25.1	13.6	38	26.2	26.6
	2	18	27.6	3.3	15	24.9	2.0	8	24.1	5.6
	3	184	29.1	33.8	455	23.6	60.1	80	24.5	55.9
	4	72	27.9	13.2	83	24.7	11.0	10	22.3	7.0
	5	4	23.5	0.7	3	37.7	0.4	1	29.0	0.7
	6	10	30.8	1.8	12	22.6	1.6	1	21.0	0.7
	Unknown	3	28.5	0.6	13	20.2	1.7			
All		391	29.1	71.9	684	24.0	90.4	138	24.8	96.5
Unknown	1				1	17.0	0.1			
	3				6	20.0	0.8			
	4				1	20.0	0.1			
	Unknown	4	N/A	0.7	49	26.7	6.5			
All		4	N/A	0.7	57	24.5	7.5			
Grand Total		544	29.1	100.0	757	24.0	100.0	143	24.9	100.0

Table 2.21: All Violence Against the Person Victims, Suspects and Accused by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

Men comprise 71.9% of Victims, 90.4% of Suspects and 96.5% of Accused, following the pattern seen for other gun crime offence types. More particularly it is IC3 men that are the most significant group for all three categories, most notably as Suspects. An examination of the Victims, Suspects and Accused of the most serious crimes, Murder and Attempted Murder, indicate that for those offence types IC3 men are even more significantly over-represented (see Table 2.22 below).

Sex	Ethnicity	Victims			Suspects			Accused		
		No.	Avg. Age	% of Total	No.	Avg. Age	% of Total	No.	Avg. Age	% of Total
Female	1	5	17.2	5.8						
	3	9	31.0	10.5	1	32.0	0.6			
	4	1	29.0	1.2						
	5	2	25.0	2.3						
All		17	25.8	19.8	1	32.0	0.6			
Male	1	7	39.4	8.1	6	25.0	3.9	2	30.5	5.6
	2	1	29.0	1.2	1	25.0	0.6			
	3	56	27.3	65.1	102	24.3	66.2	31	25.9	86.1
	4	4	27.3	4.7	19	25.2	12.3	3	31.0	8.3
	Unknown	1	1.0	1.2	4	N/A	2.6			
All		69	28.2	80.2	132	24.5	85.7	36	26.6	100.0
Unknown	Unknown				1	N/A	0.6			
	All				20	27.3	13.0			
Grand Total		86	27.7	100.0	154	24.7	100.0	36	26.6	100.0

Table 2.22: Murder and Attempted Murder Victims, Suspects and Accused by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

Here it can be seen that IC3 men make up 65.1% of Victims, 66.2% of Suspects and 86.1% of those Accused, and are also the youngest group in each (significantly so in the case of those Accused). Interestingly, it is IC4 men who feature as the second largest group of offenders, followed by IC1. Fascinatingly, there are marked differences between the ages of those involved as Suspects and Accused in attempted murders (23.0 and 23.1 years respectively) and successful murders (28.0 and 29.5 years respectively), while the average victim ages are more consistent (30.8 years for murders and 27.4 years for attempted murders). This suggests younger, less successful offenders in the case of attempted murders. Exploring why this has arisen would certainly merit further consideration. For example, whether it is due to the younger offenders not having access to more lethal guns, such as only obtaining converted imitations rather than made-for-purpose live-firing guns, or the younger offenders being less

skilled or motivated than their older peers. It would also be interesting to know whether this relationship holds in other areas or whether it is a feature unique to Brent.

The ratio between Suspects and Accused overall for Murder and Attempted Murder is 4.3:1, although this is 3.0:1 for IC1 men, 3.3:1 for IC3 men and 6.3:1 for IC4 men. By contrast, the figure for Robbery of Personal Property where there is a Firearms Feature Code, discussed above, is 13.9:1. On this basis it seems difficult to support a contention that the conviction rate for serious violent gun crime committed by IC3/Black men is particularly low (this argument was part of the basis for establishing Operation Trident). In further relation to debates around Operation Trident and the language of 'black on black' crime, it is worth noting that although 75.6% of victims of these offences were IC3, 24.4% were not.

Looking at the 65 Murders and Attempted Murders between 1999 and 2003 in detail:

- In 32 offences, the victim(s) and suspect(s) and/or accused were IC3 only.*
- In 8 offences, the victim(s) and suspect(s) and/or accused were IC3 only, but there were some other individuals with unknown ethnicity.**
- In 8 offences the victim(s) was IC3 and there were no suspects or accused.***
- In 7 offences, there was a mixture of IC1 and IC3 victims, suspects and accused.
- In 1 offence, the victim(s) and suspect(s) and/or accused were IC1 only.
- In 1 offence, the victim(s) was IC1 and there were no suspects or accused.
- In 1 offence, the victims were IC1 and IC2 and there were no suspects or accused.
- In 1 offence, the victims were IC1 and IC5 and there were no suspects or accused.
- In 2 offences, the victim(s) and suspect(s) and/or accused were IC4 only.
- In 2 offences, there was a mixture of IC3 and IC4 victims, suspects and accused.
- In 1 offence there was a mixture of IC1, IC2 and IC3 victims, suspects and accused.
- In 1 the victim's ethnicity is unknown, the accused IC3.***

Thus, out of 65 offences, 32 (*) may be considered to have definitely had only an IC3 victim(s) and IC3 offender(s), with 8 (**) probably falling into this group and a further 9 (***) being candidates. Thus, while it may be true to say that a majority of these most serious offences were indeed 'black on black', that is to say that both victim(s) and offender(s) were IC3, a significant minority were not, and there are at least 12 offences where there was a multi-ethnic relationship between the victims and offenders. It is worth noting, however, that these small numbers cannot tell us anything at this stage about trends.

Violence Against the Person and Feature Codes: Figure 2.23 below illustrates the relationship between the characteristics of Suspects and the Firearms Feature Codes.

Sex	Ethnicity	FA - Shotgun carried		FB - Shotgun fired		FC - SO Shot carried		FD - SO Shot fired		FE - Airweapon carr		FF - Airweapon fired		FG - Handgun carried		FH - Handgun fired		FO - Oth F arm carr'd		FP - Oth F arm fired		FR - F arm Conv/Adapt		TOTAL		
		No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	No.	Avg.Age	
Female	1													3	30.7			2	15.0					5	24.4	
	2													1	21.0									1	21.0	
	3													8	25.1					1	32.0			9	25.9	
	4													1	29.0									1	29.0	
	All													13	26.4			2	15.0	1	32.0			16	25.3	
Male	1	2	35.0							8	32.3	15	17.8	49	26.5	8	25.7	16	23.1	6	20.2	5	33.4	109	25.3	
	2									1	45.0	3	25.3	5	24.0	1	25.0	5	21.6					15	24.9	
	3	1	N/A	4	19.3	6	29.2	6	34.3	9	19.0	20	15.2	193	24.8	126	24.2	50	24.8	49	19.8	6	23.8	470	23.7	
	4									3	20.7	3	15.0	36	28.3	7	N/A	11	20.7	24	23.9			84	24.5	
	5									1	37.0			1	35.0					1	41.0			3	37.7	
	6									3	28.0			4	23.5	1	27.0	4	16.5					12	22.6	
	Unknown			4	N/A							1	12.0	2	25.0	5	N/A	1	14.0	2	25.0					15
All	3	35.0	8	19.3	6	29.2	6	34.3	25	26.6	42	16.8	290	25.4	148	24.3	87	23.2	82	21.3	11	29.1	708	24.1		
Unknown	1													1	17.0							1	17.0	2	17.0	
	3											1	N/A	4	20.0	1	N/A							6	20.0	
	4																			1	20.0			1	20.0	
	Unknown			1	N/A	4	N/A	1	29.0	1	N/A	3	N/A	11	25.5	17	28.0	2	N/A	10	26.6	4	27.0	54	26.7	
All			1	N/A	4	N/A	1	29.0	1	N/A	4	N/A	16	22.4	18	28.0	2	N/A	11	25.5	5	23.7	63	24.4		
Grand Total		3	35.0	9	19.3	10	29.2	7	33.6	26	26.6	46	16.8	319	25.4	166	24.4	91	23.0	94	21.8	16	27.8	787	24.1	

Table 2.23: Violence Against the Person Suspects and Feature Codes by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

Two features of this table are particularly notable. The first is the very young age of those suspected of offences involving airweapons being fired (16.8 years). This suggests that there is an issue in Brent with

young men obtaining and using airweapons in criminal ways, a finding that is reinforced with the consideration of Criminal Damage offences below (see 2.5.7). This in turn raises questions about the age at which it might be considered appropriate for someone living in Brent to be able to legally purchase airweapons, presently 17 years.

The second interesting feature of the data is the fact that on the whole those carrying handguns are older than those firing them, and that in 76% of cases where one is fired the Suspect is described as IC3 as against 61% where a handgun has been carried. This suggests that perhaps IC3 men who carry handguns are more likely to fire them than other ethnic groups in the context of violence. Indeed, the ratio of handguns carried to handguns fired in relation to Violence Against the Person is 6.1:1 for IC1 men, 5.1:1 for IC4 men, but only 1.5:1 for IC3 men. Looked at another way, for male IC1 Suspects 14% of offences where a handgun was present involved it being fired, as compared with 39% for IC3 men and 16% for IC4 men.

2.5.6 Burglary

Burglary Offences: Burglary offences comprise 4.4% of all gun crime offences over the five-year period from 1999 to 2003. It can be seen from Table 36 that the vast majority (91.4%) of Burglaries involving Firearms Feature Codes occurred in Dwellings. These offences peaked in 2001 and 2002, while overall all Burglaries with guns peaked in 2002.

Minor Crime Type	Reported Year					Grand Total
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
Burglary in a Dwelling	8	6	17	17	5	53
Burglary in Other Buildings		3		1	1	5
TOTAL	8	9	17	18	6	58
% Change on Previous Year		12.5	88.9	5.9	-66.7	

Table 2.24: Burglaries Involving a Firearm, by Year

Spatial Distribution: Figure 2.19 indicates that the 58 offences have been fairly well spread across the South of the borough, with fewer offences in the Northern half. In particular, Wembley, Sudbury and Alpertown feature, as do Stonebridge, Harlesden and Kilburn wards.

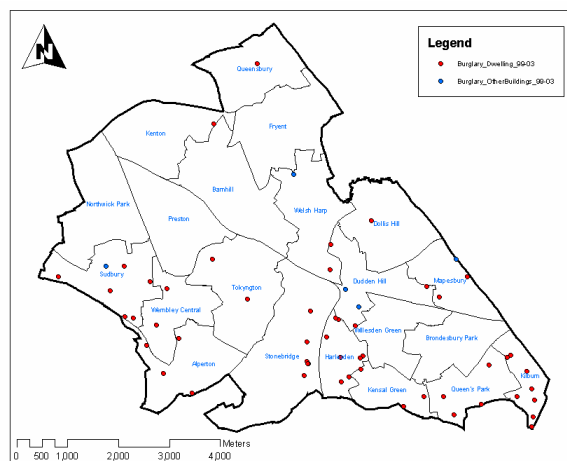


Figure 2.19: Burglaries 1999-2003
n=58

Of the 75 location codes recorded for Burglaries in Dwellings, 25 indicate a flat or maisonette, 11 a semi-detached property, 10 that the offence occurred in a hotspot location and 8 a terraced property. The five Burglaries in Other Buildings had a total of seven different Location codes, each having been recorded once.

Victims, Suspects, Accused – By Sex, Ethnicity and age: Rather than distinguishing between the two constituent offences, they will be dealt with together because of the small numbers involved.

Sex	Ethnicity	Victims			Suspects			Accused		
		Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total
Female	1	21	28.0	16.3	1	20.0	0.6			
	2	1	34.0	0.8						
	3	32	26.5	24.8	1	20.0	0.6			
	4	9	36.8	7.0						
	All	63	28.6	48.8	2	20.0	1.2			
Male	1	16	23.4	12.4	24	29.1	14.8	1	31	33.3
	2	4	23.0	3.1	2	30.0	1.2			
	3	31	26.7	24.0	97	23.0	59.9	2	20.5	66.7
	4	11	39.5	8.5	18	24.9	11.1			
	6	1	27.0	0.8	2	25.0	1.2			
	Unknown				4	20.0	2.5			
All	63	27.9	48.8	147	24.4	90.7	3	24	100.0	
Unknown	3				3	N/A	1.9			
	Unknown	3	N/A	2.3	10	20.0	6.2			
	All	3	N/A	2.3	13	20.0	8.0			
Grand Total		129	28.2	100.0	162	24.3	100.0	3	24	100.0

Table 2.25: Burglary Victims, Suspects and Accused by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

Of the Victims, there are an equal number of male and female victims, and it is also notable that the ethnic balance is roughly the same between the two sexes. Overall, 48.8% of victims are IC3, 28.7% IC1 and 15.5% IC4. The latter are considerably older than Victims from other ethnic groups, particularly in relation to male victims.

Of the offenders, 90.7% of Suspects and 100% of those Accused are male. Male IC3 Suspects make up 59.9% of the total, followed by 14.8% IC1, while 11.1% are IC4. There are some notable age differences between these groups, with male IC1 Suspects an average of 29.1 years old, as compared with 23.0 years for IC3 Suspects and 24.9 years for IC4 Suspects. Of the three accused, two are IC3 men and one an IC1 man. It is interesting to note that there are an average of 2.8 Suspects per offence, considerably higher than the 1.9 for Robberies of Commercial Property and 2.4 for Robberies of Personal Property. This suggests offenders not only depending on the threat or use of violence to conduct their crimes, but also relying on greater numbers.

Burglary and Feature Codes: As with the earlier analysis of Robbery, the Suspects group is considered here because of the larger numbers involved.

Sex	Ethnicity	FA - Shotgun carried		FG - Handgun carried		FH - Handgun fired		FO - Oth F arm carrd		FR - F arm Conv/Adapt		TOTAL		
		No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	
Female	1			1	20.0							1	20.0	
	3			1	20.0							1	20.0	
	All			2	20.0							2	20.0	
Male	1			24	29.1							24	29.1	
	2			2	30.0							2	30.0	
	3	4	19.0	78	23.6	7	22.5	8	20.9	1	25.0	98	23.1	
	4			17	25.4			1	21.0			18	24.9	
	6			2	25.0					2	25.0	4	25.0	
	Unknown			4	20.0							4	20.0	
All	4	19.0	127	25.0	7	22.5	9	20.9	3	25.0	150	24.4		
Unknown	3			3	N/A							3	N/A	
	Unknown	1	N/A	9	20.0							10	20.0	
	All	1	N/A	12	20.0							13	20.0	
Grand Total			5	19.0	141	24.9	7	22.5	9	20.9	3	25.0	165	24.3

Table 2.26: Burglary Suspects and Feature Codes, By Sex, Ethnicity and Age.

Overall, the 58 offences had 162 Suspects who in turn had 165 Firearms Feature Codes (three Suspects were involved in one offence where two Feature Codes were recorded). As with Robbery, it can be seen that the predominant method is the carrying of a firearm (94% of Feature Codes), most notably a Handgun (85%). Shotguns were carried by five Suspects, four of whom were described as IC3 (in fact, four suspects for one offence). A firearm was fired on 7 occasions, all by Suspects described as IC3.

2.5.7 Criminal Damage

Criminal Damage Offences: Criminal Damage offences make up 9.5% of all gun crime offences recorded in Brent from 1999-2003, although it does not feature in MPS reported gun crime counts. It can be seen from Figure 40 that Criminal Damage Offences where a Firearms Feature Code was recorded occurred at an average of 25 per year, peaking with 35 in 2002.

Minor Crime Type	Reported Year					Grand Total
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
Criminal Damage To a Dwelling	12	7	14	20	19	72
Criminal Damage To M/V	3	1	3	5	9	21
Criminal Damage To Other Bldg	4	6	9	7	1	27
Other Criminal Damage	1		1	3		5
TOTAL	20	14	27	35	29	125
% Change on Previous Year		-30.0	92.9	29.6	-17.1	

Table 2.27: Criminal Damage Offences by Year

72 (57.6%) of these Criminal Damage Offences occurred in relation to Dwellings. The rest relate to Motor Vehicles, Other Buildings and Other Criminal Damage.

Spatial Distribution: From the map below (Figure 2.20) it can be seen that the 125 offences are spread over most of the borough, with only a couple of locations where there appears to be clustering (notably in Stonebridge and Harlesden wards).

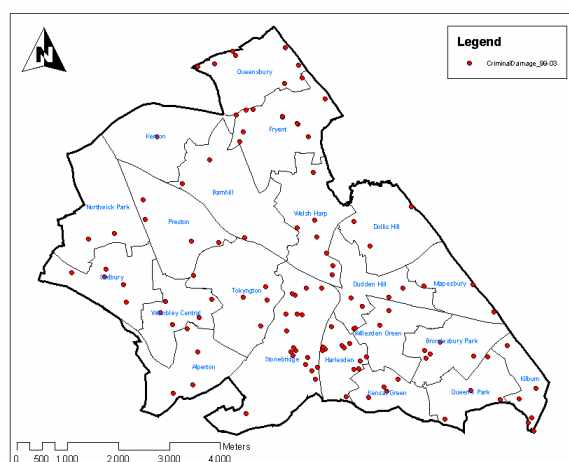


Figure 2.20: All Criminal Damage 1999-2003, n=125

159 Location Codes were recorded overall. For Criminal Damage to a Dwelling there were 99 codes, of which 24 were recorded as 'flat/maisonette', followed by 21 as house/bungalow. 22 codes were recorded for Criminal Damage to a Motor Vehicle, of which 18 were in the street and 2 in car parks. The most common code recorded for Criminal Damage to Other Buildings was four codes of School/Nursery, while for Other Criminal Damage 3 Street locations were recorded.

Victims, Suspects and Accused – by Sex, Ethnicity and Age: As with the consideration of Burglary, all of the constituent offences of Criminal Damage have been aggregated (Table 2.28, over page)

Sex	Ethnicity	Victims			Suspects			Accused		
		Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total	Number	Avg. Age	% of Total
Female	1	18	48.7	13.1	2	40.5	3.3			
	3	13	50.1	9.5			0.0			
	4	4	45.0	2.9			0.0			
	Unknown	8	46.7	5.8			0.0			
	All	43	48.4	31.4	2	40.5	3.3			
Male	1	26	43.9	19.0	14	17.8	23.3			
	2	4	33.8	2.9	1	21.0	1.7	3	18.0	37.5
	3	15	45.1	10.9	16	19.5	26.7	2	18.5	25
	4	10	41.6	7.3	22	22.0	36.7	2	17.5	25
	5				1	27.0	1.7	1	28.0	12.5
	6	1	71.0	0.7						
	Unknown	1	39.0	0.7	1	33.0	1.7			
	All	57	43.5	41.6	55	20.6	91.7	8	19.3	100
Unknown	4				1	15.0				
	Unknown	37	N/A	27.0	2	N/A	3.3			
	All	37	N/A	27.0	3	15.0	5.0			
Grand Total		137	45.6	100.0	60	21.3	100.0	8	19.3	100

Table 2.28: Criminal Damage Victims, Suspects and Accused by Sex, Ethnicity and Age

Of all the crime types considered, Criminal Damage has the oldest group of victims, with an average age of 45.6 years, presumably because older age groups are more likely to possess the houses, cars and other assets that are at risk of being damaged. Overall, 31.4% of victims were women, slightly fewer in number than the 41.6% men who were also 4.9 years younger on average. The largest ethnic group of victims were IC1, comprising 32.1% of all victims, followed by 20.4% IC3 (who were the oldest on average) and 10.3% IC4.

The offender groups were considerably younger and again predominantly male. Interestingly, the largest group of Suspects were IC4 males (36.7%), followed by IC3 males (26.7%) and the youngest group, IC1 males (23.3%). It will be seen below that the predominance of IC4 males arises because 20 IC4 men were suspects in a single incident of Criminal Damage.

Criminal Damage and Feature Codes: As with earlier analysis, the Suspects group is considered here.

Sex	Ethnicity	FE - Airweapon carr		FF - Airweapon fired		FG - Handgun carried		FH - Handgun fired		FO - Oth F arm carr'd		FP - Oth F arm fired		TOTAL		
		No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	No.	Avg. Age	
Female	1	1	59.0									1	22.0	2	40.5	
	All	1	59.0									1	22.0	2	40.5	
Male	1			12	16.3							2	26.5	14	17.8	
	2			1	21.0									1	21.0	
	3			9	19.2			2	N/A	4	20.3	1	18.0	16	19.5	
	4			2	15.5	20	22.7							22	22.0	
	5			1	27.0									1	27.0	
	Unknown	1	33.0											1	33.0	
	All	1	33.0	25	17.8	20	22.7	2	N/A	4	20.3	3	23.7	55	20.6	
Unknown	4			1	15.0									1	15.0	
	Unknown			2	N/A									2	N/A	
	All			3	15.0									3	15.0	
Grand Total			2	46.0	28	17.6	20	22.7	2	N/A	4	20.3	4	23.3	60	21.3

Table 2.29: Criminal Damage Suspects and Feature Codes, By Sex, Ethnicity and Age.

In the case of the 20 Suspects relating to handguns being fired, all 20 relate to the same incident, when a variety of weapons, including a handgun, were used by a group of 20 men to damage a house and car. Of the remaining 40 Suspects, 28 relate to Airweapons being fired, a group of offences notable for the youthfulness of the offenders, with an average age of only 17.6 years, and the predominance of IC1 Suspects.

2.6 Conclusions

The strategic analysis presented above has not been exhaustive, but has hopefully presented sufficient detail to allow a comprehensive understanding of the range of crimes encompassed by the term 'gun crime'. It should be noted that analysis can only ever be as good as the data on which it is based, and that this report has highlighted a number of deficiencies in the data used. Nevertheless, it has been shown that the constituent offences differ in number, location, profile of victims, suspects and those accused, firearm type and how used, long-term trends, etc. The key is heterogeneity. All of which begs the question whether we can legitimately talk about 'gun crime' when the only thing many (if not most) of these offences have in common is the presence of something interpreted by one or more parties to the crime as a firearm.

In terms of prioritisation, it has been seen that the largest group of offences in which firearms have been used in Brent is robberies, followed by violence against the person and criminal damage. The most serious crimes of violence make up only a small percentage of the overall number of gun crimes, and therefore a very small percentage of all crime. Nevertheless, it may be hypothesised that they have a disproportionate impact on fear of crime.

Returning to the three specific research questions posed in the chapter Aims (section 2.3):

1. Is gun crime a growing problem in Brent?

Hypothesis: Gun Crime is a growing problem in Brent

Findings: In relation to the period 1999-2003, it appears that 2002 was in fact the peak year, which was followed with a drop to 2003. Taken as a whole, therefore, it appears that while gun crime has been a growing problem, a corner may have been turned. We can therefore reject the hypothesis with the qualification to wait and see what happens in the coming years.

2. Profiling Offences, Offenders and Victims

Hypothesis: There is a relationship between individual characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity and the illegal use of firearms/victimisation

Findings: It does appear that there is a relationship between individual characteristics and gun crime and that we can accept the hypothesis. First and foremost, the profile of those involved as victims and suspects is not random, that is to say that it does not conform to the borough profile taken as a whole. In relation to offenders, for example, they are overwhelmingly male and disproportionately IC3/Black. That the profiles of different offences themselves differ suggests that the relationship between gun crime and individual characteristics is nuanced further.

3. Is the location at which an offence takes place significant? Does this differ by offence type?

Hypothesis: Location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal firearms

Findings: Almost all of the offence types displayed a degree of offence clustering, suggesting that the location of gun crime offences is non-random and that the hypothesis should be accepted. Specific offences such as robbery and violence against the person show a marked degree of clustering (hot-spotting). Taken together, this suggests that the location is significant. Whilst this will, to some extent, reflect heterogeneity in underlying variables such as population density and high street retail areas, the overall conclusion is that location is important.

Chapter 3: Interviews with 15 Convicted Offenders

Gavin Hales and Daniel Silverstone

- 3.1 Chapter Summary
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Aims
- 3.4 Methodology
- 3.5 Findings
- 3.6 Conclusions

3.1 Chapter Summary

15 offenders from Brent who had been convicted of Firearms Act offences were interviewed about a range of themes including their backgrounds, offending and victimisation, firearm, gun culture and preventing gun crime. The interviews were variously conducted at the offices of the Probation and Youth Offending Services in Brent and in a number of prison establishments. The interviews provided important contextual information, in particular about the contexts and motivations for firearm possession and use. In so doing, they go some way to dispelling a number of myths about gun crime and reinforce the messages of complexity, nuance and context that emerge from the analysis of police data.

3.1.1 Characteristics and Backgrounds of the Offenders Interviewed

The 15 offenders were all male and aged from 16 to the mid-50s. Three defined themselves as White British, one as Asian, nine as Black, and two as mixed race Black/White.

The picture that emerged highlighted the offenders' experiences of instability in their lives in a range of ways, including family disruption, exclusion from mainstream education and drug use. Although most had worked, this was typically in insecure or poorly paid occupations. For many, drug dealing was considered a viable and attractive alternative to legitimate employment and 13 of the 15 had either dealt drugs themselves or had associated closely with individuals who dealt drugs. Importantly, the distinction between offenders and victims is blurred; all 15 had themselves been the victims of crime, including 11 who had experienced gun crime as victims. Seven reported that friends or family members had been shot and injured or even killed. Only three of the 15 had reported their own victimisation to the police, and importantly a mutually reinforcing picture emerged of negative attitudes towards the police, a fear of being labelled "a grass" and a street criminal culture that promotes personal retribution. Inevitably, cycles of violence result.

Amongst the younger individuals in particular, an overriding concern was with money and symbolically significant material goods. Opportunities in relation to drug dealing or robbery were contrasted with what were perceived to be limited opportunities in the mainstream, reinforced through an informal social learning process by the visible signs of criminal affluence in their neighbourhoods.

There does not seem to be evidence of a persistent or clearly defined culture of gang membership. Instead, the picture is of peer networks providing localised social and criminal communities and in some cases providing safety in numbers, young men expecting to encounter violence in the course of their social lives in particular.

3.1.2 Offending, Guns and Gun Crime

Offending

The 15 had been convicted of offences ranging from possession of an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence to murder. Approximately seven of the offenders were what might be described as career criminals and two reported having specifically targeted drug dealers. One reported that his offending was in part a symbolic defensive strategy, enabling him to develop a reputation as a "serious guy" not to be messed with, and two others reported the significance of dependent drug use.

Firearms

18 firearms were involved in the offences for which the 15 had been convicted. Of these, 10 were described as real (live-firing) firearms, including one that was home made. Two were confirmed converted imitations and the remaining six included two blank-firers, three BB guns (firing plastic or metal ball bearings) and one airgun. A number of the offenders reported previously having owned other firearms, and 12 reported knowing numerous other individuals with guns. The significance of imitation firearms begs the question whether their unregulated sale is appropriate.

Availability

Several older offenders provided important contextual information about changes to the availability of firearms, highlighting the demise of dominant organised crime firms and the increasing availability of converted imitation firearms. Whereas one offender reported a local armourer in Brent at the start of the 1980s who exerted a degree of informal social control over access to firearms, today it appears that firearms supply is less regulated. Although criminal contacts are important, particularly in relation to real

firearms, motivation and money seem to be more significant. It appears that converted imitation firearms are more widely available, while accurate replica or imitation weapons such as blank firing handguns and BB guns can be purchased over the counter in high street shops.

Possessing a Firearm

While a couple of the offenders downplayed the personal impact of possessing their firearm, the general consensus was of empowerment, either in terms of self-image or violent potential. One individual suggested that the two might be different stages in the same process, with an initial feeling of power being replaced over time with a more neutral attitude.

Impact of Others on the Offender

It appears that an awareness of disapproval on the part of parents and partners did not strongly influence the offenders' behaviour, while the attitudes (expressed or expected) of friends and associates seem to have been consensual. There was a general awareness of the risks of being stopped in possession of a firearm by the police although this does not appear to have universally influenced the offenders' behaviour.

Attitudes Towards Firearms

Whilst some of the offenders – typically those who had imitation firearms – stated that there was never a time when it is acceptable to carry a gun, others were less proscriptive. In particular, a number of those interviewed stressed the acceptability of arming oneself in the case of a credible risk or threat, either in relation to direct violence or in the context of other criminal behaviour such as drug dealing.

Contexts and Motivations for Gun Possession and Use

The offenders were asked about both their own offending and other contexts they knew of when firearms had been present or used. The following broadly represent the scope of their answers, although it must be stressed that the themes overlap considerably:

- *Immature/Irresponsible Behaviour.* Behaviour either without specific criminal intent or lacking an awareness of illegality typically involving teenagers possessing BB guns or airguns.
- *Peer Pressure.* Carrying a gun in public to prove manliness to peers. Also offending to get money to buy symbolically significant material goods.
- *Drug Markets.* Criminal victimisation of drug dealers, dealers arming themselves for their protection and firearms used in the context of debt enforcement and threats.
- *Robbery and Burglary.* Firearms used as offence 'enablers' to ensure victim compliance, particularly when the intended target is a drug dealer who is likely to be armed.
- *Dispute Resolution.* Escalation of disputes in the context of firearm availability and a lack of exit strategies may result in trivial disputes leading to fatal violence.
- *Retaliation.* Firearms used to retaliate directly for prior offending in the context of a culture that champions personal retribution and shuns police involvement.
- *Fear and Protection.* Possession of firearms for protection in the case of actual or perceived threats or 'just in case' violence arises. Predicated on an expectation of disputes and violence and the belief, knowledge or expectation that other individuals are armed.

3.1.3 Gun Culture and Preventing Gun Crime

Gun Culture

By and large the offenders understood gun culture in terms of the normality of firearms, and also in terms of racial stereotyping. To a lesser extent, guns were referred to as accessories and signifiers of status. Another theme that emerged several times was the willingness of offenders to use guns when in the past scores would have been settled differently – a fight, for example – and at least one offender highlighted the increased availability of converted imitation firearms, suggesting that this had fuelled the changes. Overall, however, it is argued that there is a significant relationship between deprived inner-city communities and a criminal economy that thrives in the absence of credible alternatives. This relationship is reinforced by a hyper-material culture on the one hand and opportunities available in particular in drug markets on the other. Guns are an accepted feature of these drugs markets.

Preventing Gun Crime

There was little consensus among the offenders, reflecting the complexity of the issues. One of the more prominent themes concerned education and the need to set young people on the right path from a very young age, perhaps engaging ex-offenders to assist. Attitudes concerning the criminal justice system were generally constructive, focussed on the need for greater sensitivity and a better grasp of community

relations on the part of the police, and improved resettlement capacity in relation to prison. Other themes included better community facilities, legalising drugs and enhanced political representation.

3.1.4 Concluding Remarks

The interview material positions guns in a complex interaction between the criminal economy, personal and collective experiences and attitudes, mainstream authorities such as the police, popular and criminal cultures, developmental factors such as family life and education, firearms availability, the debilitating effects of dependent drug use and a whole host of other factors. Guns and gun crime are both a symptom and a cause of violent criminality.

The most significant relationship, however, appears to be between guns and drugs markets, gun-related violence being symptomatic of an unregulated market whose participants cannot call on the legal structures that underpin the mainstream economy and maintain order. In the absence of a hegemonic criminal organisation, once firearms have been introduced into such an environment, the unregulated illegal market seems to lack the capability to eliminate them and participants are forced towards the lowest common denominator. Inevitably, it appears that this spills over into wider society, fuelling a fear of violence and prompting defensive strategies including firearm procurement. Meanwhile, negative attitudes towards the police interact with a culture of not “grassing” and an expectation of informal retribution to not only hamper efforts to curtail violence but indeed to fuel cycles of violence.

3.2 Introduction

Before they came to power, the present Labour Government promised to ‘tackle crime and tackle the causes of crime’⁵⁰, a statement that underlines two key approaches to crime prevention. Situational crime prevention, tackling the crime event itself, espouses an approach that focuses on influencing the proximate conditions of crime events in order to reduce the likelihood of crime occurring⁵¹. By contrast, ‘tackling the causes of crime’ is predicated on an understanding of why (rather than how and where) individuals break the law, seeking to modify underlying factors.

Certain types of crime are very amenable to situational crime prevention, often because the motivation of the offender is unequivocal, the location of the offence can in some way be carefully managed, and those using such locations legitimately consent to the measures being employed. A multi-storey car park may be ‘secured by design’ with a range of crime prevention measures such as CCTV and ticket barriers⁵², and a post office may minimise the likelihood of successful armed robbery by fitting security screens⁵³.

In the case of Brent, such approaches have been used to tackle gun crime, including in particular the use of targeted stop-and-search operations against suspected offenders and their associates, supported by technology such as static and mobile Automatic Number Plate Reader (ANPR) cameras and software. Such measures do not, however, generally occur in the confined private environment of buildings, but are instead located in public space. In this environment, there is a fine line between making it difficult for people to carry and use guns and the disproportionate policing of particular communities, accusations of a police state, and deteriorating relations between the police and public. And yet it is in this space that a significant proportion of gun crime in Brent takes place – for example, 603 out of the 1,310 offences (46%) from 1999 to 2003 analysed in Chapter 2 were recorded as having occurred in the street.

Bearing this in mind, understanding why people commit gun crime offences in Brent is essential to tackling these types of crime. There is no overall ‘quick fix’ solution, and whilst certain offence types such as armed robberies against businesses may be amenable to situational crime prevention measures, others such as incidental violent offences committed in public and robberies against individuals in the street may not be to the same extent.

This phase of the research, therefore, seeks to explore the offender’s understanding of his offence (and it is almost invariably his offence rather than hers). In doing so it will seek to explore the social world of gun crime offenders, their motivations for their offences, their relationship to their victim, and a range of factors such as firearm availability in Brent, the role of choice in relation to firearm type, and what measures might be deployed to help prevent gun crime.

This focus on offenders is not intended to belittle the impact that these offences have on victims, nor to defend, excuse or glamorise their behaviour. Understanding why a person has chosen to obtain a firearm is not the same thing as condoning that behaviour, but is an important step in developing policies to combat armed criminality in Brent and beyond.

A note to readers: Every effort has been made to protect the identity of those interviewed for this research. Please **do not assume** that you know who has said what, and in particular please **do not speculate** about who the offenders might be. This especially applies to any readers in the police and other criminal justice system agencies.

⁵⁰ Speech by Tony Blair to the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool, 1st October 1996.

⁵¹ Clarke (1995)

⁵² E.g. Smith et al. (2003)

⁵³ E.g. Ekblom (1987)

3.3 Aims

The aim of this part of the research was to answer the following research questions and associated hypotheses:

1. Is gun crime a growing problem?
Hypothesis: Gun Crime is a growing problem
2. Profiling Offences, Offenders and Victims
Hypothesis: There is a relationship between individual characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity and the illegal use of firearms/victimisation
3. Is the location at which an offence takes place significant? Does this differ by offence type?
Hypothesis: Location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal firearms
4. Why do certain individuals in Brent carry and/or use firearms (including imitations)?
Hypothesis 1: Firearms may have symbolic and/or instrumental importance to the possessor.
Hypothesis 2: Illegal firearm possession is limited by availability rather than demand.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research?

3.4.2 Choosing a sampling strategy

3.4.3 Research Ethics

3.4.4 Identifying the sample

3.4.5 Inviting offenders to take part

3.4.6 Conducting the interviews

3.4.7 Analysing the interview material

An overriding concern in selecting a research methodology and sampling strategy was to avoid pre-judging the issues that might arise in the course of the research. As has been discussed elsewhere, discourse on 'gun crime' in the UK – and particularly in relation to London – has been characterised by a degree of stereotyping, both in terms of the characteristics of the offenders involved (notably gender and race), and also in relation to the types of offences being committed. To some extent, it could be argued that this process is reflected in Brent in a concentration on the Harlesden and Stonebridge wards in terms of efforts to tackle gun crime, which nevertheless also occurs in other parts of the borough.

3.4.1 Qualitative vs. quantitative research?

The most obvious starting point for any social research is what is called a 'simple random sample', most commonly used in quantitative research. That is to say that every individual in a known population has an equal probability of being selected to be interviewed, allowing statistically robust statements to be made about the population as a whole from the evidence of the sample. In the case of researching 'gun crime' with a relatively small finite budget, however, this approach would not be appropriate. With 'violent gun crime' offences only comprising around 0.44% of all crime in Brent⁵⁴, the number of offenders as a percentage of the borough's population will be extremely small, ruling out any reliable or manageable sample drawn from the borough population⁵⁵. A sample based on the population of all those involved in some way in the illegal use of firearms would be impossible because that population is unknown.

It was decided that a qualitative approach would be most appropriate, seeking to explore the illegal use of firearms in depth, without looking to make statistically robust statements in conclusion. A number of possible approaches to this qualitative element of the research were considered, including ethnographic (participant observation) methods. Ultimately, however, it was decided to use a semi-structured interview schedule. In considering an under-researched subject, this approach would allow particular issues of concern such as firearm procurement to be explored, whilst at the same time allowing sufficient scope for the research to examine any emergent themes.

3.4.2 Choosing a sampling strategy

Having decided that a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview would be most appropriate, it was necessary to choose a method for selecting the individuals to be interviewed. A focus on young people was rejected, as was a focus on those accessing drug treatment services, because of concerns about skewing the research findings towards certain issues to the exclusion of others. The least appropriate approach would be one that started from the premise that gun crime was about a particular issue, such as youth gangs or drug markets. Another more compelling suggestion would have involved working with community contacts in Brent to access individuals either involved in, or on the margins of, the illegal use of firearms. However, this was rejected out of a concern that any sample arising would be skewed towards particular ethnic groups or locations, reflecting the networks and interests of the community contacts. A number of other approaches were also considered, including interviews with 'informed professionals' such as probation officers and youth workers.

Ultimately, however, it was decided that the optimum sampling methodology to ensure that the most appropriate peoples' views and attitudes were being sought and recorded would be one that focussed directly on individuals who had been convicted of offences involving firearms⁵⁶. Notwithstanding the fact that this might be a slightly self-selecting group, having been caught and prosecuted, it was felt that this

⁵⁴ In 2003/04, there were 35,837 crimes recorded by the MPS in Brent, of which 158 (0.44%) were classified as 'Violent Gun Crime' offences. Note that this excludes crimes recorded by the British Transport Police. Source: MPS

⁵⁵ A reliable sample would have to be extremely large in order to result in statistically reliable findings.

⁵⁶ Remand offenders were not included in order to avoid the risk of information pertinent to their trial coming to light.

approach would ensure that the research heard first hand accounts and should be well placed to reflect the broader picture in Brent.

3.4.3 Research Ethics

Researching gun crime by interviewing convicted offenders raises a number of difficult ethical considerations. Two overriding concerns were firstly, that anyone taking part in the research did so on the basis of an informed understanding of the objectives of the research and the use to which the interview material would be put, and secondly, that their identity would be protected at all times.

In the first instance, a letter was drafted for research participants to satisfy the need to obtain their informed consent to take part in the research. This detailed the following:

- This research is being conducted by the University of Portsmouth on behalf of Brent Council. They want to understand the reasons why people in Brent carry and use guns, including imitations. By doing so, they hope to be able to reduce the use of guns in Brent.
- We are recording the interview for the purposes of research only. The recordings will not be made available to anyone else.
- Your answers today will be treated in **strictest confidence** – at no stage after this interview will your identity be revealed to anyone.
- A research report will be published, including other sources of information such as the numbers and types of offences committed in Brent. It will not reveal the identity of anyone taking part in the research.
- You don't have to answer all the questions.
- If you want us to tell someone anything you have said, please say so, indicating exactly who you would like us to talk to and what you would like us to say.

In the case of interviews in prison, however, the following had to be included because of prison rules about the limitations of confidentiality⁵⁷:

- **Please note that under Prison Service rules any disclosure by you of any of the following must be reported to the Prison by the research team. In such instances, the confidentiality assurance will not apply:**
 - Risk to yourself or another person
 - Crimes for which you have not been convicted
 - Issues concerning prison security

In addition, a guide was prepared for the interviewer. This documented the fact that in the case of interviews at the Probation or Youth Offending Services any disclosure by a research participant of a credible risk to themselves or anyone else was to be reported to the Probation/Youth Offending Service. It also advised the interviewer to counsel the research participant against mentioning specific names, locations, etc., in order to minimise the risk that the interviews provided intelligence about unconvicted offences.

Finally, again in the case of interviews at the Probation or Youth Offending Services, a list of useful contact numbers including CrimeStoppers and drug treatment providers was prepared in the event that specific information came to light during interviews. It had been hoped that the contact details of a victim support agency might also be included, but they declined permission to do so on the basis that they would not provide their services to offenders, even if they had been the victims of crime.

The research methodology, research participant's letter and associated documentation were then considered by the University of Portsmouth Institute of Criminal Justice Studies' Ad-Hoc Ethics Committee. They were satisfied that due consideration had been given to the ethics of the research, and

⁵⁷ Her Majesty's Prison Service (2004)

that appropriate measures had been put in place to (a) obtain the informed consent, and (b) protect the identity, of the research participants.

In presenting the interview material an over-riding concern has been to protect the identity of the offenders who agreed to take part. This is particularly the case because the location of the research has not been anonymised (albeit Brent has a population of over 250,000 people). In order to achieve this, specific identifying detail such as offender ages and the time and location of offences have been excluded. In addition, the considerable interview material that has been included is not attributed in any way beyond some outline details.

3.4.4 Identifying the sample

Having decided to seek interviews with convicted offenders, it was felt that the most appropriate sampling points would be the Youth Offending and Probation Services in Brent. To this end, the two organisations were approached with a view to establishing the feasibility of (a) identifying from their records all offenders currently under some form of criminal justice supervision for firearms-related offences (i.e. having been convicted of a Firearms Act offence); and (b) seeking interviews with those offenders. Both services agreed in principle to the approach proposed.

The Probation and Youth Offending Services hold records on all offenders from Brent, both presently under their direct supervision, for example on license or serving some form of community-based sentence, or in custody. Initially, lists were provided by the two services, indicating that their records included a total of 35 appropriate offenders. These were subsequently supplemented, as the research progressed, with the assistance of individual Youth Offending Service and Probation officers. Overall, the following numbers of offenders convicted of Firearms Act offences were identified, of whom all but one was male:

	Youth Offending Service	Probation Service	TOTAL
Being supervised in the community	9	10	19
In prison	1	18	19
TOTAL	10	28	38

Table 3.1: Convicted Firearms Act Offenders – Probation, YOT and Prison

Interviews were sought with all of these individuals, rather than a sample of them. Ultimately, 15 of the 38 (39.5%) were successfully interviewed. All were male:

Of the 18 adult (Probation Service) prisoners identified:

- **5 were interviewed in prison**
- **2 were interviewed post-release at the Probation Service offices**
- 6 prisoners declined to take part
- 2 prisoner interviews were declined by a Prison Governor
- 1 prisoner was being returned to court to face further charges and it was felt an interview would be inappropriate
- 1 prisoner was deported before he could be interviewed
- 1 prisoner had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital

The one Young Offender in prison:

- **Was interviewed post-release at the Youth Offending Service offices**

Of the 10 adult offenders being supervised in the community by the Probation Service:

- **1 offender was interviewed**
- 4 offenders declined to take part
- 2 offenders had moved out of Brent
- 2 offenders had their order or license terminated and could not be located
- 1 offender was deemed inappropriate for interview by Probation staff

Of the 9 young offenders being supervised in the community by the Youth Offending Service:

- **6 offenders were interviewed**

- 1 offender declined to take part
- 1 offender had completed his order
- 1 offender was remanded on new charges

In reality, from the total list of 38 initially supplied, only 28 offenders were contenders to be interviewed. Of these, 11 declined personally and 2 were declined by a Prison Governor. The 15 interviews represent a 54% success rate out of the 28 candidates.

It is interesting to reflect on the differential interview rate between the adult and young offenders. In the case of the adults, 8 were interviewed out of 20 possible interviews (40%), whereas in the case of the young offenders 7 were interviewed out of 8 'possibles' (87.5%).

3.4.5 Inviting the offenders to take part

In the case of those offenders being supervised in the community by the Probation or Youth Offending Services, the process was relatively straightforward with approaches initially being made to the respective heads of service in Brent. In relation to those in prison, however, the process was complicated firstly by needing to obtain consent from the Prison Service Applied Psychology Group to conduct the research, and then by having to negotiate access with individual Prison Governors. As an indication of the scale of this complexity, the 19 imprisoned offenders were being held in 17 different prisons. To make matters even more difficult, in some cases the Probation Service records were out of date and prisoners had been moved, in some cases a number of times.

A letter inviting offenders to participate in the research was provided to the Probation and Youth Offending Services and the respective prisons. This letter detailed the commissioning body, the objectives of the research, the use to which interview material would be put, assurances of confidentiality and importantly, in the case of prison interviews, the limits of confidentiality.

In the case of interviews at the Probation and Youth Offending Services a one-off expenses payment of £15 was made to offenders taking part. In the case of offenders in prison, payments can only be made in the event that the prisoner has to miss paid work in order to participate in the research, Prison Service rules stipulating that prisoners may not be advantaged nor disadvantaged by their involvement in research⁵⁸. The letter to prisoners made it clear that this condition would be met, although in the end this situation did not arise.

3.4.6 Conducting the interviews

Interviews were conducted by Dr Daniel Silverstone of the University of Portsmouth. He obtained Criminal Records Bureau clearance at the Enhanced Level prior to the first interview.

In the case of interviews at the Youth Offending and Probation services, interviews were conducted at the respective offices in lieu of one offender supervision session. This was done with the agreement of the services and it is felt maximised participation by ensuring that the offenders' regular routines were maintained, for example by keeping to their regular weekly timetable. In some cases it was possible to refer to the offenders' formal records (i.e. case files) in order to establish the veracity of the accounts provided. In all such cases the interview account accorded broadly with the documentary account.

In the case of prison interviews, the use of the Legal Visits area was sought wherever possible. In a couple of cases, however, interviews were conducted on the wings at the behest of the prison authorities. It should be noted that this arrangement was not ideal, in part because of considerable background noise and occasional interruptions by prison staff. On a somewhat lighter note, on one occasion the interviewer was approached by a Prison Officer who demanded to know why he was out of his cell, mistaking him for one of the prisoners.

In all cases, interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed⁵⁹. Importantly, this allowed the interviews to be conducted in a natural conversational manner and maximised the use of the time available.

⁵⁸ Source: Correspondence with HMPS Applied Psychology Group.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that despite using a professional transcription service, considerable time and effort was required for the principal author to check and correct transcripts. In particular, intrusive background noise, the use of slang and some strong

3.4.7 Analysing the interview material

The material was converted into a spreadsheet, based loosely on the Framework methodology in which the columns represent key themes, the rows individual interviews, and the cells contain transcript evidence pertaining to the themes⁶⁰. This maintains the narrative of individual interviews while allowing 'read across' encompassing all of the interviews as a whole.

It is possible that some of the offenders' accounts do not represent a wholly accurate version of events, either for example because they are providing the answers they think the interviewer wants to hear, or because they have an institutionalised account developed over the course of their interactions with the criminal justice system. Other reasons are also possible. On reflection, and as will become apparent in the Findings below (section 3.5), there is a broad consensus between the 15 interviews in relation to a number of key themes, confirming external validity. In relation to the internal validity of the interviews, the line of questioning was structured in such a way that certain issues were covered more than once and opportunities were presented for the interviewer to cross-examine the offenders' accounts. Furthermore, in several cases official records were referred to after interviewing. No significant inconsistencies were encountered, with the exception of one interview in which the offender provided conflicting accounts of, for example, his education. His interview has been given less prominence than most in the findings, a number of his accounts being treated sceptically. It is not believed that this has adversely affected the integrity of the research findings and conclusions.

One significant limitation which is worth commenting on concerns the Prison Service rules governing research in prisons that stipulate that any disclosure of 'undisclosed illegal acts' in the course of an interview must be reported to the Prison authorities⁶¹. Understandably, a number of the prison based interviewees expressed concerns about this confidentiality limitation. More importantly, this limitation occasionally made it difficult to explore in detail the context for the offence of which the offender had been convicted. A purely hypothetical example to illustrate might be as follows: An individual has been convicted of possession of a firearm which, unknown to the interviewer, he had in his possession as a result of involvement in the drugs business. Not having been convicted of a drug-related offence, the interviewee cannot reveal this detail and the interview cannot discuss this drug market participation. It is therefore impossible to explore the reason why the offender had the firearm in his possession. On the other hand, this directive minimised the possibility that the researchers would be placed in a difficult ethical position. Notwithstanding this latter comment, however, this confidentiality limitation inevitably truncates the research evidence that can be collected from prison-based research.

On the whole, however, the interviews provided a forum within which the offenders appeared to appreciate the opportunity to describe their histories from their own perspectives. Indeed, in a number of cases offenders provided accounts that they stated went well beyond those provided to the police and courts, providing important contextual material. This may well account for the fact that these offenders agreed to take part in the research in the first place, along with the fact that many expressed concerns about the present situation in Brent.

accents made the process of transcription challenging. On several occasions, for example, the transcriber had noted the opposite of what was said by missing a 'not'. The corrective efforts, however, have ensured a high degree of integrity in the final transcripts.

⁶⁰ Ritchie and Lewis (2003)

⁶¹ Her Majesty's Prison Service (2004)

3.5 Findings

The Findings include the following sections:

3.5.1 Introduction

3.5.2 Characteristics and Backgrounds of the Offenders Interviewed

3.5.3 Offending, Guns and Gun Crime

3.5.4 Gun Culture and Preventing Gun Crime

These sections include a large body of verbatim interview transcript material. This is wholly intentional, the objective being to address a key criticism levelled in relation to recent efforts to tackle gun crime, namely that those actually involved (as offenders) have not had a voice, while ill-informed 'authority' figures have described what they believe to be the issues⁶².

3.5.1 Introduction

The quantitative analysis in Chapter 2 highlighted the complexity of the issues involved when considering gun crime in Brent and the wide range of contexts within which guns are used illegally. Whilst there are a number of generic characteristics evident in the data, notably the predominance of male offenders, the age, ethnicity, offence type, firearm type and offence location of gun crimes in Brent are all heterogeneous. This picture is reflected in the offender interviews.

The picture portrayed by the interview material is of a street-level criminal world into which young men from Brent's more deprived areas are recruited and which is dominated by the potential rewards and associated risks of involvement in a fragmented drugs market. It will be seen that this market creates instability in a range of ways, notably because of the criminal targeting of drug dealers and the defensive strategies they employ to mitigate against this violence. More generally, however, a strong criminal culture promotes acquisitive crime such as robbery, protects criminals with anti-police norms and encourages informal retribution. Against this backdrop, real firearms appear to be an accepted feature of the drugs business, available to individuals with the right criminal contacts, but not available in significant numbers. Converted weapons appear to be more numerous, with highly accurate imitations used in offences such as robbery being readily available through high street retailers. Indeed, it will be seen that this availability of imitations is important in a range of ways, in part because of the conversion of such weapons to fire live ammunition.

Presenting the material

Deciding how to present the interview material proved extremely difficult on account of the fact that most, if not all, of the offenders interviewed provided information on a range of issues about themselves and their peer groups, often with complex inter-relationships between these issues. For example, there are links between drug dealing, peer network social groups, firearms, violence in social settings, and attitudes towards the police that defy simple deconstruction. Nevertheless, a number of broad themes are presented, but it is acknowledged that there may be other ways the interview material could have been presented.

In some cases, notably in relation to drugs markets, some material is presented that does not directly relate to firearms, but which should nevertheless be of interest and use to anyone in Brent concerned about crime and disorder in the borough (and indeed readers from outside of Brent).

It was felt to be important to ensure that the offenders' voices are heard, and to this end a fairly large number of verbatim quotes are included, reproduced as faithfully as possible. In relation to these quotes, however, no identifying information has been included in order to protect the identity of the individual offenders. Whilst this necessarily implies that some of the narrative is lost, it is nevertheless hoped that the material presented enables the reader to develop a picture of the story in Brent and allows some insight into the offenders' perspectives.

⁶² It is not possible to provide a specific reference to this criticism, although it can be said that this has been a general theme at a number of meetings, seminars and conferences attended by the author, generally stated by community members and aimed at statutory authorities. Frequently, these criticisms have highlighted socio-cultural differences between those in positions of authority and the communities they serve.

3.5.2 Characteristics and Backgrounds of the Offenders Interviewed

A range of information was collected from the offenders about their backgrounds. This was to serve three purposes: Firstly, to contextualise their offending; secondly, to provide important background material about crime in Brent; and, thirdly, to explore a series of themes that have been prominent in recent discussions about gun crime, including family composition, school exclusion, gang membership and drugs.

The picture that emerges is complex and nuanced and discredits the sorts of sweeping statements made about the pre-eminent importance of, for example, absent fathers, gang membership and 'gansta rap'. Importantly, the material highlights the fact that most of the offenders interviewed have experienced instability in their lives in a range of ways, including family disruption, exclusion from mainstream education and drug use. It will also be seen that the accounts of these men blur the distinction between victims and offenders; they have all been victims themselves, in some cases of serious crimes, and the majority of which were not reported to the police. That victimisation does not excuse their own behaviour, but it does demand a more holistic view of the relationship between offending and victimisation than is generally presented.

The background material is presented under a series of themes as follows:

- Demographics
- Residential Locations
- Family Composition
- Education
- Experience of Work
- Recreation
- Gangs and Crews
- Drug and Alcohol Use
- Victimisation
- Reporting Crime to the Police
- Contact with the Police

Demographics:

The 15 offenders interviewed were all male and ranged in age from 16 to the mid-50s. They were asked to define their own ethnicity: 3 defined themselves as White British (English), 1 as Asian (Indian), 9 as Black and 2 as mixed race Black/White. The 9 defining themselves as 'Black' included 8 of Caribbean ethnicity, 4 having been born in the Caribbean and 4 in the UK. In the case of the two mixed race individuals, one reported having a White mother and a Black father, and the other reported having a White mother and a mixed race father about whom he knew very little.

Residential Locations:

In terms of where they were living (either at the time of the interview, or at the time of the offence if they were interviewed in prison): 8 gave their postcode as NW10, 2 as NW6, 2 as Wembley, 1 as HA9, 1 as HA0 and 1 as 'Various – No Fixed Abode' (including Harlesden and Willesden).

Family composition:

The offenders were typically from disrupted family backgrounds. Of the 13 who answered the relevant question, only 4 reported having grown up with both parents. 6 had grown up with only their mother and siblings, one had grown up with his grandfather, one with a combination of grandmother, aunts and father and one with a combination of an uncle and a grandfather. 3 reported having grown up in a household that included step- or half-siblings.

Education:

Six of the 15 interviewed reported having been permanently excluded from mainstream education for a range of reasons including poor behaviour and attendance and a further individual was excluded for a fixed period for taking a knife to school. 7 of the offenders reported some post-16 education, typically attending a college course.

Experience of Work:

Unsurprisingly, a history of having worked was particularly contingent on the age of the offender. Of the 7 young offenders, 3 reported no employment experience, one had done unpaid 'work experience' and 3

had paid retail experience. The 8 adult offenders had all worked, including one individual who had learnt a trade while in prison from which he was making a living. It will be seen later that for some individuals, involvement in the drugs business – and it is frequently described as a business – is considered a viable alternative to legal employment. It is worth noting that at least 13 of the 15 offenders had either dealt drugs or associated closely with individuals who dealt drugs, a fact that underlines the significance of the informal economy in the lives of these men.

Recreation:

When asked about what they did in their spare time (before being convicted in the case of those in prison), the interviewees gave a generally benign series of answers focussing on spending time with their children, if any, going to the gym and socialising with friends. Three of them referred at this stage to drug taking, in one case because his drug use was latterly dictating his whole life, in the other two in the context of social experiences. Only one of the offenders directly referred to crime at this point, talking about his time prior to going to prison:

"I was doing business, like... I was doing more back into crime... I was more focussed on crime then."

When asked specifically about clubbing or raving, the 11 offenders who were asked the question all responded that it was – or had been – a feature of their social lives. Interestingly, only one of the 11 reported going clubbing or raving in Brent itself (Cricklewood); two offenders described travelling to Watford; another to locations such as Oxford and Northampton; and a third preferred the more up-market venues on offer in the West End.

In terms of clubs and raves as a location for crime, 8 offenders described encountering or at least fearing encountering violence, including guns:

"I've seen loads of fights at raves."

"I don't expect trouble, but I know that either one of my stupid friends will start trouble or somebody else's stupid friends will start trouble. If I can avoid it, I will avoid it; I don't want to lose my life just yet."

"I've been in a club when someone has pulled a gun and shot... someone got shot in the leg."

"I don't really rave in the area [Brent] no more to be honest with you, round there. It's a bit too crazy, yea... I used to go up West End and all that sort of thing, but now it's too, it's too, too dangerous to go up there."

The offender cited in the latter quote was particularly concerned with the risks associated with going out to clubs and raves, and described in detail the need for safety in numbers, in particular to avoid being robbed:

"...if we were going partying, there would be fifteen, twenty people cos we would feel safer in twenties and fiftens than in ones or twos or threes... It's safer in numbers, innit? ...Out on raving, yea, yea. Specially raving and that, specially raving. If we were just in the street, maybe around five, six, seven people, but raving yea, fifteen to twenties, twenty-fives."

The importance of group socialising as a defensive strategy was explored in more detail with the specific consideration of gang or crew membership.

Gangs and Crews:

From the outset it is worth noting that the language of gangs and crews is problematic, being loaded with emotive terminology and powerful social 'folk devils' such as football hooligans and East End gangsters along the line of the Krays. Literature on the subject of gangs, notably originating in the US, stresses the importance of features such as a hierarchical organisation with lines of authority, names and symbols, shared interests and the use of violence in defining gangs⁶³.

For the purposes of the present research, offenders were asked whether they had ever been the member of a gang or crew, and if so whether that group had a name, territory, rivals and so on. No definition of

⁶³ E.g. see Petersen (2000)

gangs or crews was suggested by the interviewer, the intention being to elicit the offenders' understandings of their own social worlds.

There is no strong sense from the interviews that Brent has the sort of highly territorial criminal gangs that have been a feature of many inner city US neighbourhoods. As one offender put it:

"...it's not like we were the 28s gang or we're the Cripps or Bloods."

Nevertheless, at least one offender referred to the fact that the group he associated with, which was largely involved in drug market activity, displayed some signs of territoriality:

"...the boys that hang out, they won't let anyone into that area. Say if you came into the area and tried to sell drugs and make money, you wouldn't be allowed to... You would get robbed."

On the whole what seems to feature is a complex mix of groups of predominantly males, numbering between 5 and 20 in size, the functionality of which is blurred between social and criminal purposes. Peer social networks seem to predominate, organised along loose locational and age lines, the identity of which may be defined in oppositional terms (that is to say in opposition to mainstream society) and whose activities may include criminality⁶⁴. Interestingly, race did not seem to feature as a significant line of cleavage in the sense that particular groups were excluded. Instead, where groups were mono-ethnic it seems more likely that this was as a function of common experiences and spatial residential segregation. Furthermore, several of the offenders reported mixed race groups, and played down the significance of race, pointing instead to the diversity in their communities:

"...it was just a group of people you would always see together, like, so, we were just classed as that's us, that's our crew... [From the] Same area and either going to school with each other forever, you know going to primary school and nursery together, and we just kept in contact and went to the same schools and everything... It [race] didn't matter. Black, white, Indian whatever... So long as you show that you're not like everybody else or you're not different from us, then it was all right, I suppose. If you were willing to do what we was doing, yea did what we did and everything, that's all right, you could hang around with us or whatever... Like, if you would be out late at night outside with us in the area, you're all right. Sit down with us and smoke weed and mess about, do stupid things like...Messing about, riding stolen bikes. Driving cars."

"I don't really call it a crew, like, but all of us brethrens... we were not really a crew, like hanging around on corners at night getting in trouble... We just smoke the weed, drink one drink and girls and that's it."

"We just sit down every day, sit down and smoke weed and have fun. They just party, cos they don't have anything to do, there's nothing has got their attention. All they're doing is making money, that's all they care about. They ain't got college. And that's it, so they just sit down and smoke their weed and have fun. Take the day how it comes."

"...there would be like twenty of us, and we just hook up early morning and we go everywhere, like even out of London sometimes. Just move up that shit, go robbing, spray cans, all different kinds of shit..."

"Not really a gang, just friends you grew up with, I don't class them like gangs, they're people that you know, yea... You know from school, people you meet as you go on and you take life and travelling, you just hang out or just become friends, you make friends at work, you know."

In a number of cases, however, offenders reported having different groups with whom they associated, either at different times, or indeed simultaneously. There was some suggestion that for certain individuals this overlap represented a graduation from social and petty-criminal teenage groups to more explicitly criminal late teens or early twenties groups that might in turn be slightly less geographically concentrated:

"Yea, as I got older I started to meet more people like. And I started to mingle with girls. I started to hang round with different age groups, cos I've always, the friends that I have now, they are all

⁶⁴ It is worth stressing, however, that police intelligence that the author is aware of does point to the presence of a very small number of explicitly criminal named crews in Brent centred largely on crack cocaine markets. That evidence about these groups did not explicitly come through in the present research suggests that the picture presented here may be only partial.

older than me... to me they seem like ordinary people but really and truly, obviously sometimes there was intentions to [commit crime], yea and do stuff.”

“I'd say I used to move with three different sets of people... But my age group we had a crew, there must have been about 20 of us in there, so we were all going out together, we would all fight together, we all made money together, but if I wanted to go out decent or something to chat up girls, I can't go with them guys cos they're just gonna just smash up a place or we get thrown out, that sort of thing. I got to go with the older guys... Then I've got another set of crew to go and make money with... [doing] Robberies...”

“...they was bigger man than me... Like they were gangsters innit... they tease people and that stuff like go and rob Post Office and sort of them things...[and also] they were selling a lot of weed...”

A number of the offenders stressed the importance of numbers, both in terms of empowerment and safety, and also in some cases in facilitating crime:

“...it was mad, you could walk down the street, and you could say to the biggest geezer that walks past you, 'you're a prick', and he won't say nothing back, cos there's twenty of you. It was just mad, like, the vibe...”

“...it was like a group of brothers, everybody would look out for each other. There's bad things we'd like, at certain times we would argue or wouldn't give each other money, but if we came to shoving and something was wrong, we would all be there...”

“It was just a group that just bond together and just felt safer in mass... It's safer in numbers, innit... Cos if you go to parties, there's, maybe there's [other crews], with more than twenty five people in. They're saying if they see like maybe three, four people and there's around twenty five other people they see you might have like jewellery, whatever, know what I'm saying. If they feel there's safety in numbers... it's just psychology innit. If they see twenty people, over twenty people, they don't really wanna rob twenty people. But if they see maybe three people they'll try... growing up in North West [London], certain, certain as you call it war skills come into play naturally. You think, boy you know what, instead of going out with just one or two people, you see right, these guys here, they've got their little gang, and they're not getting robbed. The reason why they're not getting robbed is because they've got a gang, so you naturally try and keep your lives with other people... Basically, just protect themselves, or whatever they need to do, they would do it in mass cos it's easier, like whatever, drug selling in mass is easier than drug selling by yourself or robbing in mass is [easier]...”

A final point relates to changes in the composition of these groups and importantly how they may go into decline. One of the offenders referred to members of his group encountering moral dilemmas about their offending which ultimately saw the group fragment. Another highlighted the way that his group ended up going in different directions, in part as a result of criminal justice intervention into their activities:

“We used to [go robbing], but it got to the point where some people were saying, 'I don't wanna do it, cos at the end of the day it could happen to my mum, it could happen to me'. Other people were like, 'We'll do it 'til you get caught and if you get caught then we stop, if we don't get caught, then we carry on'. So, there was two different opinions on it, and everybody got their own way. Whoever wanted to carry on robbing went robbing, and whoever wanted to stop, stopped.”

“...all of us start getting older and we start branching out, things start happening, people started getting arrested, this happens, that happens. People start getting a bit older, yea.”

In light of the evidence presented here, it is difficult to see how one can simplistically discuss issues like guns and gangs in a general sense in relation to Brent as there does not seem to be a persistent or clearly defined culture of gang membership nor any consistent view as to how one might define a gang or crew. Instead the picture is of peer networks providing localised social and criminal communities and in some cases providing safety in numbers, young men expecting to encounter violence in the course of the social lives in particular.

Drug and Alcohol Use:

All except one of the offenders interviewed had smoked cannabis, and of those who had all reported first use during their teens, typically aged 14 or 15. The degree of reported use varied from occasional social smoking once or twice a week to chronic smoking up to five times per day. 2 offenders reported having used Ecstasy, 2 had used amphetamines, 1 had used LSD, 2 had used heroin, 2 had snorted powder cocaine and 3 had smoked crack cocaine.

Three of the offenders could be described as having been problem drug users and all were among the older age groups. One of these men had injected heroin as his primary drug, latterly using it in conjunction with crack cocaine. The other two had been crack users. The offending of all of these three men related to their drug use problems, directly in two cases where the offending was to fund drug use and indirectly in the third where the man in question owed money to some drug dealers.

One particular point of concern relates to one of the younger offenders who reported the occasional social use of crack cocaine amongst his peer group. This was justified on the basis that the individual who introduced the drug to the group as the pioneer user was not dependent:

“... because we know he’s not one of them addicts, yea, we’ll say fuck it, why not.”

In relation to alcohol use, all offenders reported having first used alcohol as juveniles, but none reported problematic use at any stage.

What is clear is that illegal drug use is present in the lives of all of the offenders interviewed. It will be seen later that this is reflected in relation to attitudes towards and involvement in drug dealing.

Victimisation:

All 15 of the offenders reported having been the victim of crime, ranging from having had a car vandalised through to attempted murder. 10 reported having been the victims of robbery or attempted robbery and a number reported violence including being slashed, stabbed and shot.

“...knives, swords, you know what I mean... It’s lots of threats stuff... coming from the estate...”

“...there was a couple of guys coming to our school, right, tried to rob us...”

“...when I was in school, yea, I got rushed on a regular basis... kicking and beating...”

“I had my first watch on, and there was this guy [in the right club] who really liked it, and he asked to buy it for his mum, and he tried to take it. You know, tried to bottle me...”

“...just an argument happening in the pub or something. Just gone outside and he stabbed me with a knife...”

The exposure to gun crime of the offender group needs to be stressed. 11 of the 15 offenders had been the victims of gun crime. 6 reported having been threatened with a gun, 5 reported having had shots fired at them or in their direction, and 2 had actually been shot and injured.

“I’ve been threatened with a gun a couple of times, but not that’ll scare me. That’s normal, guns and that. I see them every day...”

“I’ve been around where shots have been [fired] after my friends...”

“All I can say is that directly they meant to kill me...”

“Basically I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Somebody obviously assumed I was with a group of people there and started to let off shots and I was there.”

“...there’s been some serious occasions when we have been stuck up and it’s come to the point where we thought we might die...”

“[I was shot at] because I was with someone, like, I was with people who sell drugs, and they were shooting at them, and they shot at me as well.”

“...when I was younger someone put a gun to my head... “

Furthermore, 7 of the offenders reported friends or members of their family who had been shot and injured or even killed, and a further individual reported that his brother had died in the context of drug dealing, although he did not indicate how.

“...my uncle, he get ‘im a 12-guage [shotgun] in his chest... He get two, innit, one in his head and one in his chest.”

“My brother died for selling drugs.”

“I had loads of friends that died by guns.”

“...my friend got shot... I went to the funeral.”

“...a lot of people I knew have been shot and killed since I’ve been in prison.”

“I lost my friend though a gun thing, he got shot... well actually two of them actually.”

“I know a guy who got shot eleven times about a month back.”

Finally, seven offenders reported having seen guns being fired at other people, including one who claims to have witnessed a murder. Four of these offenders reported having seen shootings in or outside of clubs or pubs.

Although the criminal justice system has labelled all of the individuals interviewed as offenders, it is clear that all have themselves been the victims of crime. The distinction between victim and offender is therefore blurred.

Reporting Crime to the Police:

In relation to their experiences as victims of crime, only three out of the 15 said that they had reported crimes to the police. In one of those instances the perceived failure on the part of the police to act resulted in the offender taking retributive action himself which ultimately resulted in his conviction. When the offenders were challenged as to why the police weren’t called, rationales included the offences not being serious enough to merit police involvement, and in one case the fact that the offence was in fact retribution for an earlier offence committed by the interviewee.

More significantly, however, three key themes emerged that have important implications in terms of attempts to tackle gun crime: strong anti-police norms (at least 10 interviews), fear relating to risks associated with being labelled a ‘grass’ (at least 5 interviews), and a street criminal culture that promotes personal retribution (at least 4 interviews). When asked whether they had reported their victimisation to the police, answers included:

"No. I'm not like that. Cos I don't really like the police anyway."

"Nah, nah, you can't involve them like that."

"Police. The only thing you'll do is put your life in danger. Instead of helping you, like they'd put you in danger.... I trust them, but then the proceedings is wrong. If you come into a neighbourhood where everyone does not like police, they stand outside your house, you're talking to them, they go off, and apparently that person got arrested. The words gonna go round, I'm grassing him up. And that's just playing with your life. If you're known as a grasser, you can't walk on the streets safe."

"I just didn't see the point, really. Cos that's only gonna bring more problems upon myself, cos I would have to look out for the police, then I would have to look out for these people watching me, and then I'd have to look out for them watching the police and the police watching them, so I'd prefer to just, if I can deal with it myself I will deal with it."

"I was brought up not to involve the police..."

"...when we were growing up, it's just not a, it's like standard procedures again, some things are not done."

"...in the Brent community you're, not really much that people deal with the police, we don't really get down like that and start like phoning the police, tell them 'oh my mates just been shot, it's this person or another one', do you know what I mean? Just take care of yourself, or your own people, they will help you take care of it... it's just one of those things, yea, you just don't get involved with the police, innit... you can get your family into trouble, people want to do your family or, someone says your son's an informer or your brother's an informer, or, do you know what I mean, you can't get that reputation."

"...in the criminal life, if we've got a dispute we sort it out between us, we don't go to the police, you go to the police you're a low-life. You know the rules and regulations. You're a criminal, you're active, go out and get things. You don't say nothing. To grass someone up is wrong. You know what you're doing is wrong and if you're arrested you got to take it on the chin, you know. You know if you get caught, you go to prison."

The co-defendant of the latter individual clearly hadn't grasped these "rules and regulations" as he had indeed "grassed up" the interviewee. Several of the other offenders likewise reported having been incriminated by the accounts of co-accused.

One offender who was subject to violent threats over a debt he had incurred, including death threats directed at his immediate family, stressed that, as he saw it, the risks posed by his aggressors far outweighed any possible benefit potentially accruing from involving the police:

"It's hard reporting things to the police, as in like sometimes you don't want to portray yourself as a grass... that always used to make it worse... And you have your family and your children and things, it's not good, know what I mean."

Finally, one of the offenders highlighted the significance of informal retribution in the case of seeking revenge for an 'unnecessary' murder, when the sanctions of arrest and prison are felt to be insufficient. That is to say that since there was no justification for the initial murder, only direct retribution would be appropriate:

"...if someone kills one of your people... if you're close to the person then – then only thing, you don't want to think of them going to prison, you're gonna want to kill him innit. Or, whatever, he doesn't deserve... Especially if it's unnecessary, that's how you're gonna think about it, you're not really thinking about 'ah, he should get nicked'... that's how it is, innit."

The fact that the most serious gun crime in Brent has at times been tit-for-tat⁶⁵ suggests that a number of these factors may have been significant. A sense of injustice may give rise to feelings that only direct retribution is appropriate, criminal culture dictates that the police should not be involved and scores should be settled personally, and individuals fear being labelled as a grass and the possible price they and their families might pay as a consequence. A question for anyone involved in trying to tackle gun-related violence has to concern how to break this circuit and avoid individual acts of aggression escalating into cycles of violence, retribution and counter-retribution.

Contact with Police:

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all but one of the offenders had been stopped by the police other than in the context of their offence and subsequent arrest. The young offenders typically reported having been stopped between 2 and 10 times, although seemingly without immediate consequences:

"[I've been stopped] only about 10 times... But it seems a lot because it happens in the same area or it happens in the same place. So it's the same routine, I'm being stopped again, I haven't got anything on me, they're gonna ask the same questions."

"The police know who I associate with. They know who I deal with, they know what I'm about and they think that I'm in a class the same as them. They just, any time they see me, I've never ever got in trouble with them that they've taken me to the station for."

⁶⁵ E.g. see Silverman (2002) which documents three murders in Brent in the late 1990s and Blacknet (2002) which documents the conviction of two men for attempting to murder a key witness in the most recent of these.

At least one of the offenders suggested that his early contact with the police had been very negative:

“The first time I got stopped by police, crime wouldn’t even have come into my mind. I went to the Post Office to go and get my Mum’s Giro, and they came and stopped me: ‘Whose is this then?’ [I was] ...a little boy and every ‘ting there, and I’m thinking, and the way they’re talking to me when I was young, do you know what I’m saying... it’s not right, man, it’s not right, it’s not right...”

Furthermore, a number of the offenders alluded to feeling that they had been stopped as a result of their race:

“I’ve been stopped three times a day, twice a day... People doing stuff and they say, normal black guy and let me just stop this guy, nothing else to do, probably the clothes I’m wearing, you know what I’m saying...”

“Cos of being black and selling drugs or something like that...”

“...armed police stopping us... four or five times a week... its stereotype, innit, obviously, you see a black man in a car, flashy car, blah, blah, blah, he’s not in a suit and tie and all of it, they’re gonna stop him.”

The irony in the case of the latter quote, however, is that that particular individual later described being involved in drug dealing, almost certainly his principal source of income. It illustrates the point that police stop and search activity, even when targeted at the right people, can serve to promote a negative view of the police when it does not result in arrests. In this regard, disrupting the activities of criminals may come at a high price in terms of public opinion, particularly in ethnic minority communities.

Finally, two offenders described how they ‘managed’ the process of police attention. One of the older offenders explained how he would avoid complications when stopped by the police by ensuring that his car was:

“...taxed, everything’s legit, [that way] if you do get tagged by the police you can get out of it. But if you got no tax on the motor, you’re going down the police station.”

Another made clear that he felt he had managed to deter the police from regularly stopping him, although it is not possible to verify his version of events:

“...they don’t do it no more, because what happened every time they saw me, I leave that station and I go to another station and I make a formal complaint, they have to send people down to your house to find out what your complaint is about and it goes on their record. So they know that every time they stop me, when they radio through and they hear my name, right, they say if you ain’t got nothing concrete, let him go.”

Summary:

The world inhabited by most of the offenders considered here is one in which the distinction between victim and offender is often indistinct. In the majority of the 15 cases, the institutions of family and education seem not to have provided a stable foundation on which to build the transition to adulthood and independence. At the same time, it will be seen that powerful social forces have drawn these men into the gravitational field of criminal life. Limited experiences of legitimate employment contrast with the opportunities presented in their communities from robbery, drug dealing and a range of other illegitimate means. Others have found themselves dealing with the ravages of dependent drug use. Mediated by exposure to criminal cultures, attitudes towards the police are negative, informal retribution is promoted and being labelled ‘a grass’ may bring with it very real risks both to the individual concerned and their family and friends. It is against this background that these offenders have committed crimes and been found guilty in relation to the Firearms Act.

3.5.3 Offending, Guns and Gun Crime

The background material presented above has already introduced the role of guns in these men's lives and provided a sense of the social and economic backdrop against which their own offending has taken place. Importantly, it has also introduced the role that firearms have played, albeit from a victim's perspective, and it has been seen that the majority of these offenders have themselves experienced gun crime, either in person or directed at their friends and families.

This section will now focus more closely on the role that guns have played in the offending of these individuals and their associates, considering

- their offences and criminal careers
- the firearms, including types and how obtained
- friends and acquaintances with guns
- the impact of others on the offenders (friends, family, police)
- more general attitudes towards firearms
- the contexts and motivations for obtaining firearms, including amongst associates

In relation to the above, important details concerning drugs markets in Brent will be introduced. This will include information on how the markets operate, how people are recruited into drug dealing, and the relationship between drug markets, violent crime and firearms.

Offences (and criminal careers):

The 15 had been convicted of offences ranging from possession of an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence to murder; two of the offences related solely to possession of a firearm or imitation firearm. The majority of offences occurred in the last 2 to 5 years, with one having occurred a good deal earlier. More specific details about the timing of the offences will not be provided, but at least one provides important historical context to the present day.

In no particular order, the 15 offenders interviewed had been convicted of the following offences, here summarised in general terms rather than the exact charges on which the offenders were convicted:

- Threatening unknown individuals in public with an imitation firearm in response to being threatened by them (BB gun)
- Firing an imitation at unknown member of the public (BB gun)
- Firing an airgun at unknown members of the public
- Firing shots at known individual
- Possession of a real firearm (2)
- Armed Robbery (business) (3)
- Armed Robbery (person) (2)
- Aggravated burglary (3)
- Murder

Five offenders reported that they were the only individual from a group of offenders to have been prosecuted. Two reported that they had not committed the offence for which they had been found guilty (although both admitted to being involved in other criminal activity so were not trying to represent themselves as blameless). Finally, five of the offenders denied that they were in possession of a firearm, in one case denying that a gun was present at all, and in the other four cases insisting that the firearm belonged to someone else and that they had played no role in its presence.

In many cases, they also discussed other offences they had committed, for some of which they had been prosecuted⁶⁶. Approximately seven of the offenders were what might be described as 'career criminals', that is to say that their offending behaviour was long-standing and constituted a source of income that supplemented any legitimate work. There is also some evidence within the 15 of specialisation (or perhaps preference), notably in relation to drug dealing, robbery and burglary, and two of the offenders had worked for more senior criminals, for example delivering goods for them. One had been involved in handling stolen firearms, for which he reported typically earning between £50 and £200 per gun depending on the gun's value.

Two further offenders admitted to specifically targeting drug dealers, something that will be given greater consideration below in relation to drugs and drug markets. The fact that the dealers they were targeting

⁶⁶ Note: Interviews with prisoners actively avoided and did not discuss unconvicted offences.

were known to have cash and drugs and to be unable to report victimisation to the police made them ideal targets:

"...sometimes we see it as, if we rob you, you're our next drug target and we rob you, you can't tell the police."

Interestingly, one of the offenders considered his criminality to be a rational response to what he perceived to be a dangerous environment within which he himself and family members were potential victims. They key here seems to have been to develop a reputation as someone not to be messed with:

"...instead of being a victim, a lot of people see it's better to be a suspect if you get my meaning... Say like, to give you an example, um, say there's stuff I didn't get involved in. If I didn't do certain stuff that I did when I was younger, maybe my Mum would have been robbed, my brother would have been robbed, and rer, rer, rer, so, I'll do certain things... to let other people know that that is a serious guy, leave him and his friends alone... a little bit of a reputation basically to protect me, [and my] family..."

"...what I'm saying is the kinder you are, the worse you are going to get it, basically."

The importance of this need for bravado and a reputation for dangerousness may be significant. If there is an expectation that individuals have to choose, as this man is implying, between being a victim or an offender, and a conspicuous offender at that, efforts to curtail criminality may be hampered by a self-sustaining process of victimisation. It raises the further question about how an individual may sufficiently earn a reputation as, or prove that he is "a serious guy". After all, seriousness is a relative term. In a criminal culture featuring firearms it is conceivable that the presence of guns may in fact fuel an escalation of symbolically 'serious' behaviour as individuals seek to maintain their reputations. In the case of those involved in criminal businesses such as drug dealing, this reputation may be even more significant because of the absence of recourse to the police on the one hand and the predatory behaviour of fellow criminals on the other.

Offender's Firearm:

Type

Classifying guns into real guns and imitations is over-simplistic. To illustrate, the following is a list of the types of guns described as being involved in the offences of the 15 offenders in the present study. In the case of one offence the offender claimed that although there had been a knife present he had not seen a gun.

- 3 "BB" guns (fires plastic or metal ball bearings, typically manufactured to replicate a well-known brand of live firing gun). At least one made of metal and modelled on a 9mm handgun.
- 1 airgun with pellets.
- 1 home made "one shot" pistol with two bullets.
- 1 converted replica 8mm handgun that had been "drilled through" without ammunition.
- 2 blank-firing 9mm handguns, both with blank-firing cartridges.
- 1 converted imitation handgun with 32 bullets – the offender claimed it could be switched between firing ball bearings or live ammunition by alternating between different barrels⁶⁷.
- 3 real and 1 probably real 9mm handguns.
- 3 real guns – no further details provided.
- 1 sawn-off shotgun.
- 1 .38 revolver with 15 bullets.

In other words, out of a total of 18 firearms relating to the 15 offences for which the 15 offenders were convicted, a maximum of 9 were 'real guns' with a further 2 confirmed converted imitations and a home-made firearm that could fire live ammunition.

In addition to these firearms, a number of the offenders interviewed indicated that they had previously owned other guns, including a number of BB guns and airguns, a "Magnum .45", a real gun that was otherwise not described, a "handmade gun with dum-dum bullets", a pump-action shotgun loaded with 9 cartridges and at least one imitation firearm.

⁶⁷ Note: inconsistencies in this offender's account call into question the veracity of this description.

The interviewees were also asked about other people they know (or knew) who own guns. The results were fairly unequivocal. Only three of the 15 reported that they did not know anyone who owned a real gun and two of them knew people who owned imitation firearms. Of the eight who stated the number of people they knew with real guns, responses ranged from four in the case of one of the younger offenders, through to 20⁶⁸. Those reporting knowing people with real guns typically reported between 10 and 15. For example:

“Fifteen... All of my friends has guns...”

“I know a lot of people in Brent who have got guns... More than 10. I could count more than 10.”

“About 20 people... [They have] real guns... handguns, everything really...”

“...at least 15... I know a lot of people who've lived doing sophisticated armed robberies...”

Where the types of real firearms owned by these other individuals were reported, they typically mentioned 8 and 9mm handguns and .38 and .44 revolvers; two also mentioned the Mac-10 9mm submachine gun. One offender reported that his peers preferred handguns because “shotguns are too big”.

At least at this stage it appears that real, that is to say made-for-purpose live-firing, guns are available, as are converted imitation or replica weapons. The presence of converted imitations would seem to suggest that made-for-purpose live-firing guns are not very widely available and that the UK's restrictive gun laws are having an impact. After all, why go to the effort of converting an imitation (or even manufacturing a gun from scratch) if the real thing is available?

Availability and Choice

Changing Criminal Culture

Considering how the firearms described above were obtained allows the introduction of material that points to important changes in the criminal culture in Brent with specific relevance to firearms availability. More generally this also applies to the question of the apparent demise of organised crime and the ascendancy of what has been termed variously chaotic, opportunistic and disorganised crime. This section also highlights important differences in the availability of imitation and real firearms.

One of the older offenders had a lengthy criminal career based largely in Brent that started in the early 1980s. Notwithstanding the possibility of rose-tinted spectacles, he describes the presence at that time of what he termed one of “the old firms”, that is to say a hierarchical criminal fraternity within which there were individual specialisms and a collective spirit:

“...the area was, it was all sewn up, it was like one big family really, there's different elements but we are all one big family. We used to defend each other. So everybody knows nearly everybody, and anybody that comes from outside, in those days, and tried to get in, or tried to hurt you, as one within, it wouldn't happen. Because they will get sorted straight away. Cos you had different elements, and you had the large element who would deal with certain things, and then you had those who was underneath who would deal with certain things, and it was like a family, really, you know. You see all this Mafia stuff and all that, but it's something along that line where it was just like one big family, and everybody had their little part to play... you've got the youngsters and you've got the juniors and you've got men... if they wanted a car stolen, to go and do a robbery, they would go and get the guy who was lower down the chain, who does the car stealing, and they would say, 'listen, go and get the car', and that was it. If you wanted a house burgled, you would come and say, 'listen, there is so and so at this house, we know because they're blah, blah, blah'. And they would leave that to you, because there was a trust and a bond there... we was united.”

Indeed, this appears to have been a group who looked out for each other in a number of ways:

“...when I first went to prison and come out, there was money there, there was clothes there. This was there for me, you know, but not any more, that's gone, those kind of things have gone.”

⁶⁸ One individual reported knowing “A good fifty people” with guns. However, it was felt that his account was unreliable.

One of the features of this firm was the existence locally of an armourer, described as “a bigger boy up in the firm”, who controlled the supply of guns within the local criminal fraternity:

“...in those days there was loads of guns about, loads and loads of guns, yea... there was a selection of guns, you could go to a certain person in the area and go in and he would go and take you into a room, and say ‘pick what you want’.”

For known faces in the criminal fraternity, this armourer meant that access to firearms was “very easy”. At the same time, however, he seems to have exerted a degree of informal social control in order to protect himself from unwanted attention:

“If you are known, you can ring him, go to him, and he would give you one [a gun]. But if you don’t know him, you can’t go to him and say ‘could you give me that’, cos it wouldn’t happen, you know. And certain people, he didn’t give it to ‘em anyway cos he knows those people are just hotheads that are around and that would draw attention back to him and didn’t want that, he was in the business.”

Another of the older offenders concurred with this history and described what he sees as a changed picture today:

“Gun culture, it’s always been about, but, it’s more blatant. People now have got guns in their back pocket. Just thinking about it, years ago it was undercover and only certain people have got ‘em. Youngsters can get guns now, it’s so easy to get guns now. Years ago, the 70s, you couldn’t get a gun, to get a gun you had to be a face. You had to be known, in the criminal underworld, to get your hands on a gun, but anyone can get a gun these days...”

Interestingly, the offender who described the armourer was able to obtain his firearm from this individual for free, perhaps indicating his status within the criminal fraternity at that time:

“I never paid for it, I just went and got it, I didn’t have to pay.”

He then went on to describe the demise of this firm’s hegemony with the arrival of new criminal groups and a new criminal culture that was prepared to directly challenge the status quo:

“[By the mid-1980s]...there was a lot of political Yardies coming in the area, yea, they’re opportunists, if they think they can intimidate you they would intimidate you... They don’t care who you are, the Yardies, they look for opportunities, so if they see you’re making a good living for yourself, they think they are entitled to come and get a piece of that. And they will come and try and take that by force... [At the same time] that’s when the sort of cocaine, crack business started to come into it...”

“...by about, say about ‘83, ‘84, things started to change rapidly, cos as I say the whole thing starts to turn to the rock [crack cocaine]. And then, it was dog eat dog really, everybody is after a penny... It’s all individual stuff, now.”

This theme of a changing criminal culture was picked up by a couple of the other older offenders, who described a change in attitudes away from criminal relationships based on respect:

“...it’s a different ball game, this is a different, the criminality is different now. You know, when you hear the old bods saying it’s not the same any more, they’re talking the truth, there’s no more respect, they’re talking the truth. I wouldn’t have come round your house before... Now, they don’t care...”

“I saw a massive cultural change which I really didn’t like, which I found very menacing.”

Indeed, this view was reflected by some of the younger offenders in their own comments about the criminal culture in Brent today:

“...this is dog eat dog, criminals rob other criminals, criminals rob civilians...”

“It’s every man for himself...”

Availability today

Against this background of a shifting criminal culture, it is perhaps unsurprising that the way in which criminals obtain firearms today in Brent also appears to have changed. Whilst criminal networks appear to continue to be critical in relation to the availability of firearms capable of firing live ammunition, none of those interviewed for the present research mentioned the presence of anyone with a store of weapons to be loaned out akin to the armourer described above.

In relation to the firearms used in the offences for which these offenders had been convicted, six of the offenders who had either real or converted firearms were able to provide information about the procurement of these guns. All were obtained through family or criminal contacts and most concurred that obtaining a gun was easy in Brent:

"[The converted firearm] I get it off my brethrens... Very easy... [I just] Get it. Borrowed it."

"My cousin came and called for me. Basically I gave him fifteen hundred and he went out... [he came back] in the morning [with the converted firearm]..."

"...the [converted] one that I got I got from Yardies... I just know 'em from around... It wasn't easy, they did piss me around a lot... it took them basically two weeks... they showed me about four guns before I took that one, you get me, like different ones, they showed me a Glock [which was £1000], they showed me some old fucked up revolver. I don't know, this thing was busted, mate... you couldn't ever pull the hammer back, it was messed up... [it was] scratched up like they tried to get the serial number off or something, that was scratched up, the handle, it was cracked, the crack, the whole thing was cracked... It looked like it had been thrown around, that's what it looked. I was told it wasn't used before... I paid five bills [£500] for the whole lot... The thing and a brush to clean it out [but no ammunition]."

"Family connections, people that he knew of... I think, he got it in Brent."

"I've got this on the spur of the moment, this gun I was arrested with. I was talking to [a friend], he said 'I've got a gun do you want it?' And I bought it off him... [It cost] A hundred pounds [with 15 bullets]... I think it was a dirty gun... he said if you want more I can get more... [just] get back in contact with him."

"I've seen machine guns out there, I've seen shotguns, handguns, hand grenades, anything. If you got the right connections you can get anything you want out there. You know..."

"That [handgun] was given to me ... He showed me how to take them apart, clean them and look after them... If I wanted to go into a place where I know who the people's gonna be, and I wanna take an Uzi with me, yes I can do that."

"I wanted something new, I don't want one that's been used in a murder before."

When asked about the availability of real (live firing) guns in Brent more generally, the responses given were slightly more equivocal, but nevertheless suggested at the importance of knowing the right people.

"...if I want a gun, then maybe I can drive through Harlesden, I can see somebody that I knew from before, and say yea, who's got that, can you get me that? And I got that."

"It depends, it depends on if you really want it bad enough, I suppose. But it is easy, I ain't gonna lie, it is easy to get."

"Maybe sometimes you might come across people who sell guns, maybe someone knows somebody who has got a gun and maybe they've killed somebody... and they want to get rid of the gun, they sell it to somebody... It's just, guns get circulated."

"...it's all about money innit. If you ain't got money, you ain't getting nothing. But I mean, nowadays, to get a *real* gun, it's a bit hard work. Because there's guns flying about but they are more replicas, they are replicas, really call it rebored, they're redone up and home-made shots... they're really a load of shit... you can't kill nobody with that shit... They jam and everything, you know."

"[For a 9mm handgun and ammunition] More like about a grand, grand easy, yea. About a grand brand new... not really out of a box. They say it's brand-new but it ain't got nothing on it, it ain't got no robberies or killed no-one, innit. You don't, you're never gonna get them out of a box."

The key here seems to be that if you know the right people – the implication being other reasonably serious criminals – then obtaining a firearm is a relatively straightforward process and there is a degree of choice. The fact, however, that some individuals, notably the younger offenders, are obtaining converted weapons suggests that made-for-purpose firearms are not available to everyone, either because of cost or because of restricted supply⁶⁹. The last quote presented above, from a well-informed middle-market drug dealer, also suggests that there is not a direct link between legitimate retailers and criminal markets such as Brent's. It also highlights a theme raised in other interviews, namely a concern with, or at least an awareness of, forensic evidence relating particular firearms to particular offences.

In relation to imitation weapons, the picture is much more transparent. Any offender wishing to obtain a highly accurate replica – be it a ball bearing gun, airgun or blank firer – for the purposes of, for example, committing robbery, can do so with ease, typically through an army surplus or outdoor sports shop (one in Wembley was mentioned) or market stall (Wembley Market was mentioned). The costs reported varied from £35 to £120. Aside from direct purchases by the offender, in one case a BB gun was stolen from a relative's teenage son, in another a member of the public was used to facilitate the purchase on behalf of the co-defendant of a young offender:

"I went to spend a weekend at one of my sisters' places... she's got a young son... I spent the weekend in his bedroom, and it was lying about in his bedroom and I saw it there, and I haven't got a clue why I picked it up, I just do not know."

"The geezer got an old man to buy it from a shop."

Perhaps reflecting the ease of obtaining these firearms, one offender referred to the airgun he was using as "like a toy", although it became clear that the police didn't see it that way when armed officers were deployed. The issue is that many of these replicas are sufficiently realistic to give a potential victim no reason to doubt the authenticity of the threat that they pose.

Impact on the offender of possessing a firearm:

The offenders were asked how it felt to be in possession of a firearm. Two types of answer were given, the first of which downplayed the firearm treating it as not of interest:

"I'm not impressed by them things... I know without the gun I was still the same person and the gun can go any time. And without that gun I can still do what I want. If I want to do it, I'll do it."

"It's just another weapon."

The second kind of answer was much more commonly expressed, stressing feelings of empowerment, either in terms of self-image or violent potential:

"...sometimes it did make me feel that I had *it*."

"It feel, like, it let you feel big, like. No man can't touch you no way, yea, cos you know if a man come up to you, could be easily – you don't have to shoot them... You just show 'em and then they're gone. Easy. Just let you feel like you have more power. Yea."

"It does give you power – feels like you've got power, you get me. Cos if wanted to I could go back to that Yardie and get that ammunition and take somebody's life with that ... It makes you feel, how can I say it, makes you feel like you, safe, nobody can touch you. Nobody can touch you."

⁶⁹ It is unclear how the market for illegal firearms operates in terms of the relationship between cost, supply and demand. It may be the case, for example, that less well known criminals have to pay a premium.

"...when I had the gun, I knew I could go and confront these people. Whereas if I didn't have the gun, I wouldn't have gone and confronted them knowing they have guns, so in a way, I felt secure going there, because I'm actually coming with the same thing..."

"OK, well it is power; you understand what I'm saying? ...I know that, like I said to you, if I brandished it, so if anybody is gonna trouble me and I brandish a gun, you know what I mean? And the way it used to lick as well, it sounds like a real gun, you understand what I'm saying?"

"Um, it felt nice. You know, you, like the dog's bollocks with a gun, you know."

One offender referred to both, suggesting that they may be different stages in the same process

"No, at first when you get one you feel like, yea, a big man, you know what I mean, you got a real gun and blah, you're not the boy, you're the man, you got power. When you get older, you get, it's nothing, it's not really, you know it's not about that, things like that happen around you, so it's not about that. It's not about that kind of life at all."

These feelings of empowerment may be something that campaigns aimed at changing attitudes about firearms could address. Could, for example, the possession of firearms could be presented as an indication of weakness, as something to be ashamed of? Ultimately, it may be that the feelings of needing a weapon over-ride these issues, but they may nevertheless merit further consideration.

Impact of others on the offender:

Finally, before getting into the details of the actual offences and the offenders' motivations, the offenders were asked about the impact of other individuals on their gun possession, focussing on individuals they were close to (parents, girlfriends, friends etc.) and the police.

Friends and Family

On the whole the reaction (either actual or anticipated) of friends was generally understanding or even positive, in sharp contrast to the reactions of parents, grandparents, girlfriends and wives. This perhaps suggests peer networks within which attitudes towards firearms are shared and consensual – or at least that is the expectation. Some examples of attitudes attributed to the friends of the offenders included:

"Saying you are big, like, yea you are big man."

"They would say if anything kicked off, or whatever. If anything happened with a couple of people, they would back down quicker than they normally would for me."

"...they knew. They understand what I was doing... They thought, well, they never really said anything, they couldn't. I was doing my own thing; I was earning more money than they've ever seen in their lifetime."

On the other hand, one of the offenders suggested that his friends would be divided on the subject:

"I know some people would look at it and say, 'Ah yea, that's tough, that's tough, that's, that's good', and other people would look at it and say, 'No, I know that's not you, what are you playing at?'"

With one exception, the reaction of family members, partners etc., was hostile:

"[My grandmother] She go nuts"

"[My parents] would have killed me, yea."

"...we really broke up because of that sort of thing"

One offender highlighted his mother's plight, presenting a picture of a parent who was resigned to the criminality of her son but did her best to try and protect him:

"...she's not involved in what I do, she doesn't agree with it, but she just told me to be careful... that's as much as she can do... she told me like, not to go out, stay low, she doesn't like certain people around me just in case I get myself in trouble and shit like that, you know."

A question for anyone tackling attitudes towards guns has to be how best to do so and whether there is any mileage to be gained in directing efforts at those around the offenders in question. In the case of the offenders questioned for this research, it appears that many were aware of the likely negative attitudes among family members but that had not had an impact on their offending. By contrast, peer groups appear to have been supportive, or at the very least not actively negative. If peer groups are the primary attitudinal reference point for these offenders, they may be the group most effectively targeted to try and change offender attitudes.

Fear of the Police

Of the 11 offenders who were asked about it, seven said that they had been afraid of being stopped by the police while four insisted that they had not, either because they weren't afraid of the police or, in one case, because it hadn't occurred to him that he would get caught:

"Yea, I didn't think I'd get fucked for it basically."

It may be significant that this individual had a 'BB' imitation handgun that had been used recreationally with friends, suggesting an immature attitude focussed on the symbolic value of the gun rather than its potentially incriminating role.

Among those who expressed a fear of the police in relation to their firearm, at least two indicated that this manifested itself in them not carrying their guns in public, although not in them giving up their guns altogether:

"I never used to carry it in the street with me. I used to leave it somewhere. When I need it I go and get it. I never used to carry it with me. I never used to carry like things with me. I never used to, like, because of getting pulled up..."

"I wouldn't carry one; I don't wanna get nicked with it as well, like."

On the other hand, three offenders stated that they were not concerned about the police, in one case because he was positively at the point of wanting to get arrested, his drug addiction having got the better of him:

"I wasn't thinking about police stopping me. That wasn't in my mind... Cos since my father died, like I haven't got no fear, no fear at all, no fear... I'm not scared of police, no."

"I'm never gonna be afraid of them. I've got friends, cousins who've been in jail for gun crime. Police and that don't scare me. Jail and that, they don't scare me... there's lots of people I know in jail. It would be just like a Day Centre, like a Youth Club... So, either way I win. Cos when I come out I'm still gonna be the same person."

"I was hoping it was gonna come to this big climax where like, and that would be the end of it. I mean, when I was finally arrested I was quite relieved. Cos I mean I was in such a state, you know, I really needed some serious help, or I needed to be put down. One of the two."

On balance it appears that an awareness of the possibility of being apprehended with a gun is a deterrent in relation to the routine carrying of firearms, which has to be seen in a positive light. On the other hand there appears to be a minority who will not be deterred. At least one of those offenders, however, was stopped in possession of a firearm and received a custodial sentence as a result, suggesting that those who do fear the police have some cause for their concern. It might be worth considering publicising such arrests and prosecutions more prominently with a view to deterring the minority who carry their guns in public.

Attitudes Towards Firearms:

With a view to probing their moral position on firearms, the offenders were asked the question "Is there ever a time when it is acceptable to carry a gun?" Of the 13 who answered, seven gave negative

answers and the remaining six gave qualified answers that suggested there might be contexts when they would consider firearm possession acceptable.

Those who gave assuredly negative answers, including two armed robbers who had used imitations, focussed on the potential harm of firearms and in one case stressed the fact that if someone carries a gun they will eventually find themselves in a situation where they will use it:

"...it's dangerous, innit."

"No, of course it isn't, no. Jesus Christ, no. If you are gonna carry a gun, eventually you'll use the bloody thing. It's like carrying a knife. Eventually, if you carry a knife, eventually you will use it because you've been put in a situation, because you've been be put in a situation simply because you're carrying a knife. It's the same with a gun."

On the other hand, meanwhile, the positive answers focussed on situations when someone might be at risk, whether because they are being threatened or because of the business they are in. Without a hint of irony, one of the aggravated burglars even cited Tony Martin, the Norfolk farmer who shot two burglars who broke into his house, as a role model.

"It depends, innit. If you don't trust the guy and you think that your life's in danger, then of course there's a reason, you have every right to carry a gun. Cos I ain't losing my life just because of some law."

"No, not to carry a gun, to have a gun in your house, for your own protection. Like that farmer who shot the burglar... Even though I'm a burglar, I rate him... No, not carrying it, you're not carrying it cos then that's too much shit, you get me. You can walk down the street, know you've got heat on you and the geezers screwing you out, and you could just flip and shoot him... that's stupidity."

"Only if it's necessary. If you know that your life is in danger, then by all means. I will not tell someone, 'no, don't walk with it', if you know that you're gonna, you might be killed."

"If your life's in danger and you have got no choice, got to protect yourself, then that's the only reason I would, that's the only reason. I think, right, if your life's in danger, you know someone is out to kill you. You know the police can't protect you, cos they can't protect you 24 hours a day, you're not like special to them or nothing. You can go and tell them someone's doing something, but they're not gonna be round you 24 hours a day. So, I think if you need to protect yourself, and it is only for protection not to threaten, you gotta do what you gotta do, really, innit."

"Yea, if you're gonna go meeting somebody that you don't really and truly know and you're carrying a parcel of money or you're carrying a parcel of drugs. You'd better go prepared."

There may be little that the authorities can do to change attitudes relating to individuals who believe it is acceptable to carry a gun if they are involved in the drugs business. On the other hand, however, there are clearly some very negative perceptions about the degree of protection that the police and other agencies can offer those in fear of their lives. A question that arises is the degree to which the police and other agencies can or will afford protection to those known to be criminals. If a drug dealer's life is in danger, can he go to the police and seek protection or must he fend for himself? As with the more general discussion above of offenders as victims, the distinction between victim and offender may become blurred and it is not clear that mainstream services can cope. The compromise may be to afford protection to the drug dealer in order to avoid serious violence, but whether that is compatible with the law is another matter.

Contexts and Motivation for Gun Possession and Use:

This section presents evidence based on the offenders' descriptions both of their own offences and others that they know about personally, for example friends or associates who have carried or used guns. It also presents evidence relating to why the offenders think people in Brent more generally carry guns.

Immature / Juvenile / Irresponsible Behaviour

Several offences were described relating to what might be variously understood as immature, juvenile or irresponsible behaviour where it appears that the offenders either were not aware that their behaviour was criminal or had got themselves into situations they had not anticipated. These cases illustrate the way that imitation BB guns and airguns that are readily available may come to be used in ways that ultimately may be branded as “gun crime”, at least for the purposes of recording crime and publishing crime statistics.

One of the younger offenders reported a trend when he had been at school for taking BB guns to school, where those involved would,

“...shoot at cars going by on their windows. And as soon as we had all fired we would just sort of duck.”

He claims that he got his own BB gun (an imitation 9mm handgun) in order,

“...to show off to my friends, cos they all had like BB guns, well not all of them, two or three of my mates, right... they all had plastic ones and I thought yea this is a metal one, this is a big boy one.”

Interestingly, it appears that the school was aware that pupils were bringing such guns to school, but in responding to this in a relatively passive manner had given the impression that such behaviour was not serious⁷⁰:

“...one or two of them have been caught by the teachers and they haven’t been expelled. They’ve just taken them, the teachers have taken it and said ‘tell your mum and dad to come in at the end of the year to collect it’, that’s all they said. And so like, then other friends started to get them cos they thought it’s not a big thing.”

One individual interviewed took to carrying his BB gun with him in public, seemingly without drawing a distinction between what might be acceptable amongst his friends and in public more generally. There is also a suggestion in his account that he was trying to impress a girlfriend. On the occasion of his offence he was approached and threatened by two men who he believes mistook him for someone else:

“I knew they were hurling abuse at me, like, cos I could hear them... and I started shouting at them, and basically we started provoking each other, and I got provoked to the extent where I took the firearm out of my waistband and said I would have to shoot...”

There was no suggestion in the offender’s account of what happened, or in his life more generally, that he was carrying the imitation handgun (which he otherwise played with as a toy) for any reason other than the misplaced perception that he was able to impress his friends and girlfriend by doing so. Placed in a position where he clearly felt threatened, producing the imitation firearm enabled him to respond to this threat, as his aggressors were unable to tell whether the ‘gun’ was real or not.

Two other cases, one relating to a BB gun and one to an airgun, further illustrate the interaction between apparently innocuous guns and crime when teenagers “mucking about” and “having a laugh” end up being arrested and charged with offences relating to the Firearms Act.

“I was walking back from my friends. There was a woman there. We was, he was, we were both playing around with a [BB] gun. Something happened; it hit her in the eye. She thought it was me, and she was trying to come to me I told her it weren’t me. She didn’t want to listen. I told her don’t touch me again, you touch me again and... I’ll kill you.”

“[We were] Just playing around with a pellet gun [airgun]... [firing it at] random people. Just thought it was funny, innit.”

⁷⁰ It should be noted that Brent Council’s Youth Crime Prevention Officer, who works closely with the Education Department and schools, challenges this version of events. She argues that it is very unlikely that a school would not at least impose a fixed term exclusion for a pupil bringing a BB gun to school. There is nothing, however, in the account of this offender to suggest that his version of events may be fictitious. It would be interesting to know more about how schools deal with BB guns, which are essentially marketed as toys. For example, would they treat a brightly coloured plastic BB gun differently from a highly accurate metal replica BB gun? Such an approach could explain the apparent inconsistency between official policy and practice.

The latter case illustrates an interesting feature of the current laws around the sale of airguns, namely that although they can only be used on private land it is not necessary for the purchaser to prove that he or she has access to such land. In the case described, the youths firing the airgun at members of the public were doing so from the window of an upper-floor garden-less flat. The consequence of this behaviour was a visit from armed police officers some time later:

“The gun squad went in there and they knew where everyone was, like they kicked in the door... They went straight into his room. They went into his sister’s room to comfort her. They must have been watching the house for a long time.”

These incidents raise a number of issues in relation to present debates around gun crime. Firstly whether it is appropriate that highly realistic replica and imitation guns are readily available to individuals who may then use them in immature and irresponsible ways in which there is an ambiguity about the threat that they pose. They may be non-lethal, but from the perspective of the victims there is no way of knowing that, yet the law is concerned only with lethality, not perceptions. Secondly, whether it is appropriate that individuals can purchase airguns without having access to suitable locations at which they can be used. Thirdly, whether in fact the issue is one of age, that is to say that ‘boys will be boys’ and therefore greater measures need to be taken to prevent teenagers from accessing these weapons, because they will inevitably use them in irresponsible ways. Fourthly, whether there is a public education gap relating to the fact that these behaviours will be taken very seriously and will in some cases result in criminal records. And indeed, fifthly, whether the open sale of BB guns and airguns sends the wrong message about the implications of irresponsible use – particularly in built up urban areas.

Peer Pressure

Leading on from a discussion about irresponsible juvenile behaviour, one case illustrates the fact that within some circles there may be peer pressure placed on young people to prove to their friends and associates that they conform by carrying a gun.

“Um, what happened is, I meet up with these guys, they are bigger guys and they are walking around with guns... they were saying that’s true I was small, yea. They were saying like ‘you’re not a big man’, like ‘you can’t walk around with a gun like us, cos you’re just a youth’. So I says ‘all right then, give me, I will walk, I will show you lot’, saying ‘yea, I can do it, I can do exactly what you guys do’... basically what drove me to doing it is peer pressure. Peer pressure.”

Another account suggests that guns have become something of a fashion accessory, referring in particular to the ‘thug’ image, in the present context ‘thug’ being a street social/criminal construct rather than the more traditional ‘hooligan’ definition:

“It’s because before it was more of a phase, now it’s just like a fashion accessory, it’s become more of a necessity... it’s just like with buying clothes, I suppose. Like Nike will bring out one pair of trainers, someone will buy it and everybody else will start buying it, it’s become a craze now. Like you’re not nobody unless you don’t have them. That’s the way some people see it, or that’s what thug’s supposed to be like, you ain’t done this or you ain’t got that, you are nobody.”

In the context of the interviews presented here and in conversations with other individuals in Brent, it has become apparent that there is, amongst certain groups in Brent and elsewhere, a powerful sub-culture of what is described variously as being “on road” and a “thug” (often pronounced ‘tug’). Fundamentally this appears to involve a rejection of mainstream conformity in favour of a street-level criminal culture that reifies money, crime and ‘respect’ and rejects education, legitimate employment and state institutions such as the police:

“...thug’s a way of life, it’s not a look at all, it’s how people actually react to certain things, do things to get by in life.”

This “on road” culture is reflected in part in a rather less direct form of peer pressure that concerns the perceived need to behave ostentatiously. As one of the offenders interviewed put it:

“...it’s everybody wanting to get everything so quickly... everyone wants to be gangster number one! ...People don’t care how they make money; it’s just how you’re flushing, how you’re moving,

how you dress, how you do things. But if you've got nice cars, yea, people don't care how you got that. If you got that, then you're someone, you get me."

This highlights what appears to be a fundamental cultural attitude shared by most of the younger offenders – the aspiration to immediate wealth and conspicuous consumption. It is an issue that cuts across much of the material presented here, be it in relation to robbery, burglary or drug dealing or any of the other ways that people are trying to make money. At least in part, this may reflect the tension between high material expectations and experiences of relatively poorly paid legitimate employment.

"Where I live in North West London, as you know man, it's just not really upper class, it's just people going around there surviving, they're seeing round the corner West End, people wearing nice clothes. Then people see nice clothes then it starts the money thing, then cars then, know what I'm saying, ... Then people get robbed."

"I don't have a problem with my friends selling drugs... Their mums can't afford to buy them the things that they want, so there is a reputation to live up to, there's an expectation to live up to, so they have to do that on road to make their money to get some."

"...people are trying to make as much money as they can, to live a better life. And they see a lot of things happen on TV, all these famous people, rap stars, gold, big cars, houses, they all want it... but everyone ain't got the same means of getting it, so they are going about getting it in other ways."

"...the main issue of it is money. Sometimes as a young black male, sometimes you want things and you know that you haven't got the money to provide for yourself, so you go out there and you look for other options of getting money."

In relation to the latter quote, it will be seen below that 'other options' are readily available, most notably in relation to the drugs market in which some young men are getting involved from their mid-teens. As one of the offenders interviewed put it,

"Some people ain't gifted in the brain or gifted in certain things. They can't make money that way. They can only make money by doing this [dealing drugs]. So they have to do it."

Drugs and Drug Markets

Perhaps the most consistent theme to emerge from this research is the link between drugs markets and firearms, although it needs to be stressed that this is a nuanced relationship and not simply a question of turf wars. More than that, however, it is apparent that the drugs markets in Brent feature in the lives of almost all of the men interviewed and those of their friends and associates. As indicated above, 13 out of the 15 offenders interviewed had either directly dealt drugs themselves or were closely associated with individuals who dealt drugs.

This section describes this link between drugs and guns and also presents evidence about the way that at least some of the drugs markets in Brent operate. The latter includes evidence on attitudes about drug dealing, recruitment into drug dealing, the types of markets present and how those markets operate. There is also a brief description of life in a crack house (dealing house). The drugs concerned are cannabis (in its various forms), powder and crack cocaine, and, to what appears to be a lesser extent, heroin.

Some important features of drug markets include⁷¹:

- Because drugs are illegal:
 - They are highly valuable.
 - The drugs business is largely cash-in-hand or uses informal credit arrangements without legally enforceable contracts.
 - Dealing drugs is attractive to, amongst others, those who are less deterred by the sanction of a criminal record (such as those who feel they have few legitimate prospects or who already have a criminal record). Those involved in the legitimate economy are generally deterred.

⁷¹ E.g. see Goldstein (1985) and Jacobs (1999 and 2000).

- Those in the drugs business have no recourse to legal risk management, protection and insurance strategies, such as calling the police, legally-enforceable contracts, electronic money transfers (such as debit and credit cards), credit agencies and insuring their goods, hence:
 - Drug dealers are targeted by other criminals who know that the dealers will have cash and valuable commodities and that no formal sanctions will result.
 - Drug dealers need to protect themselves in informal ways.
 - Threats of or actual violence may be used to enforce debts.
- Drugs such as cocaine, crack and heroin are addictive, therefore:
 - Once demand has been established it is self-sustaining and markets form.

Attitudes Concerning Drug Dealing

A number of the offenders referred to the allure of drug dealing in terms of the potential material rewards that could be earned, in several cases highlighting a social learning process whereby other successful drug dealers flaunted their wealth in public. There were also several references to the normality of drug dealing and at least one offender described how easily he got involved while another stressed how hard it is to get out of crime.

"...everyone's really selling drugs or doing something nowadays, innit."

"I got involved in the scene like, I got involved because it was so easy, it's so easy, you understand what I'm saying, to get involved. It's so easy, it's so, so easy, man."

"It's very hard to get out because it's like, you used to rob people, you used to do this, you're a gunman, you used to shoot, drug dealing. You can't think, 'right I'm gonna quit and I'm gonna work in McDonalds', cos if someone robbed me, then I said, 'I'm working in McDonalds' and that, there would be trouble."

One of the offenders, referring to his peer social group, highlighted the centrality of drug dealing to their lives. In doing so, he also described a common view amongst the younger offenders, namely that drug dealing was almost necessary in order to be able to earn money and purchase goods that would otherwise be beyond the means of the offenders and their families:

"You know what it's about, is, it's drugs out there, that's it, all they do is sell drugs... They just sell drugs to get by... Skunk, crack, heroin whatever is about... They are hustling innit, whatever people are feeling they got it... I don't have a problem with my friends selling drugs. They are doing it because the Police aren't going to buy them the things they want. Their mums can't afford to buy them the things they want, so there is a reputation to live up to... so they have to do that on road to make their money to get some."

In doing so, he described his (officially economically deprived) area as:

"...a goldmine, to make money..."

Another saw the prospects of earning money through drug dealing as something that can "better you":

"...depending on who you work for, it betters you I suppose. I know it's not the right thing to do, but sometimes it does help. Cos if you know that you have a regular income, some people rely on that money, to do certain things."

In relation to the visible signs of economic success related to drug dealing, several individuals stressed the appeal of getting involved:

"...if you get a drug dealer, right, he has made money, this and that, you are going to think I want to do drug dealing, this guy has got a jeep, right, this guy's got this, I want to do drug dealing...we easily get influenced. It's like you need willpower to say to yourself, right, no I'm not gonna do this."

"People want their money, boy. People are hungry. Some of the kids are hungry now cos they have seen what they can achieve without going to school, they think it's all right. They say I don't

want to go college or school. Look what my cousin can do. See my cousin makes a thousand pounds a week, they think it's all right, but they live – in their area it's normal, it's a way of life."

This included not only those yet to get involved in the drugs market, but also some individuals at the lower levels aspiring to move up the ladder:

"You start off small, you start off maybe on an eighth [of an ounce] or something... yea, weed, a bit of weed, and then you start getting older and you start seeing people with nice cars and that and getting that, and you're driving that car... 'Ah, he sells this and blah, blah, blah'. And you are young, you are not really thinking of the consequences or whatever, you just want to get that, you're like 'I wouldn't mind a nice car like that'... You're 16, 17, then, you just really want to move on..."

Types of Market

The overall picture presented is of a semi-closed market within which dealing predominantly happens using mobile phones and pre-arranged meeting places:

"...you go up the road, leave it somewhere, leave it in a phone box, walk past, get the person walk past, see how much they want, get the money, it's in the phone box."

"...sit by the phone and the phone will ring and someone will ring me and say bring me three tens of crack and four tens of heroin. And you just go downstairs, or wherever it is, wherever they tell you to meet them..."⁷²

"...it was phones, yea it was a phone thing at that time... it was my phone but like we was all in it. The phone was so busy, I couldn't do it on my own, it was like, they weren't really working for me they used to move my stuff. If I fell asleep, whatever I had left, they will get rid of it."

The consensus was that crack houses (dealing houses) were old news, or at the very least only represented a small fraction of the market:

"That's old man... Only them small timers deal like that, man. Small timers in that area are selling drugs from their house... People are much more smart than that. Everything's different, everything's closed up now. The police have done that, they have made it worse for themselves by nicking too much people, stupid little people. That's just made older people be wary of them. That's it. That's cos the little kids that dealt, they get caught. And when they get caught, yea, they [the Police] think, 'Yea, I've taken a drug dealer off the streets'. They cleaned up the streets. But no they haven't. Only someone like me's going to take that boy's place, and make the same money that he was making. That's it. They should get away from wasting their time on the little drug dealers out selling little bits. Get the people that supply the big drug dealers. If they get the person who is dealing with the kids, how are the kids gonna get it? You can't get no more drugs if there's no more big dealers."

"People don't do it [crack houses] no more. Not up this way."

Nevertheless, there appear to be certain areas where the markets are located. One offender described a block on his estate, and went on to describe the way that the police are dealt with, for example when conducting test purchase operations:

"There's a block [on my estate]...it's a block for drugs, for drug dealers. The police try and come in the block, but they don't get no-where. People know who the police are and who ain't. They know who's undercover. And if they think you're undercover they'll tell you to smoke it in front of them."

One implication of this spatial organisation appears to be a degree of territoriality in a number of locations:

"...the boys that hang out, they won't let anyone into that area. Say if you came into the area and tried to sell drugs and make money, you wouldn't be allowed to. You would get robbed."

⁷² A 'ten' of heroin is a £10 bag of heroin.

"... this other man came to us... and said 'look, if you're selling, you can't sell stuff here full-stop... I've got all of these boys under locks'."

"...if you was to go into another person's area where you know they are doing that, they're doing that kind of line of business, then he will take over your business and yea, there will be conflict. But if you started up by yourself and... you're not stepping on anybody's turf or you're not taking away anybody's customers, then you'll [be left alone]."

This behaviour does not, however, appear to have controlled competition and as a consequence cocaine prices are reported to have fallen resulting in dealers diversifying into heroin to supplement their earnings:

"Before it was like, it was like, people didn't really get involved with brown [heroin], but now everyone's doing brown, I think brown is actually making more money than white stuff [cocaine]... It's moving a lot faster... I think so much people are dealing white, in one area, its too much competition. The prices, because the prices have dropped so much, I think everyone's trying to drop their prices to get more customers. By the time you get an ounce, and might break the ounce down, you make about a hundred pound [profit] off an ounce, it's a fucking joke."

Dealers

At the most junior level, several of the offenders indicated that drug – typically cannabis – dealing took place in the context of the school environment:

"...in school... I used so sell about £20 worth or £40 of drugs and make £5 or something."

"It [dealing] went on at school."

Another described close friends of his dealing drugs at the age of 16:

"I know people less than that, 16, like four of my friends yea... they've been there from back in the day, they're 16, one of them sells weed. The others sell crack and heroin... on the estate."

This youthfulness is reflected in the comments of one of the younger offenders about the profile of who deals cocaine in his part of Brent:

"...the majority of people selling white [cocaine] around here is young black men. Like boys my age and older, that's...born here, born and bred here."

Several of the offenders provided descriptions of how people get involved in the drugs market in the first place:

"...the majority of the time it's people trying to find someone to work for them."

"... say if I wanted someone to work for me, and he was new to the game, whatever, and he didn't know how, they'll set you up properly. They make you love them so that they make it look like they've done such a big favour for you so you will shoot people for them if they ask, if it came down to it. That's what they want, their soldiers. That's what the older people want. They'll give you, you could come to them and have nothing, be broke, they'll give you a phone that rings, people ringing on it, they'll give you money, they'll give you everything to start off with, 'til you get on your feet, and you'll be selling drugs for yourself. And then doing that, that has gained your loyalty to them... Or they'll give you a phone and say to you, yea, this phone is for crack, or crack and heroin and then [they] would say that eighth [of an ounce] of both of them, here's an eighth of crack and an eighth of heroin, chop it up into little stones, and then sit by the phone and the phone will ring and someone will ring me and say bring me three tens of crack and four tens of heroin. And you just go downstairs, or wherever it is, wherever they tell you to meet them, they tell him to meet me somewhere, and you have to deal with it, if you're gonna get paid..."

Another corroborated this description of the way that patronage and loyalty might be put to use by the more senior criminals:

"...you got older guys telling them, 'Don't worry man, nothing won't happen to you man, come out and shoot him.' Do you understand? ...They're looking up to this guy because he's got some money, he's got some gold on him, he's got a ride or people know him, he must be telling the truth."

In terms of how the drugs were being supplied to dealers, one of the offenders described having received drugs in the past while another had dealings with what appears to have been more organised criminals from whom he was buying "ready washed" crack cocaine:

"Big boys, really... They see your status, you know, you're not one of the geezers who's going to knock them, they see that you're business-wise, like, you're not really into ripping no-one off or anything like that, you're a good businessman, like, you know what you're doing, when they talk to you, or whatnot, and you need to meet people."

He goes on to describe the fact that they were keen to sell him drugs on credit, a situation he was keen to avoid:

"...some of the buyers that I used to get it off, like, they used to want, cos I used to get rid of it quite quickly, they used to want to give me more than I was taking, and I didn't want that. I don't like people phoning me, like, for their money, I've got my own money to buy it. I don't need to be phoned every second, like."

Targeting Dealers

At least four of the offenders described the intentional targeting of drug dealers by other criminals. The first stressed the need to be armed:

"We were going to go into a drug dealer's house... Even though he's a white drug dealer, you don't know if they still got straps [guns] there. He might have a strap there. So, we went to a bit of trouble because we thought it was worth it, d'you know what I mean. Likely to be goods. We were going to get probably a nice bit of money out of it... So, I had the strap."

Another highlighted the fact that, in targeting dealers, he and his associates knew that they were minimising the risk of the police being involved:

"...sometimes we see it as, if we rob you, you're our next drug target and we rob you, you can't tell the police."

He also stressed the fact that in order to minimise the risk of informal retribution by the dealer they had robbed, the key was to use a sufficient level of intimidation:

"...it's intimidation. I intimidate you to the point where you can give me a nine bar [a 9oz/quarter kilo quantity of drugs], all of your worth and your money, and that leaves you flat broke and means that you're bankrupt, you have to start from scratch. If you can do that, then I have intimidated you enough."

In a third case, a cycle of violence initially related to drugs market activity when a member of the offender's family was the victim of an aggravated burglary targeting the relative as someone who would have drugs and cash. The offender intervened, intending to threaten the aggressors to the extent that they left his relative alone. In the event "it got out of hand":

"...what happened to my [relative] was reported to the police and they didn't want to know. So when the people came back the second time, I took the law into my own hands... I had to defend my family... it ended up that I killed someone."

Finally, one offender who was involved in dealing described problems relating to jealousy within the small group of which he was the senior member, suggesting that where co-operation does exist it is sometimes extremely fragile:

"They don't wanna go out and get their own. They look at you and you set them up and they hang around with you, and then, they talk in that way, you're making lots of money or whatever,

and they talk shit, robbery and he's got this and that, and these are people you have known like for ages. You help them, you gave them money, you've given them things, you have put them on their feet. Because you're doing some good, it's just jealousy... They don't wanna get out of there and hustle like you hustled. They wanna come and try and get what you got, but the majority of the time they don't, but sometimes people do."

Dealers Protecting Themselves

On the basis that drug dealers are targeted by other offenders, it is not surprising that they take measures to protect themselves. One of the offenders described his associates as dealing with fairly large quantities of drugs and therefore needing to be armed with firearms in order to protect themselves:

"If something does go wrong, it's not in a legal way. They can't go asking for legal advice to help them, or the police to come and help them or the insurance companies. If someone comes to take your things, you have got to defend you, it's you by yourself. No-one but you, you're by yourself out there."

"Yea, they're dealing with big drugs. They're dealing with a lot of drugs. They don't wanna get, they're not taking a chance of someone coming and taking that cos they're taking a risk of going to jail."

Indeed this need for drug dealers to be armed, or at least to have access to firearms, was generally treated as accepted practice:

"...every big drug dealer is most likely to have a strap [gun] or have a strap man, to do it for you, get me, or someone to hold it for you, that's how they do things."

"[Dealers own guns] To protect their turfs, yea... Selling drugs, someone might wanna come and rob you, somebody might wanna rob you of your drugs money or your drugs..."

"They have a gun, they have it by their bed... some of them sell crack... They need it for protection."

"If you're selling drugs, I'd say, 'Yea, brother, yea, good on you, good on you mate [for having a gun]'. Cos if you've got your stuff, people *are*, not they might, you *are* going to, most probably somebody is going to probably going to jump on you and take your stuff.... If you're working, you get your own team, you gotta a little show where everybody made your money, you are, buy a little Rolex, yea bruv, driving in the area, yea, you are going to get jumped on."

"People who are selling heroin and crack, they protect themselves. People who are buying heroin and crack, they protect themselves, because it's a rough, rough situation. If you are going to buy a portion of heroin or cocaine or something, they are armed, because they are dealing with money from you, and this is what's going on."

"The majority of drug dealers out there, they got access to guns, they can get access to guns, so when you're in the criminal lifestyle, you always know someone who knows someone who knows someone, if you get my point."

"If you're in the drugs game, you *have* to be armed... No two ways about it... because look, you've got man that is selling drugs and then you've got like a team of, 'I'm not going through all that selling drugs, I'm just gonna rob the dealers'... OK, and they're the ones you have to watch out for."

"They can't phone the police and say, 'Yea someone just put a gun to my face and took all my drugs'. You're going to jail for drugs. Know what I'm saying. So they have to do it themselves, which is in the street, in the street which is to go and get your gun and do your stuff."

Taking the descriptions of criminals targeting drug dealers, and drug dealers arming themselves for their own protection, it is clear that there is a link between drugs and guns in Brent. What is more, it may be the case that a vicious circle, or even a form of arms race, may arise as a result of these predatory-defensive behaviours. The question that then arises is whether anything can be done to influence this

cycle of violence? Certainly, eliminating drug dealing would solve it, but it is generally accepted that this will not happen. But are there other ways of preventing the targeting of drug dealers, reducing or even eliminating the need for firearms?

Debts and Threats

The description above is not to say that there isn't also violence initiated by those involved in drug dealing. In the absence of legally binding contracts, those involved in drugs markets have few options to ensure informal contracts are honoured beyond building up trust over a period of time. In some markets, notably the Mafia-controlled heroin market in New York⁷³, the model has been for criminal relationships based on reputation, patronage and respect. However, such a system does not seem to exist in Brent, at least not at or close to street level.

One of the offenders interviewed had committed an armed commercial robbery in order to try and repay a debt he had incurred with some drug dealers from whom he had previously bought cannabis. His problems started when an industrial accident stopped him working and earning money:

“...my crimes stem from, what can I say, hanging with a drug dealer, yea, and at the end of the day, [I] couldn't pay because I had an accident at work and that's where it all started from... I was looking for means to stop the threatening, as in doing crime to get money...”

The people to whom he owed money had used a number of strategies to threaten him, including attacking him, firing shots at him, and then targeting his family:

“...these people actually pulled a gun on my missus.”

Interestingly, neither the police nor courts were ever told about this intimidation and violence, the offender in question fearing recriminations in terms of being labelled a grass in the case of the police, and believing that the court would not be interested in the motivation for his offending:

“I don't think the Court don't want to hear what's happening to me or what's happening to my family anyway, you understand what I'm saying. All it is, that I commit a crime, yea, I commit a crime, I pleaded guilty to the crime I committed and I went to prison.”

One of the other offenders reported being present when one of his associates had fired shots into a party at someone who owed him money in relation to drug market activity:

“I've been standing next to somebody who is firing a gun outside a party. Firing it *in* the party... The person has owed him money and it's like, avoiding each other. It came to the point where, the person I was with spotted him first, and decided to take aim for target practice.”

In the case of the former example, it would appear that greater confidence in the police might have averted the crimes that arose as a consequence of the initial debt. Whether the individual in question would have actually wanted to take part in a witness-protection scheme or similar is a moot point, however, implying as it would family disruption and so on. The latter case illustrates the fact that in some cases, shootings in public may be 'drug related', albeit it is not clear whether the intention was to actually injure or kill or merely intimidate the intended target. The social audience present may also have been significant, the shots perhaps being a statement of status to a wider audience than any one individual.

Dependency

One of the offenders in particular described his dependent drug use and its relationship to his offending. At a point when he had recently relapsed onto heroin after a clean period of many years, he was forced to leave the house in which he had been living with a friend:

“...I was out on the street, and from that day onwards my life just spiralled completely out of control. I had a heroin habit. I met an old girlfriend from some years before; she was a fucking crack addict. My life then became heroin, crack, and as I say things just spiralled into such a – absolutely, totally out of oblivion. And I had no work, I had no money coming in, people were avoiding me, I was just really in trouble... I went to places I never knew existed, you know.”

⁷³ Blumstein (1995) cited by Bowling (1999: 540)

Having obtained an imitation handgun – in fact a toy BB gun – he reached the point where he committed a series of armed robberies, targeting soft venues such as shops. The chaotic and disorganised nature of his offending is quite apparent:

"The robberies, the robberies were absolutely, I mean they were so pathetic, I mean, embarrassingly pathetic. I mean, it was just shop robberies, you know, there was no planning, there was nothing, nothing at all. I mean, I was driving down the road and I would see an opportunity of a shop, there was nobody in the shop, I would just walk in and say 'give me the money'. And that was all it was... Then I would go off, make a phone call, buy my heroin, and go wherever I could go and smoke it, until it was gone then go and do the same fucking thing again. There was no long-term plan; it was just nothing at all."

What is also apparent is the depth of this individual's problems:

"I mean, I would have been quite happy to have walked into one of them shops, robbed the shop, walked out and if a policeman in the street had just shot me, I would have been quite content with that."

It is not clear whether greater access to drug treatment service might have forestalled this series of robberies, but certainly that is a possibility. The question is whether more can be done to ensure, firstly, that individuals such as this know about the treatment options available to them, and secondly, that they feel confident in accessing help at a sufficiently early stage.

Life in a Crack House

Over a number of years the term 'crack house' has entered the drug market vernacular. Latterly such venues are also being referred to as a 'dealing house' to reflect the fact that there may be other drugs present than merely crack cocaine. More often than not, however, there is little further description as to what exactly this means. One of the offenders interviewed for the present research, however, described having lived in such a property for a period of at least six months and some of what he described is included here for the purposes of context. It should be added that this was not in Brent but in the Ladbroke Grove area and that the offender himself referred to the property as a crack house.

The crack house – in fact a flat – belonged to an ex-girlfriend of the offender with whom he had rekindled a relationship. When they met, he was injecting heroin and she was smoking crack; he then began smoking crack in addition to his heroin habit. The girlfriend's flat had effectively been colonised by a group of crack users, some of whom may also have been dealing, and the scene described is one of disorder and confusion:

"Yea, before you know it, they were effectively taking over the place..."

"...they're doing what they're doing, you know... individually or collectively... I don't think any one of them had sense enough to sort of like be in any way what you would call a big operator. They were totally disorganised, everybody was ducking and diving to make a few quid here and make a few more there and anything they made they'd just come back to the house and smoked it. Everybody was smoking it, you know what I mean, the place was just fucking like a railway station."

"If someone went out and sold something for a hundred pounds, it was a lot of money to them, you know, it was just, it was pathetic, you know."

The flat was described as a dangerous and chaotic environment within which the crack users would fight and attempt to rob each other and guns were present:

"There was a hell of a lot of fighting went on... constant... It would be fists and people would get hit with different objects that were lying about, you know, the place was a madhouse, it was a total madhouse, it was a crack house, you know. A lunatic asylum."

“One particular time I was, yea, in this flat, you know... I had a decent watch, you know, it was a watch I had had for some years, and this particular guy took a fancy to my watch because it was worth a couple of quid.”

“I have seen people with guns, yea, yea. I mean, you know, I mean, like this period I spent living in that woman's house, you know what I mean... I very much doubt there was more than two people at any one time in there with a gun.”

Although only one brief example, this description nevertheless has potentially important implications in terms of debates and policies concerned with dealing with these venues. In the present case it is clear that those using the flat were predominantly chaotic users who experienced considerable instability in their lives in a number of ways. Any efforts to tackle the existence of venues like the one described here need to give due consideration to the needs of such individuals.

Drugs and Drug Markets – Summary

There is no question that drugs play a significant role in the criminal economy in Brent and that for some drug dealing is seen as a viable – and indeed desirable – means of making money, particularly when contrasted with what are perceived to be limited opportunities in the legitimate job market. Even at a young age, offenders report opportunities to get involved and the visible presence of dealers in their neighbourhoods flaunting their wealth. And there can be no doubt that demand exists for drugs such as crack cocaine and heroin.

In the absence of a hegemonic organised criminal organisation, however, the combination of illegality, money and motivated offenders, ensures an unstable market within which competition may manifest itself in violence, dealers are considered valuable targets and preyed upon by other criminals, and firearms feature on all sides. Indeed, in relation to drug dealing (if only certain drugs), firearms seem to be universally considered as a given – at least in terms of dealers having access to them.

It has also been seen that the personal impact of drug use may be high. One offender found himself in debt and on the receiving end of threats and violence directed both at himself and his family. He responded by committing an armed robbery to try and repay the debt. Another reported his drug dependency disrupting his life to the point where he committed armed robberies as a means to fund his addiction.

There can be no question that any efforts to tackle the illegal use of firearms must address the entrenched link between guns and drugs. In doing so, it must be recognised that drugs are commodities traded in markets and that to a considerable extent the illegal status of drugs fuels instability and violence within these markets. Agencies intervening into these markets need to be mindful of the potential impact of their activities. Evidence from Australia, for example, suggests that disrupting drug markets may make them more dangerous places both in terms of public health costs, and as existing relationships built on experience are broken, only to be replaced with relationships based on threats and violence⁷⁴.

Robbery and Burglary

Five of the offenders had been convicted of robbery and three of aggravated burglary and in all of these cases the key to the presence of the firearm is as an offence enabler. That is to say that the firearm helped facilitate the offence by ensuring the compliance of the victim(s).

Two of the burglaries were introduced above in relation to the targeting of drug dealers and in the case of at least one the firearm was taken (albeit without ammunition) because the intended target was a drug dealer who might himself have been armed. The third burglary lacks a detailed description as the offender was reluctant to talk about the offence, although it is not clear that the motivation for the offence was in fact a burglary. Indeed, from some of the offender's account it may in fact have been related to a drug debt.

Two of the armed robberies have already been introduced in relation to the discussion on drugs and drug markets, in one case to get money with which to buy drugs, in the other to pay off a debt. They won't be described again here in more detail, except to say that they were committed with imitation firearms. A third convicted robbery was purely for financial gain, while in the case of the remaining two, one offender denied responsibility for the offence and the other suggested that the offence was not in fact a robbery,

⁷⁴ Maher and Dixon (1999)

although that was what he was found guilty of. More generally, however, many of the offenders interviewed described having been involved in robberies or associating with people who had committed robberies and there are signs of a culture of robbery, particularly among some of the younger offenders – one referred to the “robbery game”, for example.

In the case of the robber interviewed whose offence – one of a series – was purely for financial gain, he and his co-defendant were both career criminals, although the interviewee claimed he hadn't committed robberies before. His motivation appears to have been that he was out of work and needed the money to pay for household bills:

“Yes, it's financial. Got a criminal record, ain't getting paid, with bills coming in left, right and centre, phone bill to pay. It was pressure indoors, 'Where's my fucking money?' Drive me fucking mad, so I've had to go and do something.”

The targets were selected on the basis that they were:

“...quiet and out of the way.”

Although this does not seem to have ensured the compliance of the victims. This case is unusual for the fact that shots were actually fired, in this case by a co-defendant:

“He let two shots go and threatened to blow someone's head off.”

As mentioned, a number of the offenders interviewed who had not been convicted of robbery as their present offence reported that they and/or their peers had committed robberies, in most cases without being caught. Some examples of this behaviour have been described above, for example in relation to gang and crew criminal behaviour. These robberies appear to occur at a number of levels, with teenage school children robbing each other at the lowest level, and targeting venues such as Post Offices in the case of more senior offenders.

The robberies described involving teenage school children typically involve ‘rushing’ behaviour, that is to say a group of children would target one or two other children taking items such as phones and possibly using violence, although it is not clear whether weapons would feature. It appears that to some extent this would occur on the basis of rivalries between different schools, with robberies occurring at the end of the school day:

“...just like show them our school is better than the one they are at.”

Towards the more serious end of the scale, one of the older offenders described him and his peers committing “Rolex robberies”, stealing items such as jewellery and watches from adult victims:

“Robberies are easy, easy stuff, easy to do robberies and get away with the stuff...that was the easiest, easiest access of money...”

Interestingly, his description highlights a robbery culture in which anyone may be considered a potential target and suggests that there may be a localised informal social learning process wherein individuals in Brent learn that robbery can make them money:

"That's basically, this is dog eat dog, criminals rob other criminals, criminals rob civilians... People do just, it will just be probably where you're living and what's the fashion. Like in West London, Northwest London, in West London the kind of thing that young guys would be doing is more like Rolex robberies, and robberies. South London, they're not really on robberies there, they're more on drug selling and robbing Post Offices, in East London drug selling. It's just, it's like whatever one set of people is doing, the rest will say well, this is where these guys are getting their money from robbery, then they'll jump on that... if that's what you're seeing around you, you will say, well, this is how they're making money..."

The picture that emerges is that even within a single group of offences such as robbery, one finds a wide variety of offenders, offences and offence motivations. It would be interesting to know whether early experiences of robbery, such as the ‘rushing’ behaviour described by several of the younger offenders, translate into affirmative attitudes towards committing robbery as adults. Certainly there appear to be

groups of adults who consider robbery to be a convenient means of making money and who are not often caught for their offences.

What is clear, however, is that where firearms are used in course of robberies it is almost always as a tool to facilitate the offences. The power differential created by the presence of a firearm is almost always sufficient to ensure the co-operation of victims, and to that end victims must merely believe that they are being confronted with a real firearm. The existence of highly realistic imitation firearms appears to make that outcome relatively easy to achieve, using weapons that can be purchased over the counter in shops, such as those specialising in outdoor sports and army-surplus goods. Nevertheless, it must not be assumed that all gun-enabled armed robberies are committed with imitation weapons and potential victims should not be lulled into a false sense of security; real guns are occasionally used.

Where questions must be asked, however, is in relation to the open sale of highly accurate imitation firearms. Branding such weapons as harmless may be accurate in the sense that they cannot be used to kill. However, their credibility as imitations extends to their credibility as offence enablers where the objective is to terrify rather than injure.

It is not clear, however, whether the ready availability of imitation firearms results in more armed robberies taking place, or whether imitation firearms are used instead of other weapons such as knives, and the number of robberies is unaffected. Notwithstanding the desire for fewer robberies to occur, in the case of the latter it could be that as imitation firearms are less potentially physically harmful than knives their use is preferable (although this does not consider the differential potential psychological harm of the two weapon types). Victim behaviour may also be significant if, for example, victims are more likely to fight back if faced with a knife than an imitation firearm.

In any event, a question that should be addressed is whether, in light of the sort of evidence presented in the present research, the open sale of highly realistic replica and imitation firearms is either appropriate or responsible.

Dispute Resolution and Retaliation

The accounts of three shootings, two of which resulted in fatalities, highlight the use of firearms in the contexts of resolving disputes or retaliating against previous incidents. In at least one of these cases, the offender's account highlighted the fact that official – that is to say police and media – reports of the shootings pointed to drugs market related violence, whereas in fact the reasons for the violence were much more benign. Nevertheless, involvement in the drugs market *may* be significant in terms of the ownership of the firearms used – as has been seen in the consideration of drugs and drug markets.

In the first case, shots were fired at an individual with whom a friend of the offender was involved in a dispute about a girlfriend:

“...it was over a fucking woman, that's how the whole argument came; it was a stupid fucking argument... What it is, this geezer [the friend], he was banging this chick that he was seeing. Anyway, I think, he phones the chick one day, some other dickhead comes on the phone, who he has an argument with, a bit of an argument on the phone, nothing... but he knows the guy as well... Anyway, we're driving one day, and we see the guy he had the argument with, and he says 'that's that wanker, that's that guy I was telling you about on the phone', blah, blah, blah. So he says 'I'm gonna punch him up', like, or something. So he's jumped out the car, they started arguing and all that nonsense. Anyway, I broke it up, it was stupid, we went about our business. We didn't see him for a few, well, actually about two months... and that's where all the madness happened. That's what it was, it's all boiled down to that... ”

Further description of this incident that followed illustrates three important factors in this case. The first is that there are individuals in Brent who appear to carry their firearms in public places when they have no specific intention to use them. The second concerns the way that an apparently trivial dispute can result in potentially fatal consequences. The third is the significance of the expectation, belief or knowledge that either one or, particularly, both of the parties to the dispute are armed:

“...he was gonna have a punch up. It weren't really gonna come out to a gun thing, it wasn't about that, they never went or was rolling with the guns intentionally to shoot the gun, nothing to do with it, he just had it on him at the time. And they've seen the [guy], and like [my friend started

shouting] 'Hey you pussy!'...but he [the victim] has gone like he's got something, like he selects something... Do you know, it looked like... I think he did have a gun, I seen him like this, so he looked like he selects something, so we're not gonna take, a stray bullet can kill anyone mate..."

Shots were then fired in the direction of the individual in question, although from the account it appears that none hit their target. This theme of arguments rapidly escalating into violence is reflected in later comments by one of the offenders, when asked a more general question about why people in Brent carry guns:

"I think a lot of people carry guns nowadays because they know, they think that other people are carrying guns. Get yourself into a little bit of an argument, and people might know then that he's gonna pull a gun at them, so they don't want to be the ones that get shot, they want to have their defences as well, just in case."

This illustrates a very difficult challenge in terms of tackling the sort of gun violence that, as will be seen below, has resulted in fatalities in Brent. If individuals are arming themselves and carrying firearms because of the expectation, belief or knowledge that other people they may encounter and conflict with are carrying and may use firearms, all the ingredients are present for an escalation of risks on all sides. Furthermore, the routine carrying of firearms will inevitably result in shootings taking place and fatalities where, in other settings, other forms of conflict resolution might be used.

One of the offenders interviewed knew two people who had been shot and killed, one of whom had been a close friend. Both of these murders were put down to "silly arguments":

"They were both silly arguments really, just got out of hand, got out of hand, it was stupid arguments."

The account of one of these murders makes it clear that it was in retaliation for an earlier one, although no details were provided as to how that conflict began in the first place:

"...he killed someone, and it was just like a going around thing innit, like, he killed them, they were after him, and they came back and killed him."

The second, however, appears to have been much more innocuous:

"...this is an argument, argument over like, me and you on the phone would have a row, and then the other, the young guy who actually shot my friend, took it out of hand... Well out of hand. But then when it come across in the papers and the news, it's always 'Suspected of drug deal' or drugs and all this nonsense, and you, any really killing when it comes to coloured people, not being funny, it's a bit stereotyped, it's always 'gang related' or some drugs. They won't leave that it's drugs, and then most of the killings ain't nothing to do with drugs."

"That's really what it boils down to; it is that really, it's not really drugs. I'm not saying all of them are not drugs, some of them are drugs, a robbery has gone bad, someone's come to rob someone, pulls a gun then it goes all messy and then someone gets shot and dies. But I mean, most of it is just an argument, like a fight would happen, and then it would come to the guns and you beat someone up, they go and get a gun and they come back on the street, and then you hear they're looking for you, you wanna do them before they kill you... Cos you know something's gonna happen, it's just stupid, it's just stupid... most of them are silly arguments, really. All of them, they all boil down to stupid arguments."

"...he [the friend who was shot and killed] never done nothing, he was so humble. He weren't even into violence and guns, and stuff like that. He was just a humble guy. It's just this stupid idiot what killed him, he was an idiot, I think he was listening to Tupac and he was smoking crack as well. I'm sure he was. I think he was listening too much rap music, get into the hype, they get into a own little world of their own, and he's done what he's done."

These accounts highlight a number of important and inter-related themes. Firstly there is the issue of conflict resolution in the context of firearms ownership. Then there is the issue of personal retribution and a refusal to involve the police and other agencies. Finally there is the issue of fear. Once a conflict has begun in which one or both of the parties fears that the other may have access to and use firearms there

is almost an inevitability about the outcome being a shooting – neither party wishes to be the victim, so both will feel that they must act first.

Another offender expressed this problem in his own terms when asked the general question about why people in Brent carry guns, referring to what he considers to be a “lost generation”.

“Tit for tat, little stupidity, do you understand, little stupidity. ‘Oh he dissed me. I’m not having that. I don’t like the way you talk to me, about this girl’. Do you understand? ... It’s lack of education. When I say lack of education – lack of vocabulary, lack of understanding situations. These guys... their schooling is on the road, in that world where it’s disrespect, girls, money, that’s all. It’s not like, well there’s a problem here, and let’s look at various options of how to go about dealing with it... with most of them, it’s one way. Cos they don’t know any better. So that’s why I say The Lost Generation. They don’t know about options... ‘I’ve got a gun, I’m gonna pop you, I don’t care who sees. Fuck, I didn’t think about consequences’. Do you understand? It’s lack of understanding, lack of education. That’s what it is... Tunnel vision.”

So how can one tackle these sorts of scenarios and, in particular, prevent cycles of violence? Preventing the routine carrying of firearms will certainly help, but is it sufficient? This is a very complicated issue, bound up in a number of themes including, but not limited to, attitudes towards the police, expectations of violence, perceptions about the need for personal retribution, firearms availability and peer group solidarity. Critically, however, this issue centres on the way that conflicts may escalate to the point that guns are used. A number of the older offenders talked about the way that disputes used to be settled with a “straightener”, that is to say a fight. This no longer appears to be sufficient.

Fear and Protection

Earlier in this chapter it was shown that all of the offenders interviewed had been the victims of crime and the majority had also been the victims of gun crime in its various guises. It has further been shown that guns feature in relation to the active processes of conflict resolution and offence retaliation and also that guns are significantly associated with drugs markets. It is perhaps not therefore surprising that some of those interviewed described the importance of guns in relation to a more general need for protection:

“...it’s not uncommon that a guy will have a gun on him for his protection...”

“People walk with guns in Brent basically to defend themselves.”

“...in my own opinion, it is for safety... if you carry a gun... you’re frightened for your safety.”

It will be seen however, that this fear manifests itself in particular in relation to several key issues. Firstly, as highlighted in relation to conflict resolution, because of a fear that others have guns. Secondly, in relation to social settings, most notably when out clubbing/raving. And, thirdly, because of a fear of retribution.

As alluded to in relation to the section above on conflict resolution, the knowledge that others have guns may be significant in terms of increasing demand more generally for the ownership of firearms:

“Certain people buy it [guns] for protection. Certain people buy it because another person’s got it. You get me. They got a strap [gun], I want a strap.”

Outside of the interviews presented here, an individual in Brent who has on occasion played the role of community spokesperson commented to the researcher that many people in Brent not otherwise involved in crime have guns for their own protection:

“You would be amazed at the kinds of people who have guns.”

Here the theme of arguments again emerges as significant, indicating a concern with being drawn into conflicts from which few exit strategies may be available. Again, the awareness that others may be armed is significant:

“I’m not sure really, a lot of people carry guns just in case, because I think a lot of people carry guns nowadays, because they know, they think that other people are carrying guns, get yourself

into a little bit of an argument, and people might know then that he's gonna pull a gun at them, so they don't want to be the ones that get shot, they want to have their defences as well, just in case."

"...it's for protection, innit? Everyone else has got one, and then if I argue with someone they are gonna pull it out."

"Because they're scared. That someone else is just gonna draw for it quicker."

And the risks associated with these types of arguments seem to increase in relation to social settings or travelling out of the area. These locations may be significant for several reasons, including: In the case of social settings, encountering rivals, the presence of an audience and alcohol; In travelling out of the area, encountering new groups, territoriality and unknown social and criminal environments. Interestingly, one of the offenders commented that carrying guns might increase the likelihood of serious violence:

"...other ones [friends] that I know, like I said it's just safety. Either it's at home, or it's in their cars. It's not a thing where they're walking around with it twenty-four seven.... The general time when they keep it in cars is if they're out on the roads if they're doing their business or they're out on the roads or if they are going to a rave or something... Like, it's a necessity when it comes to raving or being out on the roads, because in that environment you can't really tell who's who. If there's someone looking for you in a rave, he sees you before you see him, you know."

"Because just in case, like people go out raving and stuff, yea, and people getting shot. People, they will carry a gun to a rave because, you have an argument with someone, well, I'm not saying everyone does, there's silly people out there, they have argument with someone, and that person's got a gun, he doesn't know you. I think just because they're ignorant, and he's got a gun and power having a gun, he will try to shoot you. He doesn't care about you, he doesn't know, he doesn't care if you live or die. As long as he gets away with it, he doesn't care, so a lot of people they go and they carry a gun, just in case they do get themselves into stupid arguments. So I think it's ridiculous. If you're going out to have a good time, you can't have a good time carrying a gun, do you know what I mean, because you can get yourself into an argument. And if you, it's more likely, if someone comes and steps on your feet or you have a big argument with someone, you're gonna pull out your fucking gun, you don't know whether... they could be with a crew and you could be by yourself and this is your protection, innit, this is your power... So more than likely, someone will pull out their gun. They'll try and blast someone and that's stupid."

"They carry the guns somewhere different. If we're staying in the same area you don't need guns... If we're going out of London, if we're going south, we're going to carry some guns."

Finally, one of the offenders who had been in a group at the time of his offence explained that the co-defendant who was in possession of the gun had it out of a fear of retribution:

"...the people who was there, some of them are on the run basically, they have to watch themselves twenty four seven, because of the things they've done or the things they're doing so, them walking with that [gun], that's their way of protecting themselves, or protecting someone... [They are on the run from] Other people like them."

The picture here, taken with the sections on drugs and drug markets and conflict resolution and retaliation, paints a picture of young men expecting and fearing encountering violence in the course of their social and criminal lives. This fear manifests itself for some in carrying firearms as a defensive strategy *just in case* conflict arises. Such a strategy, however, raises the stakes for all concerned, and may in fact result in guns being used more often and at an earlier stage in disputes. This may go some way to explaining the use of serious and at times fatal violence in the context of what, to the casual observer, may appear to be extremely trivial precipitating events – stepping on someone's feet or arguing about a girlfriend.

3.5.4 Gun Culture and Preventing Gun Crime

The final section explores the offenders' perceptions about gun culture and preventing gun crime.

Gun Culture – Offenders' Perspectives

In light of recent discussions about the existence of a gun culture, the offenders were asked what the term meant to them. They answered this question from one or both of two perspectives, what they understood gun culture to mean, and what its relevance was to them.

In many ways this question resulted in some of the most interesting and insightful discussions about what is going on in Brent today and how the offenders themselves view this. By and large, they understood gun culture in terms of the normality of firearms, and also in terms of racial stereotyping. To a lesser extent, guns were referred to as accessories to a lifestyle and signifiers of status. Another theme that emerged several times was the willingness of offenders to use guns when in the past scores would have been settled differently – a “straightener” fight, for example. One offender in particular explained at length what he saw as the issues affecting young – particularly black – men in Brent and the relationship of these issues both to gun crime and wider society. His comments are reproduced in full below and readers are urged to consider them in their entirety.

In relation to the normality of guns, comments included:

“In this time what I see is a way of just being.”

“It’s nothing, it’s standard now. Guns, it’s nothing, it’s nothing now. Back in the day they were something. Now it’s, guns is nothing. I hear gun culture, it’s an ordinary thing... it’s rare that someone hasn’t got a gun.”

“Everyone’s got guns now, it’s like they’re all, it’s like gun madness, who you wouldn’t think would never have a gun has got a gun.”

One offender commented on the relationship between gun culture and his own offending:

“It means fuck all to me, I’m out of that now, fuck it ... At the time it was everything. At the time it was everything. You had a strap [gun], you the man. Nobody can, you can go and rob people and no-one can rob you back, you got a strap.”

Whilst others referred instead to what they perceived around them, distancing themselves from those they saw as involved in the gun culture:

“[It’s not a fashion] They do it because of what they deal with. If something does go wrong, it’s not in a legal way...”

“Everybody wants to be, everybody think that they’re bad and all this bollocks...”

“It frightens the life out of me. It frightens the life out of me. I mean society frightens the life out of me now, I tell you, it really does... You know, a lot of these young guys – as I say, it’s, it’s, when they’re growing up in this culture, and I don’t, I think that they’re kind of lost in it as well. And they see it as being what you have to do, because there you go, there’s this term respect, you know. I mean, they think respect is something that like you automatically get, you know, it’s not something you earn. You automatically get it, and if you’ve got a gun then you’ve automatically got respect. It makes your respect bigger, you know. People are going to look at you and think you’re all right and you’re better than this guy over ‘ere cos he hasn’t got a gun...”

“A gun is a fashion accessory, if you haven’t got a gun, you’re not one of the faces, then you’re not one of the boys... from what I know on the outside looking in, it’s like, gun culture is a fashion accessory, and the youngest of youngest of kids nowadays have got guns, you know... the youngsters nowadays, the first thing they are turning to is the gun, you know... it’s about fashion and making them feel big. Where you was asking me earlier if I felt good to have a gun, well this is what happens with these kids, they, if they haven’t got a gun, they don’t feel part and parcel of

what's going on. So what they do, they go out and get guns and a lot of people ain't got no sort of qualms to sell these young kids guns..."

"Gun culture, it's always been about, but, it's more blatant. People now have got guns in their back pocket... from the 70s, it was more organised, close knitted, but now it's all over the place, which is a bad thing... There's a thing out there now. It's a new thing. If you got a gun, you're a man, you know... It's getting worse, you know, it's getting worse."

"Like I said, you got people that would have things, OK, just for show... you have guys out there, they want people to know that they are a bad boy... Gun culture, to me? It's just life, innit... it's worse, man... Now a lot of people aren't bad boys, [they are] wannabe bad boys, get caught up in the game. Then they got no options, they got no choice, somebody's looking to take 'em out, then they got to defend themselves, you know, and it's bad intentions now these days, you have people ain't playing. It's like if you fuck with me I'm gonna off you. So the intention's up there."

"...you can't have a straightener no more now... these days... You'll have about seven man coming round in your house. Bam Bam!"

A number discussed the relationship between gun culture and race:

"...it's not really about who's black and white, it's about what happened there, it's basically about who's rich and who's poor..."

"...white people don't see guns in the same way. They don't see it as an accessory, they see it as a means to an end... if they go out with a gun, they're going out to do something... other than that, the bloody thing is hidden away. I mean, you've got this other [black] element, they want to carry a gun and they want to take it everywhere they go, you know, because as I say, it's an accessory, it's like a fucking bracelet or a watch, you know."

"...you are talking certain race always have guns... that's my perception. To me, when people say that to me, they are thinking, yea, certain people carry guns. It's not true, everyone's got guns..."

"...to be quite honest with you, it's terrible. Because it's back on black, you know, and this is what's going on. Black, and young, black kids losing their lives. Because of troubles, basically."

"Well, I think black people... Not just Yardies, I just think black people... I look at the black side because they have been influenced by the black Americans, and the black Americans, this is a gun orientated period... So this is where they're getting a lot of their influence from, these young kids nowadays... As well as Jamaican."

Importantly, one of the offenders explained that in his opinion the widespread availability of converted imitations has encouraged the changes seen, increasing access to guns and fuelling a "bad boy" criminal culture of which guns are a significant part. His argument is compelling and certainly merits further consideration:

"Do you ever ask why people are becoming bad boys now? Because do you know what, back in the day, there weren't no fucking imitations, do you understand? People, man couldn't get their hands on anything, they didn't wanna fork out the money, but because now you can get them so cheap... you can take any kind of replica and convert it. It's too easy... You have a lot of wannabes, and you see the thing is now, these days now it's not even, it's not even wannabes, these days guns is the norm. It's just the norm. Right, and a lot of decent people that don't want the gun violence any more, do you understand?"

Finally, one of the younger offenders in particular situated gun crime and gun culture in the context of a wider political view that stressed his frustration that the problems underlying gun crime are not taken seriously and condemned the branding of gun crime as a black community problem. His views are presented in full to ensure that a young person who clearly feels passionately about the impact of these issues on his community gets heard:

Offender: It's, what that means to me. It's just I don't believe in people killing people, basically. At the end of the day, it sounds bad to say, "Ah yea, someone got murdered last night" or whatever. To hear that, it is bad, and when you hear it on a regular basis and it's in the same area, it gets depressing 'cos you live there and you have to fear for your own safety. But, in all honesty, I don't really see either politicians or police officers or anyone in that field of authority doing anything to say that yea, I can see a change being made or I can see attempts being made to try and stop this. 'Cos at the end of the day, whenever anything happens, and it's serious or it's along the lines of gun crime, it always comes down to "young black males" or "Yardie gang related incidents", and nine times out of ten it's not necessarily the case. And it really, it starts to jar people when people say, "Yea, it's just black kids doing this and doing that". Or sometimes there is real issues behind what goes on, but because nobody actually wants to find out, or get involved with us, that's the answers that you get.

Interviewer: So, I mean, you said two things, you said so, one thing you were saying it it's got a racial element to it, I think you said.

Offender: Yea, cos sometimes I think when I hear stuff on the telly about "Yardie gang related shootings", sometimes I actually know the people who is doing whatever, whatever, and it's not Yardies, they're just black people.

Interviewer: Right.

Offender: They do not necessarily have to be Yardies, but it's, but the title, somebody gets that title or whenever you hear anything that's got a young black male involved, you instantly think either he sells dugs, he does something illegal or he's a Yardie. Not necessarily the case. Innocent people have been murdered or their life's been taken. And it's been, "Yardie gang related shootings", or whatever.

Interviewer: Right, so you're saying, the other thing you said is there's other things that people don't want to get involved in.

Offender: Yea, like there's other, like – there's other elements to it. Like if we're doing all of these things they say we're doing, why are we doing it? Like if you really wanted to find out how we thought and we felt about gang related crime and shootings and losing friends and family, the thing is we are not different. But because whenever it does happen it is taken so lightly that, "Ah, someone else died yesterday, yea, Harlesden, got shot, gang-related, whatever, whatever," and that's that. Other things, you see little things like a dog on TV, winning a prize for fucking saving a cat or some bollocks like, shit like that, and they take more notice of that than serious issues. And I think to myself that as a young person, I know to myself that if other young people got paid attention to, the way they pay attention to other things, things would be a lot different. In Brent we don't have any community centres that we can really say, yea, it's a place where we can go to and we feel safe, for starters. And there is not enough entertainment and some educational facilities or whatever, for us to do stuff. The only one I know we have at the moment is the one in Harlesden... And that's not safe, that's not safe. Stuff happens outside there every day. And that's supposed to be a Youth Community Centre.

Interviewer: So I'll come back to that. It's obvious you have a lot to say in terms of what you think could be done. OK, so you're saying, it stereotypes black men into a small –

Offender: Don't get me wrong, I know the majority of the time it is us that's doing it. But when it's not, or when you don't know who it is, to just say, "It's Yardie gang related", it's a bit much. But at the end of the day, it's frustrating for the peoples' parents to hear on the news, yea, "Yardie gang related shooting", knowing full well that their son's not a Yardie and he ain't dealing with drugs and he's not in a gang related, or whatever. That's like –

Interviewer: And you're saying obviously innocent people are caught up in these?

Offender: Yea, you're right, innocent people are caught up in them.

Interviewer: And also you're saying there's serious issues behind all this?

Offender: Yea, there is issues.

Interviewer: Poverty, and so on?

Offender: Do you know why, the main issue of it is money. Sometimes as a young black male, sometimes you want things and you know that you haven't got the money to provide for yourself, so you go out there and you look for other options of getting money. Sometimes you may have like, part of it may be, an only child with a single mum. And you may want things and your mum won't be able to provide it and so you have to go out and do it yourself. Things like that, starting up your own business at a young age to help you and your mum, is not, it doesn't sound that bad, but depending on what you are doing it, it is bad obviously. But I've seen people do that and turn it around. And go and get a normal job and better themselves. And lose their life, in the same way that somebody else is carrying on and lost their life. It is hard because the people who try hard or turn their life around and start doing good, there is no acknowledgement or there's not acknowledgement when we do something that's, you know... But they just notice the bad things about us, ah yea shooting and drugs. There is nothing to say, ah, black football team or this, that and the other, or we did this. But, I don't think that it should always have to come down to "us and them". It should be "we" or if anything, we, they or, but it comes down to "them and us".

Interviewer: When you said business, you said young guys setting up business, did you mean illegal business, or...

Offender: Yea, illegal business, illegal business. It's only because life is a bit awkward or life's harder than everybody else's. 'Cos I won't lie, sometimes it's not nice to see, as a child growing up, you are in the same class as somebody, they got new trainers that you ain't had, or you wanted those and they got them before you. It doesn't hurt but it's annoying to think well, but I wanted those and my Mum can't afford them. Things like that will make people turn to other options. When you turn to other options, that's when it starts. You get mixed up in one drug trade, and say, "Yea, I'll stick to selling weed", and then later on in life you touch on selling brown [heroin], and you touch on selling white [cocaine], and then it escalated and escalated and escalated, 'til you either end up dead or you start smoking yourself.

Taken together these views and reflections on gun crime encompass a range of understandings. Some see gun culture as reflecting the normality of guns within certain sections of society, and at least one blames this situation on the availability of converted replica firearms in particular. Alongside this, guns are portrayed as associated with a 'bad boy' image implying that a gun is merely an accessory – albeit an important one – to a wider criminal culture. One implication, it is suggested, of taking all of these issues together is that individuals aspiring to this image and lifestyle may, in a sense, get out of their depth and find themselves in situations where there is no exit strategy available other than the gun.

The younger offender quoted latterly at length expresses his frustration that many of the issues that underlie this criminal culture are either misrepresented or not taken sufficiently seriously. His comments are a call to attention for those who would tar everyone with the same brush. He doesn't seek to deny that gun crime takes place, or indeed that it frequently involves young black men. But he contextualises these problems. Ultimately, his is a passionate and emotional appeal to be understood: "the thing is we are not different".

So where is the 'gansta rap' music in all of this? The interview material would seem to suggest that there is no direct causal link between urban music, gun crime and gun culture, and certainly music received only the most superficial of references. What seems to be more compelling is the relationship between deprived inner-city communities and a criminal economy that thrives in the perceived absence of credible alternatives. Undoubtedly the tension between the two is magnified by a hyper-material culture that essentialises conspicuous wealth, and music may be one (perhaps significant) element in the promotion of such attitudes. But it appears that music is not pre-eminent; wider society promotes a consumer culture that is felt most acutely by those who struggle to keep up. For some this tension is filled with the opportunities and risks that crime presents them, one feature of which today is the gun.

Preventing Gun Crime – Offenders’ Perspectives

The final section of the interview invited the offenders to discuss how they think gun crime could be tackled. This resulted in wide-ranging discussions, some of which reflect on many of the issues explored already in this research. It is fair to say that there was little, if any, consensus about what could be done. For the sake of completeness, the offenders’ comments are organised below under thematic headings.

Perhaps the most consistent set of themes concerns young people and education, in particular the need to set young people on the right path from a very early age. Interestingly, two of the offenders highlighted the “valuelessness” of crime, from the point of view both of material wealth and in terms of self-respect. Considering the opinions of several that ex-offenders should be used to help influence attitudes and divert young people from crime, there is perhaps the beginnings of a consistent view here that might see ex-offenders playing an educational role in steering young people away from crime.

On a slightly different tack, the comments from another offender about his own lack of awareness of the opportunities that mainstream life offers need to be noted and reflected on. The question needs to be asked whether people like him are being encouraged to learn about the wider economy and be ambitious in relation to their own prospects. As he puts it, “there was no drive... I’m more likely to see a rich person in the ‘hood [neighbourhood] that’s made money from drugs than somebody in the ‘hood that’s made money from being a doctor”. If he is being honest, and there is no reason to doubt that he is, there is clearly room for challenging young peoples’ perceptions about their choices. Do they, for example, have a realistic understanding about the reality of drug dealing? Yes there is money to be made, but it is a dangerous business, dealers may lose years of their lives to imprisonment and drug dealing has serious social implications. The likelihood is that young people over-estimate the rewards and under-estimate the risks involved.

In relation to the criminal justice system, it is interesting to see constructive attitudes towards the police, centred principally on the need for sensitivity and a better grasp of community relations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the attitudes of some were more hostile when it came to the prospect of, for example, longer prison sentences for convicted gun criminals. This hostility was not, however, unqualified, and the comments from two offenders about the limitations of resettlement practice, notably training facilities in prison and helping prisoners make the transition to independent living, are worth noting. Finally, a positive attitude towards the Youth Offending Service is interesting, in particular because the young offender in question highlights what he perceives as an empathetic and sympathetic organisation, the staff of which understand what life is like for their clients.

To begin, however, a potentially controversial view that to some extent the communities in Brent affected by gun crime need to take some responsibility:

Community Pride and Responsibility

“It’s us, us in general. If we really cared about the area that we lived in, and if we really wanted to make it better, we’ve got to stop doing the shit that we do.”

Community Resources

“If there was community centres or whatever, that could find people jobs, give internet access, people can go and look for jobs. During the day, instead of sitting at home, you can go there, and look for a job. You could get CV advice, anything, anything that would help us from either being stereotyped, or just being looked at in the wrong way. And benefit us.”

Diversion

"Basically, yea, keeping us occupied doing stuff, always doing stuff and keep us occupied, going to colleges, schools, employment. Doing basketball, football anything, anything to let us have fun, anything to keep everyone nice and happy."

Drugs and Drug Markets

“How they would get rid of gun crime? Legalise drugs. Legalise selling drugs.... [Drugs and guns are connected] Hard. They are linked together.”

“...they need to make a clean sweep to get all these drug situations out because they can do it, if they put the force in there, you can do these things. And that will sort of get rid of a lot of this, cos that’s what it is, they all want the fast life, they all want to be millionaires.”

Education

“I don’t see that you will [stop gun crime], without educating people to sort of like, the valuelessness of crime, but at the end of the day there’s no point, there’s no value in it. Because there’s very few people come out of it with anything to show.”

“...people have got to learn that to have self worth, you have got to go out and work to achieve what you want, not in an illegal way... I know, money that you earn illegal doesn’t say anything, know what I mean, and one way or another you are gonna get caught... It doesn’t have to be drugs. And that’s all the kids, most of them in these areas about kids, that’s the easiest way, for them, to sell drugs.”

“They should preach in schools, you know, drum it into kids... It will always be here, no matter what.”

“...most of the criminals out there, they’re not stupid, they’re smart people, they just ain’t had opportunities... it’s just, they do the easiest, like, the easiest thing that’s there. Like me for example, it was robberies and that. Robberies are easy, easy stuff, easy to do robberies and get away with the stuff. I could have done much, I could have maybe been a doctor, I could have been a lawyer, but it’s just the way I grew up. Teachers, maybe looking at me, I don’t look like their kids, walking past me in school and I’m dangerous. Just, that’s what I’m saying; it’s basically from the young ones... [And] it ain’t just like once in ten years. I’m saying like maybe like every month they’d get like a doctor coming, then they could get an actor coming and then show them, keep reminding them, keep reminding them, keep reminding them, keep reminding them there’s other options ... when I grew up I didn’t know lawyers can make a lot of money, doctors can make a lot of money, all these people can make money. Know what I’m saying, musicians, actors, models, drug dealers, hookers. You never think, boy, doctors. Just ‘cos no-one, like as a kid you, I didn’t see no doctors coming and saying, ‘Yes, I’m a doctor, I help this person here, I make this much money, I’ve got this house’. Maybe if I’d have thought, I’d have thought, yea, mate, yea, then we do this type of thing. I didn’t, there was no drive... All I could see is what I see on TV. Basically, so you’re watching TV, ‘Oh maths, maths. Maths ain’t gonna make me no money’... And that’s what the talk is in your area. ‘Yea money, this guy’s got nice clothes and he’s got a nice girl’, know what I’m saying, so... So, so it’s not just musicians or actors and that. People who make money and who is enjoying their life and that, probably could show them, boy, that there’s enjoyment of life without doing that. That would stop a lot of stuff... You are only gonna know what you are hearing. ‘Cos I’m more likely to see a rich person in the hood that’s made money from drugs than somebody in the hood that’s made money from being a doctor or, so I will learn from what I’m closest to.... it’s from the early ages, you gotta show them that there’s more, there’s much more ways to make money, there’s more ways to enjoy yourself than drug dealing and music.”

Firearms Supply

"The only way to have guns stop coming into the country is like tighten the security at the ports, yea, that’s the only way."

Focus on Younger Age Groups

“Forget about now, now, now, you got young ones, you gotta nurture them from up, from up.”

“You gotta get them early, you gotta invest in schools and education, do you understand, right, you’ve already lost a generation...you can’t get them back. What you gotta do is deal with the next generation. You gotta start from primary school, not secondary school.”

Money and Employment

"Anyway, I wish the Government gave me a choice, cos I say I would cut down on my selling [drugs] and that sort of crime."

(Ex-)Offenders

"Cos if you get someone big, right, coming to you and saying, 'You shouldn't do this, this is stupid', you are going to go home thinking so much of it. Like, yea look where this guy is and the only reason he has got there is because he ain't done this, that's what I would think. You need someone; you need a powerful person... [someone who is] not too straight... [but] working full time..."

"What I would advise is, get some criminals on the payroll and pay them to stop people... Like that would be the best way, cos no one listens to police people, know what I'm saying. Certainly, I mean, criminals always listen to other criminals..."

"Well, if they are given grants, like me for instance, if I was to be given a grant to sort of help children in the community, because I've been there, I've done it, I know, and I've got certain qualifications now, which I have achieved, which I know could enable me to help these kids and enlighten. Because kids, if you've been there, you've done it, they look at you in a different light, to someone who is sitting there talking all this stuff, and they haven't got a clue in hell, you know what I mean, they are only talking from study or whatever, they are not talking from actually being there and doing it and going through it. I've been through it, I've done it, know what I mean, so, I think I could be asset to people like that."

Policing

"I dunno. I think like they get into a gang then follow the gang then get into trouble like that. So regular police would sort it out."

"...[the police need to be] more better with the community, because then, in the sense of saying the police need to be more harder, you understand what I'm saying, that will cause man to lick out even worse, you understand what I'm saying?... Because, for instance a policeman might come down the road to see you, you might be 14, 15, you might be 19, it's got nothing to do with gun crime, they go and harass him, what's the rebounds from that? ...There have to be better links with the community."

"They need to take more responsibility for their actions, meaning that, just because somebody looks suspicious, you don't necessarily have to stop them, sometimes they have to really do their job properly, in a way where they are, arghh, it's so hard to explain. Not just bypass everybody, but make sure that you are knowing to yourself that you're doing it because you know this person sells drugs and you know this, don't just jump to conclusions all the time."

"...getting out of their cars and walking around and trying to integrate themselves more in a proper way, not in a biased, racist way."

Political Representation

"Politicians, any local rep for the area. Like basically we need you, innit. We need you to speak up. Cos at the end of the day, we live here, and it's not the best place to live, but something needs to be done about it, at the end of the day."

Prison

"I can say, for like people in prison who got caught up in the system, and even guns, drugs, or whatever, the Government should actually put more training schemes into the prison system. Because there is a lot of prisons out there that you go in them and you don't do jack shit, all you do is smoking fucking drugs, other people smoking heroin or whatever. They should put more courses like plumbing and electricians within the system for people to do, give people, give people something to look forward to, directly."

“What would have stopped me? Um, just wasting my life in prison... I knew how hard it was gonna be in prison when the judge give me [my sentence]... the biggest hurt for me was my children... If anybody troubled them on road, if they’ve got problems at school, there’s no dad to go.”

“Prison sentences don’t really do nothing, you know what it is, he’s just wasting more of his time, you’re effing up his life even more, that’s it. When he comes out usually he will do something even sillier to get money.”

“...you know what it is in this country as well, they don’t give people the chance to change. They think, the first thing they think about is prison. Prison doesn’t really help no-one, cos being behind the door twenty three hours a day or whatever, how’s that gonna [change] you? They don’t let you back into society just to get a job, or try and work yourself, they let you back out and expect you to just go out there. Obviously you’re gonna be on your face, you gonna wanna make money, you’re gonna get back into fucking crime. You’re not gonna think of, ah man, I’ve been away for years, I can go and get a job just like that. How you gonna do that?”

Role Models

“[Footballers] They’re nothing. The money they make ain’t nothing either. Asking me to look up to them, saying he makes a lot of money, cos drug dealers make more money than them.”

Youth Offending Services

“For an offender this is a good solution sort of thing to give to a kid or, to give to like even an adult. Some discipline training, this is the sort of thing that makes someone actually see sense and say, all right, I ain’t gonna do this. Because the people who work here, they’re not police, they’re just normal people off the street... They’re people that know what’s going on.”

3.6 Conclusions

The material presented here is only based on the accounts of 15 offenders from Brent and cannot therefore make any claims to show the whole picture. What it hopefully has done, however, is illustrated the highly nuanced relationship between guns and crime in Brent and laid to rest some of the more sweeping generalities that have been used to 'explain' gun crime in the past. It is not just about drugs, it is certainly not just about 'Yardies', and at best 'gansta rap' has only a peripheral influence.

What the interviews have shown is that guns are situated in a complex interaction between the criminal economy, personal and collective experiences and attitudes, mainstream authorities such as the police, popular and criminal cultures, developmental factors such as family life and education, firearms availability, the debilitating effects of dependent drug use and a whole host of other factors. Guns and gun crime are both a symptom and a cause of violent criminality. However, the single most important relationship appears to be between guns and drugs markets.

In relation to drugs, guns are symptomatic of an unregulated cash-rich market, the participants in which cannot call on the legal structures that underpin the mainstream economy and maintain order. In the absence of legally enforceable contracts, the guarantee of security afforded by the police, risk management instruments such as insurance, or indeed hegemonic criminal organisations, market instability follows, including the use of violence targeted at and between market participants. The perceived potential riches of drug dealing are seen alongside what are perceived to be limited legitimate opportunities in the mainstream economy and interact with a hyper-material consumer culture that overrides morality and respect for the law.

Once firearms have been introduced into such an environment, the unregulated illegal market lacks the capability to eliminate them. So too, it appears, do the legal agents of the state⁷⁵. Instead, participants are forced to gravitate towards the lowest common denominator, as one offender interviewed put it having to choose between being the victim and the suspect. In more prosaic language, if everyone else has a gun, you'd better have one too if you want to remain in the game. Furthermore, as those involved in the drugs market interact with each other and mainstream society, so a contagion effect may result and people outside of the market may start arming themselves "just in case". Certainly, the concerns expressed by the offenders and presented above support this thesis, many referring to their expectations of arguments and violence in the course of their social lives, never mind their criminal activities.

The challenge now, it seems, is for the mainstream to recognise the fact that much gun-related crime is a symptom – direct or otherwise – of an unregulated market within which violence is a norm. Like any market, however, it is reliant on traders, wholesale suppliers, customers, delivery people, market places and money, all of which are potential soft-spots for intervention. The medium to long-term question is whether and how one can influence these markets in such a way as to make them less violent, either by eliminating them or by changing their dynamics. In the short-term, the more pragmatic question is how one can best deal with the consequences of this violence and prevent it from spreading.

Away from the drugs market, a number of other features of gun crime in Brent have become apparent. Robbery is treated by some as both something to be expected and as a means to easily and quickly acquire money. The availability of highly realistic imitation firearms in particular seems to fuel this trend, at the same time as facilitating irresponsible behaviour among a younger group whose activities may not be criminal in intent but nevertheless attract the sanction of the law. Finally, and significantly, this research has documented the way that negative attitudes towards the police interact with a culture of not 'grassing' and an expectation of informal retribution.

The overall sense is of a fragmentary criminal culture within which internecine violence is accepted and indeed expected. Hostile attitudes towards the police and the presence of a lucrative unregulated drugs market seem to serve to exacerbate this violence. One significant feature of this violence is the expectation, at least within some circles, that firearms are accessible and will be used. These problems are complex and apparently entrenched. Any solutions, therefore, will need to be sophisticated and long-term.

⁷⁵ Although there are signs, such as in relation to the converting of imitation weapons, that tight regulation of guns has had a positive effect. Why go to the effort of converting an imitation of the real thing is readily available?

Chapter 4: CADMIS (999) Data Jan 1998 – Sep 2003

- 4.1 Chapter Summary
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Aims
- 4.4 Methodology
- 4.5 Findings
- 4.6 Conclusions

4.1 Chapter Summary

The CADMIS database records 999 calls to the Police. This analysis considers all calls to the police in Brent from January 1998 to September 2003 inclusive. CADMIS calls are coded twice according to the description received, firstly from the member of public who called 999 (the Type) and secondly from the police officer(s) attending the call (the Class). The code 65 indicates that a firearm (or information about firearms) has been mentioned. The data relating to firearms have been analysed quantitatively and spatially, the latter using GIS mapping technology.

Increase in Firearms Incidents

In general, the number of CADMIS calls in Brent has been falling since a peak in August 1999. By contrast, calls mentioning firearms have increased over the same period, particularly post-March 1999. The summer of 1999 is characterised by a clear change from the previous year and marks the start of a seasonal trend with peaks in spring/summer seen in all subsequent years. CADMIS calls mentioning firearms have increased as a percentage of all CADMIS calls over the same period, in the case of the Type classification peaking at 1.64% of all calls in April 2003, and in the case of the Class classification peaking at 0.59% in June 2002.

Attrition

There is a considerable attrition in the recording of firearms using the code 65 between the Type and Class classification of CADMIS calls. In general there are two to three calls with a Type 65 code to every call with a Class 65 code. The ratio between the two has generally been closing over time. Several explanations are offered to understand this attrition. In particular it is suggested that a failure to systematically record a response to an initial report relating to a firearm by using the D/O/N/T⁷⁶ suffixes in the Class fields may be responsible.

Response Time Effect

There is some evidence that there may be an interaction between police response times and incident classification. Calls for which both the initial Type classification and the subsequent Class classification mentioned firearms are on average responded to faster than calls for which only the initial Type classification mentioned firearms. This is the case even when controlling for the Incident Grade (the speed of response required).

Spatial Changes

The total area in Brent affected by firearms as registered in calls to 999 has been increasing over time. The spatial distribution of Type 65 and Class 65 calls is largely consistent, although 2002 is an important exception. Within these two processes there have been changes in the location of firearms incidents from year-to-year, although two types of location – deprived housing estates and major high streets – appear to be consistently important.

Concluding remarks

CADMIS contains a wealth of information about crime and disorder in general and gun crime in particular. More specifically, it is informative about the scale of gun crime in its impact on policing, public perceptions, and the way that the latter may deviate from reality. From an analytical point of view, the utility of CADMIS is severely undermined by the structure of the database and what appear to be considerable limitations in the way data are entered.

⁷⁶ Firearm Discharged, Observed, Not observed, Taken into police possession.

4.2 Introduction

4.2.1 A brief introduction to CADMIS data

4.2.2 CADMIS data for the London Borough of Brent

The final data set that will be examined in this research concerns calls to 999, a substantial repository of evidence about crime and disorder that is rarely used for strategic analysis. The work presented here is, to the best knowledge of the author, the first time that this data has been analysed in relation to gun crime and placed in the public domain.

4.2.1 A brief introduction to CADMIS data

CADMIS stands for Computer Aided Despatch Management Information System, and is the police database used to record 999 calls to the police. It represents an important resource for exploring police workload and the broad range of crime and disorder affecting a police Basic Command Unit (BCU), although for the most part it does not appear to have been designed with strategic analysis in mind. This is most notably in respect of the amount of information that is coded, but appears in free text fields in an unstructured format.

Unlike the CRIS system (see Chapter 2), CADMIS is not generally subject to public reporting, political scrutiny and complex changes in recording practices⁷⁷, something that is both a strength and a weakness, the latter because a lack of public accountability is translated into a lack of strategic functionality. Importantly, CADMIS does not seem to have been used to investigate the illegal use of firearms, despite the fact that it contains a wealth of important and informative data.

Incidents recorded by CADMIS are coded twice from a list of options⁷⁸:

- i. As the incident is logged in the first instance on the basis of the initial description of the incident supplied to the police, e.g. by the 999 caller. This is the call **TYPE**.
- ii. Subsequently by the officer(s) responding to the call. This is the call **CLASS**.

This distinction is important, and will be examined throughout the present analysis. A useful analogy is the distinction between the way that offences recorded in the CRIS crime database are initially recorded as an Allegation, and then are later given a Classification.

The exact format of the CADMIS database has changed on several occasions since January 1998, the start of the data being examined here, but these changes have been more concerned with style than substance in terms of the present analysis⁷⁹. For example, a previous version had one column for a Type Code and another called Type Text, a free text field in which subsequent codes were recorded. At present, there are three Type Code columns and a Type Text field. The same is true for Class codes. These changes do not appear to have altered the number of codes used.

More than one code can be applied to a call as required. For example, a call logged during 2003 was classified initially as Type 55/65 – a suspicious incident/person/vehicle (code 55) involving a firearm (code 65). However, this was reclassified by the officer(s) attending who clearly felt that the original classification did not accurately represent the circumstances encountered. In this case, they referred to Class codes 55/77/81, a suspicious incident/person/vehicle (code 55) where no offences were disclosed (code 77) and advice was given (code 81).

To some extent, therefore, any difference between the Type and Class classification of an incident may represent a combination of:

- Differing perceptions of an incident between the initial 999 caller and the police.
- The difference between public perception and police operational requirements.
- A possible time effect resulting from the time elapsed between the initial observation and reporting of the incident and a police response.

⁷⁷ Crime recording practices changed in both 1998 and 2002. In the case of the latter, the Home Office estimated the impact on the Metropolitan Police Service as inflating recorded crime by 12% (see: Simmons et al., 2003b)

⁷⁸ See Appendix E for a full list of CADMIS Codes

⁷⁹ See Appendix F for a full list of fields recorded as at September 2003.

- A failure on the part of the police attending a call to record a response to the allegation, recorded as the Type classification, that a firearm was present, by using the D/O/N/T supplementary codes in the Class fields (see discussion below).
- Multiple CADMIS calls for individual incidents. There are instances where multiple 999 calls are received for a single incident, resulting in one CADMIS entry being fully coded by the officer(s) attending, and the 'duplicate' calls being given the code 59 – Duplicate Incident⁸⁰. In a very few of these instances, codes other than 59 (e.g. the 65 code for firearms) are also attached in the Class Text field.

4.2.2 CADMIS data for the London Borough of Brent⁸¹

The CADMIS records for the Metropolitan Police Service in the London Borough of Brent have been extracted from the CADMIS database on a monthly basis by the (now defunct) Management Information Unit (MIU) at Wembley Police Station. Cases are selected on the basis of the Police Division QK, the code for the Brent BCU. The data under consideration includes all recorded incidents from 00:00 on January 1st, 1998 to 23:59 on September 30th, 2003 – 69 months of data comprised of 628,626 individual CADMIS entries.

Between January 1998 and September 2003, the number of CADMIS calls received in a calendar month has ranged from 6,744 in February 2003 (daily average 241) to 11,464 in August 1999 (daily average 370), representing a huge variation in police workload (see Figure 4.1). The overall trend has seen a decline after a peak in 1999; latterly, 2003 has seen a slight upturn, although the seasonal reduction in CADMIS calls associated with the winter period may see that reduced slightly as the year progresses (see Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). Overall, CADMIS calls recorded by the police in Brent exhibit a degree of seasonality (see Figure 4.3), with more calls in the summer months than in winter.

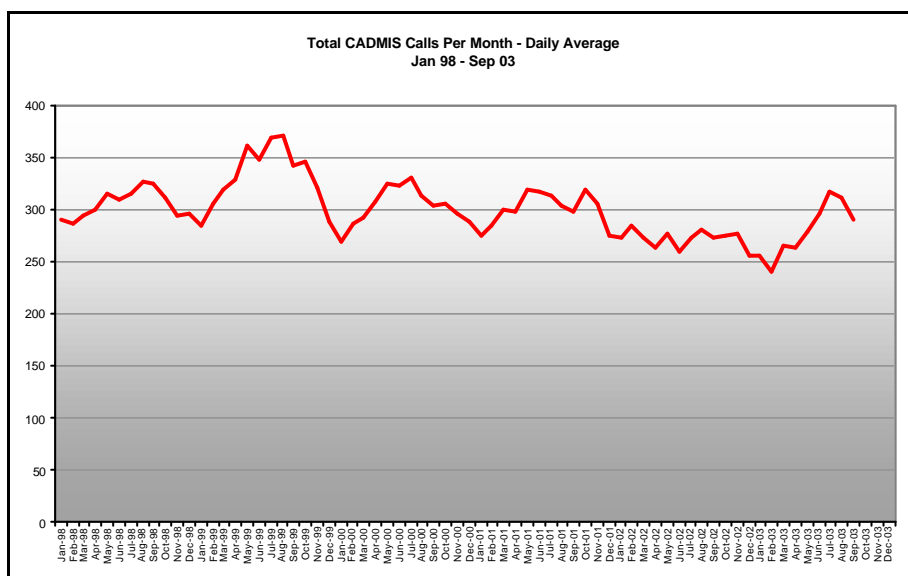


Figure 4.1 – Total CADMIS Calls Per Month Daily Average

⁸⁰ Of the 4,389 Type 65 calls examined in the present analysis, 652 (14.8%) have a Class 59 code, classifying them as duplicating pre-existing CADMIS calls. Nevertheless, this leaves 3,737 unique Type 65 incidents.

⁸¹ Wherever possible, rates are quoted as average calls per day. This controls for the variable length of individual months/years where appropriate.

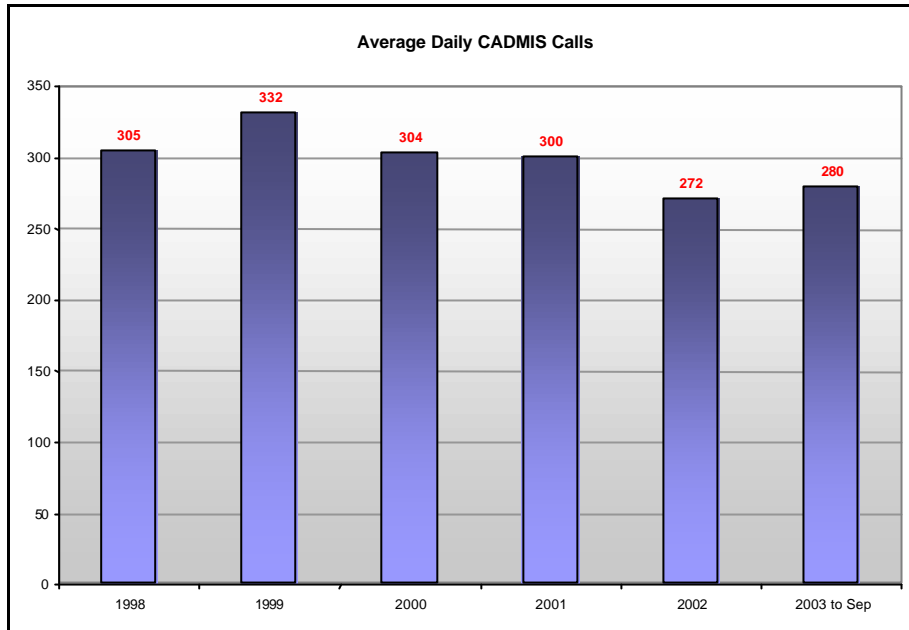


Figure 4.2 – Average Daily CADMIS Calls Per Year

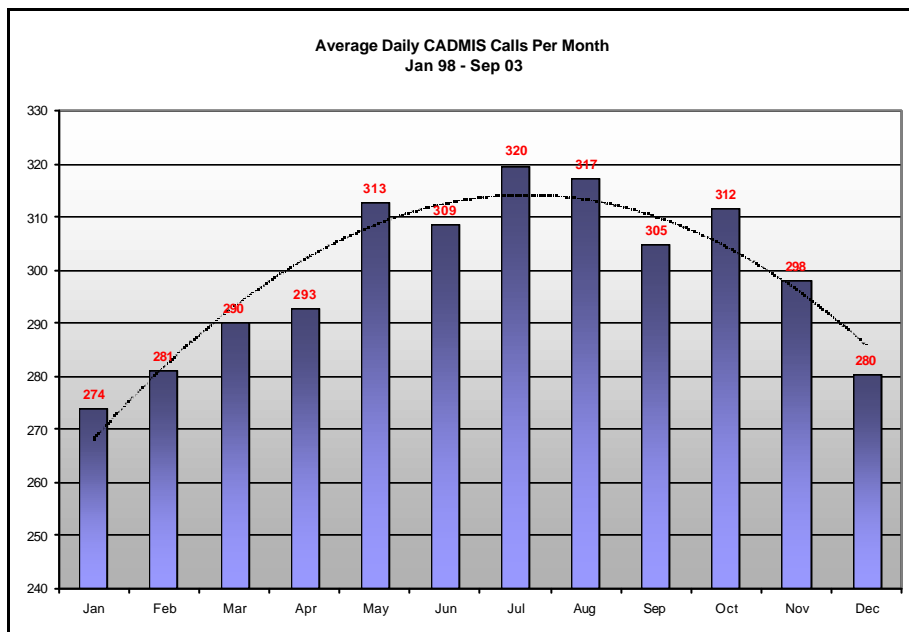


Figure 4.3 – Average Daily CADMIS Calls Per Month

Figure 4.3 also highlights the fact that within a clear annual cycle, there are potentially anomalous values. For example, May and October seem to be somewhat higher than might be expected from the overall trend (polynomial trend line), April, June and September somewhat lower.

4.3 Aims

The principle aim from this analysis of CADMIS data was to explore what the database can tell us about gun crime in Brent. More specifically, two of the research questions are addressed:

1. Is gun crime a growing problem in Brent?
Hypothesis: Gun Crime is a growing problem in Brent
2. Is the location at which an offence takes place significant? Does this differ by offence type?
Hypothesis: Location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal firearms

4.4 Methodology

- 4.4.1 Firearms Codes in CADMIS
- 4.4.2 Extracting CADMIS firearm calls
- 4.4.3 Mapping CADMIS data

4.4.1 Firearm Codes in CADMIS

The CADMIS database has a unique code for firearms, reflecting the operational importance for police officers of knowing “what they are going in to”. The CADMIS code for firearms is 65 (see Appendix E), and can appear in the following columns in the CADMIS database: Type 1 Code, Type 2 Code, Type 3 Code, Type Text, Class 1 Code, Class 2 Code, Class 3 Code, Class Text (see Appendix F). The presence of weapons other than firearms is captured with the code 69 – Suspect Armed, which encompasses a spectrum of weapons, including knives, swords, bottles etc.

In addition, since at least September 2000 CADMIS has contained a further coding appended when a firearm is present. More than one can be applied to an individual CADMIS entry, but rarely if ever does this seem to happen. These codes are:

- D** Firearm **D**ischarged
- O** Firearm **O**bserved
- N** Firearm **N**ot Observed
- T** Firearm **T**aken into the Possession of the Police

Hence the code 65D indicates that a firearm has been discharged. The police protocol as to how these supplementary codes should be used is as follows:

- A member of the Public witnesses an incident where he/she believes a firearm is involved and calls 999.
 - Control will then enter the appropriate D/O/N/T code in the TYPE field based on information from witness(es).
 - Officers are then deployed to a scene and after assessing the scene decide that a firearm has/has not been seen/discharged etc.
 - Then the D/O/N/T codes should be entered on the CLASS Field.

(Source: MPS, Brent)

Figure 4.4 – Supplementary Firearms Codes Protocol

In reality, however, these codes do not seem to be applied to the TYPE fields, and correspondence with the police has confirmed that the D/O/N/T codes are generally only provided by the officers attending the call. As a result, in practice they are only used in the case of the Class Text field.

Furthermore, the protocol outlined above would seem to suggest that for every instance that a Type 65 code is recorded, there should be a Class 65 code with one or more of the D/O/N/T supplementary codes. It will be seen below, however, that this is not the case, resulting in attrition in the recording of firearms between Type and Class classification.

4.4.2 Extracting CADMIS firearm calls

In order to extract the CADMIS calls in which firearms are mentioned, it was necessary firstly to construct a database in Microsoft Access of all the monthly CADMIS data for the period January 1998 (the earliest available) to September 2003 (the most recently available at the time analysis was conducted). This required that all monthly data be formatted in a consistent way, one of many onerous tasks involved in tackling such a large data set.

It was then necessary to search for CADMIS entries containing the code 65 for firearms, firstly under the Type Code and Text columns, and then under the Class Code and Text columns. These were then counted and tabulated on the one hand, and extracted into a separate CADMIS Firearms database, containing only CADMIS calls where a firearm was mentioned, on the other⁸². Where the firearm code appeared in a single CADMIS entry in more than one Type column, it was only counted once – the first time it appeared. The columns were searched in the order Code 1, Code 2, Code 3, Type Text. This process was then repeated for the Class columns.

4.4.3 Mapping CADMIS data

Having considered some of the temporal aspects of firearms incidents recorded in CADMIS, it is also possible to consider the spatial distribution of firearms incidents. As with the mapping conducted in Chapter 2, this can be done using a combination of:

- Geocoding software, which relates address data to geographical co-ordinates (Eastings and Northings)
- Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software, which allows that data to be mapped
- Statistical software, which allows an analysis of the spatial distribution of the mapped incidents

This process can be informative in a number of respects. Firstly, the location of incidents may be important. Clustering of incidents may suggest that there are local conditions that are in some way criminogenic – that is they may facilitate or encourage the commission of crimes and other disorder. This may in turn inform an understanding of why and how the incidents being examined happen. Furthermore, mapping the location of incidents over time may tell us something about the dynamic nature (or otherwise) of the incidents being examined. In other words, whether the distribution of the incidents being examined changes over time, both in terms of the areas affected, and also the degree of clustering of incidents.

Geocoding

In this case, the CADMIS data was geocoded by the Metropolitan Police in Brent and then passed to the researcher. Because of the way the geocoding software works, this process produced a data file that did not include all of the CADMIS fields, necessitating that the co-ordinate data was cut-and-pasted onto the original data file. Consistency checks were undertaken to ensure that this process did not introduce errors.

The geocoding software works by looking at address data and assigning addresses a point, with Easting and Northing co-ordinates relative to a reference grid, in this case the British National Grid. This is done with reference to a gazetteer (database) of known addresses, and allows the incident to be mapped. It is therefore dependent on two things: Firstly, that the incident address data has been completed, and accurately at that; secondly, that the gazetteer is up to date. A shortcoming of the present analysis is that the number of firearm CADMIS entries successfully geocoded falls over time, suggesting that there has either been a deterioration in the data captured by CADMIS, or that the gazetteer is out of date – the latter is the most likely explanation⁸³. The geocoding worked out as follows (Table 4.1):

⁸² It is possible that the Class 65 count is a slight undercount, because the Class Text field was truncated until the start of February 2002 when being extracted from the CADMIS database. Where CADMIS classification codes do appear in the Class Text field, however, they are almost invariably at the start of the entry, and therefore less likely to have been truncated than other more descriptive data which followed. The latter might include details such as the officer who responded, other CADMIS calls to which a given incident is linked, and so on. Furthermore, the ratio between Type 65 and Class 65 calls does not appear to have been obviously affected by this change – see Figure 4.11 below.

⁸³ It has not been possible at this stage to assess the degree to which the addresses which have not been geocoded are in some way systematically different from those which have been successfully geocoded. For example, it could be hypothesised that increased use of mobile phones has made address data less accurate as, in contrast to landline telephones, they are not necessarily situated at known addresses.

	Type 65			Class 65		
	N total	N Geocoded	% Geocoded	N total	N Geocoded	% Geocoded
1998	425	425	100.0	159	159	100.0
1999	712	708	99.4	253	251	99.2
2000	776	771	99.4	289	289	100.0
2001	819	816	99.6	355	353	99.4
2002	944	860	91.1	433	402	92.8
2003 to Sep	713	624	87.5	309	275	89.0

Table 4.1 – Geocoding Success Rate

Mapping

Mapping has been conducted by the researcher using ArcMap 8.2, with statistical analysis carried out using CrimeStatII⁸⁴.

The spatial location of CADMIS calls containing a firearm code (CADMIS code 65) has been mapped on a year-by-year basis, with data for 2003 up to and including September (the most recent data available at the time the analysis was conducted). Because of the differences between Type 65 and Class 65 data discussed above, the two have been mapped separately, but side-by-side, in order to examine whether there are spatial differences in the distribution of Type 65 and Class 65 incidents.

The mapping is presented in the form of hotspot maps. These have been created on the basis of the point data (individual calls), using the CrimeStatII software, and are Quartic Interpolation Kernel Density Hotspot maps, based on a fixed cell size of 25 metres and a fixed interval bandwidth of 400 metres. For further discussion, see section 2.4.7 in Chapter 2.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Levine, 2002

⁸⁵ It is important to note that changes to these variables may result in changes to the appearance of the hotspot maps that have been produced. For example, a narrower bandwidth would result in a less consolidated hotspot surface (more detailed), while a wider bandwidth would result in a more consolidated hotspot surface.

4.5 Findings

- 4.5.1 Introduction
- 4.5.2 Seasonality
- 4.5.3 Firearms as a percentage of all CADMIS calls
- 4.5.4 The ratio between Class 65 and Type 65 calls
- 4.5.5 Class 65 information about firearms
- 4.5.6 CADMIS codes used in conjunction with Type 65 and Class 65 codes
- 4.5.7 Police response times
- 4.5.8 Spatial changes

4.5.1 Introduction

To recap, CADMIS records contain two separate classifications of the incident recorded, namely the **Type** (the description given by the caller of 999) and **Class** (the description given by the officers attending the call). In the present analysis, these have been counted separately, so that a single CADMIS entry may have been counted once for the Type 65 classification and once for the Class 65 classification. As a result, for the period January 1998 to September 2003, there were 4,389 CADMIS records where a firearm code 65 was present in one of the Type fields, and 1,789 CADMIS records where a firearm code 65 was present in one of the Class fields, giving a total of 6,187 entries. However, in 1,657 cases a firearm code appeared in both a Type field and a Class field within a single CADMIS entry. Consequently, there were 4,530 unique CADMIS entries for which a firearm code appeared in a Type and/or a Class field during the period January 1998 to September 2003 (equivalent to an average of 66 per month).

The present analysis, however, will consider the presence of a firearm code separately for the Type and Class classifications of CADMIS incidents. This is because, as discussed above, they represent two versions of the same incident, one the perception of the initial caller to 999, the other police perception and operational requirements.

The crude count of CADMIS code 65 firearm entries is illustrated in Figure 4.5, which shows the average number of calls received per day for each month. In addition to highlighting volatility and an upward trend over the time period illustrated – particularly post-March 1999 – the number of CADMIS calls where a firearm was mentioned in the Type classification is consistently higher than for the Class classification, although both follow a broadly comparable pattern.

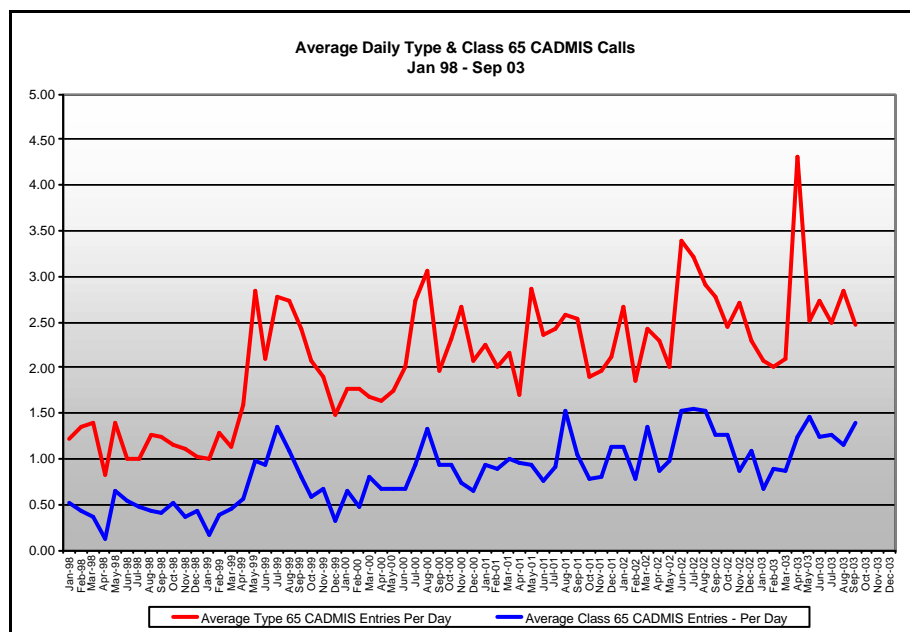


Figure 4.5 – Average Daily Type & Class 65 Calls

The general upward trend is reflected when Type 65 and Class 65 calls are considered separately, although it can be seen that the patterns differ slightly (Figures 4.6 and 4.7):

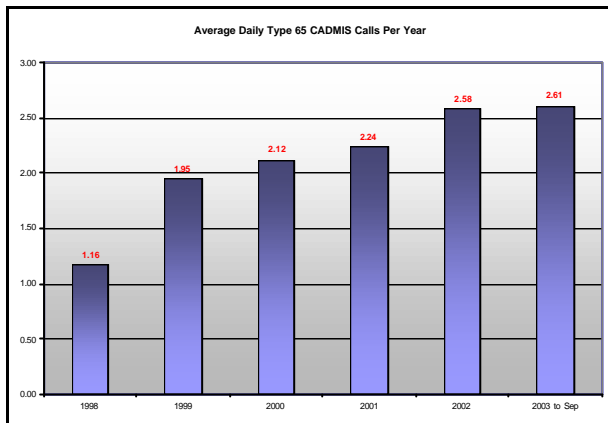


Figure 4.6 – Average Daily Type 65 Calls Per Year

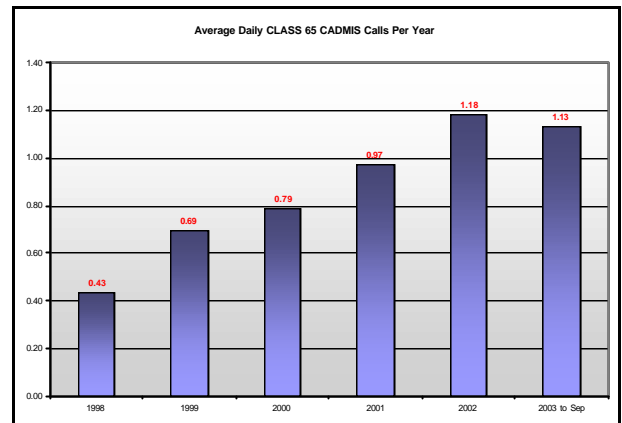


Figure 4.7 – Average Daily Class 65 Calls Per Year

It is notable that the average daily Type 65 count shows an increase between 2002 and 2003 to September, whereas the average daily Class 65 count shows a decrease.

4.5.2 Seasonality

Figure 4.3 suggested that in addition to an underlying upward trend, there may also be a seasonal effect, with annual peaks generally falling between April and August. Using a 3-month moving average, this seasonal trend is much more apparent as is the overall upward trend (Figure 4.8)⁸⁶:

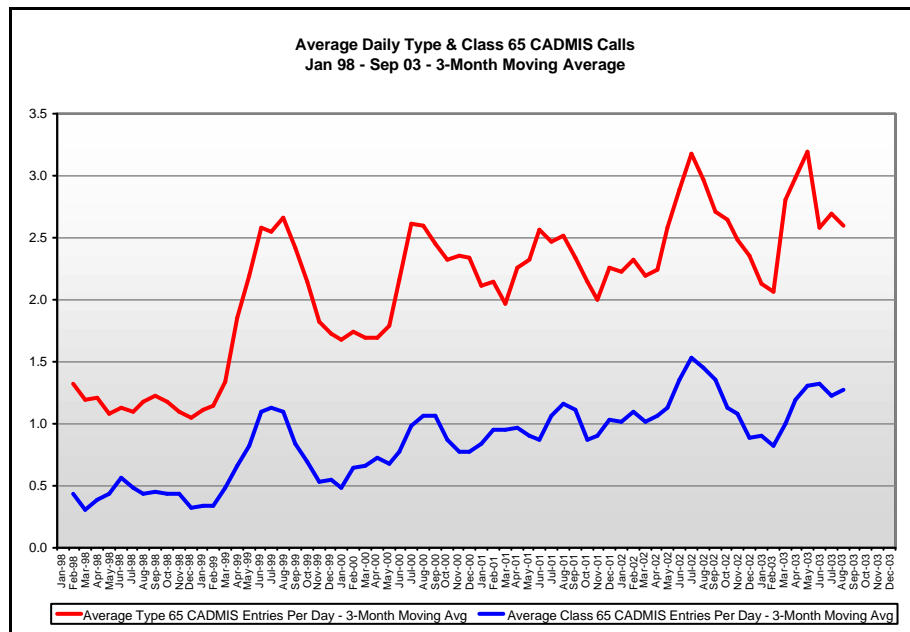


Figure 4.8 – Average Daily Type & Class 65 Calls 3-Month Moving Average

The observation that there appears to be a seasonal effect is informative in relation to considering some of the mechanisms that give rise to the illegal use of firearms. For example, it may be that the fact that people spend longer in public settings during the summer months is important, or that there is a situational element relating to holiday periods and the impact this has on opportunities for this type of

⁸⁶ To calculate a 3-month moving average, data from three consecutive months, say January, February and March, are averaged and the resulting count plotted against the middle month, in this case February. This is then repeated for February, March and April, and so on. This has the effect of reducing the amount of 'noise' in the data, smoothing the resulting line when graphed.

crime to arise. Equally, it may be that police activity changes over the course of the year and that this is in some way important.

Interestingly, however, the degree of seasonal effect appears to differ in degree between the Type and Class data, with the latter indicating a slightly more pronounced seasonal effect (see Figure 4.9). Both data sets, however, show peaks in August and low points in February.

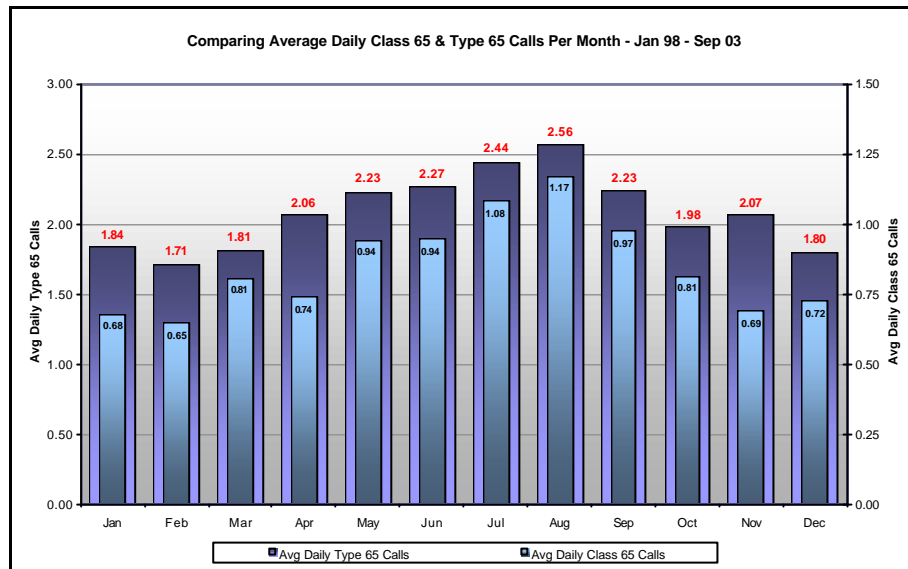


Figure 4.9 – Comparing Daily Class 65 & Type 65 Calls Per Month

The distribution of Type 65 calls indicates a tri-modal (three peaks) annual distribution of firearm calls, with peaks in January, August and November. Meanwhile, the Class 65 calls seems to have a more complex pattern, with periodic highpoints in March, May, August and December/January all coinciding with public holidays. The fall off from the summer peak is much more marked than for the Type 65 data.

While following broadly similar trends, there are some notable differences – in particular it appears that March and November merit particular consideration. The peak in November of the Type 65 data could conceivably have arisen as a consequence of fireworks being misinterpreted as firearms. Certainly there are occasional references throughout the CADMIS data to fireworks, and it is a theme that the police in Brent occasionally mention in the context of distinguishing between public perceptions and reality. The March data, however, is not so straightforward, and no explanation is immediately apparent, although the Easter holiday may be significant.

4.5.3 Firearms calls as a percentage of all CADMIS calls

In addition to increasing in crude terms, CADMIS calls including a firearm code have also increased as a percentage of all CADMIS calls (see Figure 4.10), covering a wide range of values:

- In the case of Type 65 incidents from a low of 0.28% in April 1998 to a high of 1.64% in April 2003 (average 0.71%)
- In the case of Class 65 incidents from a low of 0.04% in April 1998 to a high of 0.59% in June 2002 (average 0.29%)

Overall, the percentage of calls to 999 mentioning firearms peaked in 2002, with 0.95% of all 999 calls having a Type 65 code and 0.44% having a Class 65 code.

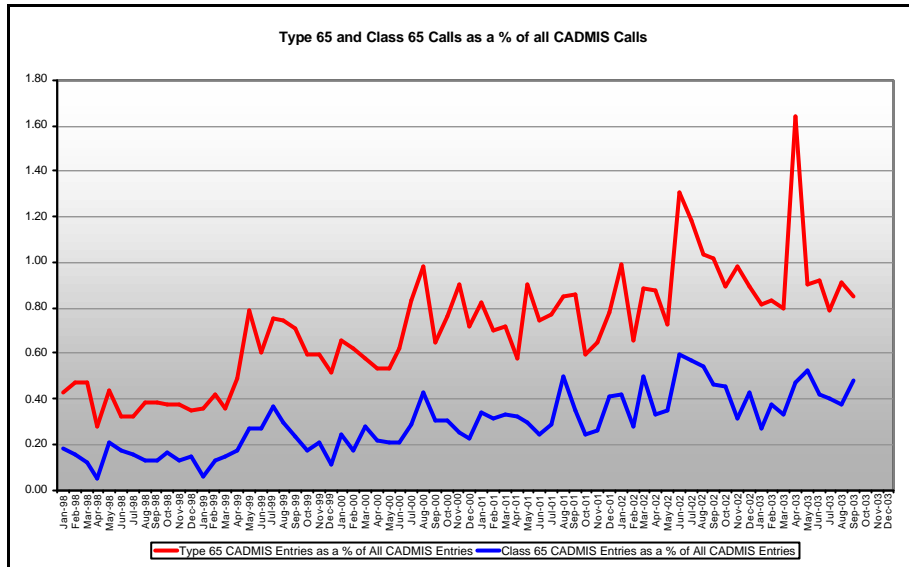


Figure 4.10 – Type 65 and Class 65 Calls as a Percentage of All CADMIS Calls

4.5.4 The ratio between Class 65 and Type 65 calls

Returning briefly to the question of how the difference between Type and Class classifications may be informative, it is furthermore interesting to consider the ratio between the number of Type 65 calls and Class 65 calls (Figure 4.11). With a multiple ranging from 1.70 to 6.25, It can be seen that there are generally between 2 and 3 times as many Type 65 calls as Class 65 calls, reflecting a substantial attrition rate between the first record of an incident as involving a firearm and its final classification. It is notable that this ratio appears to be getting smaller, as the general trend illustrated in Figure 4.11 is downward. However, there are some signs that the trend may be changing, with a slight increase in 2003 (see Figure 4.12)⁸⁷. In the case of the latter, five firearms murders, one of which involved a 7-year old girl, may have led to an increase in public fear and calls to the police. Certainly the peak of Type 65 calls to the police in April 2003 (see Figure 4.5) coincided with three murders in a short space of time at the end of March and the start of April, public meetings and numerous police and community calls for information about firearms in Brent.

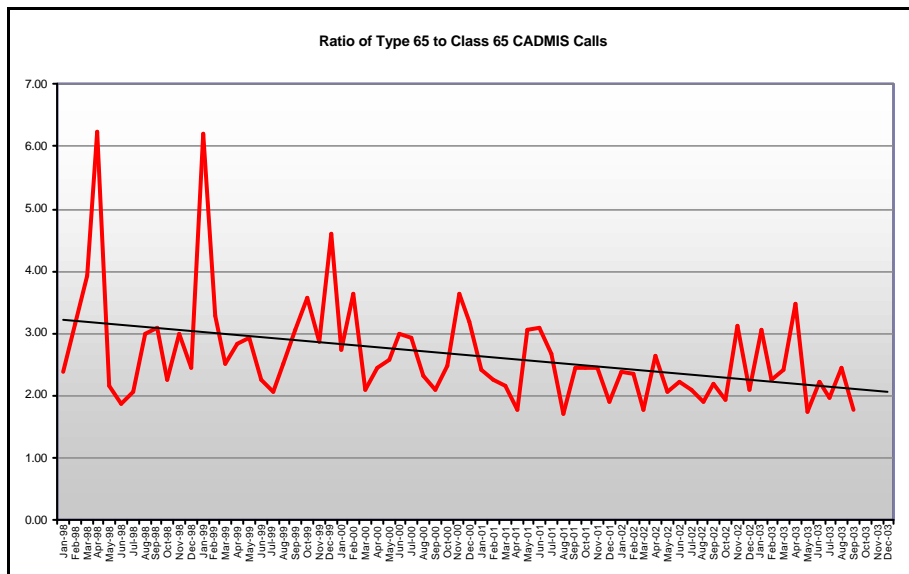


Figure 4.11 – Ratio of Type 65 to Class 65 CADMIS Calls

⁸⁷ Although note: it is expected that the average for the full year 2003 will be slightly below the level indicated for January – September as the seasonal trend for fewer incidents in the winter months impacts on the average.

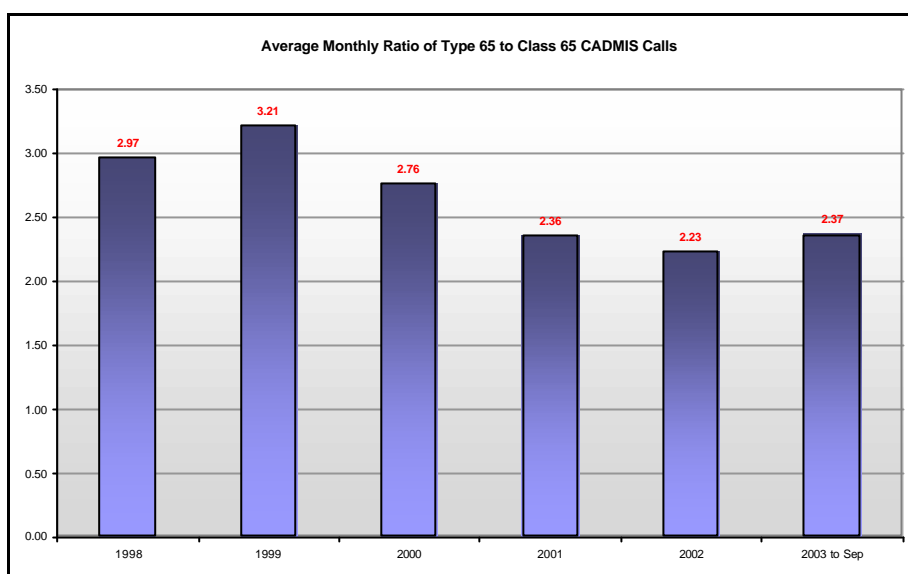


Figure 4.12 – Average Monthly Ratio of Type 65 to Class 65 CADMIS Calls Per Year

4.5.5 Class 65 information about firearms

As mentioned above, since around September 2000 CADMIS has included a series of codes that indicate the status of any firearm mentioned. These are appended where a firearm code 65 is entered. The supplementary codes are:

- D** Firearm Discharged
- O** Firearm Observed
- N** Firearm Not Observed
- T** Firearm Taken into the Possession of the Police

These codes can be recorded in the Type Text and Class Text fields, but are invariably only applied to the latter. What is seen, however, in the case of the Type Text field, is the use of a short description, such as 65SHOTS, 65Thr (threat?), 65AIRGUN or 65FOUND. This latter type of ad-hoc coding makes systematic analysis almost impossible.

The use of the D/O/N/T supplementary codes is not easy to deal with, both because they don't always seem to be applied, and because when they are applied they are not necessarily appended on to the 65. For example, both Class Text 65/01D and 65D/01 indicate that a firearm (code 65) was discharged (D) in the context of Violence Against the Person (code 01). Furthermore, more than one of these letters can be used for an individual CADMIS entry – e.g. 65DT indicates that a firearm was discharged and taken into the possession of the police⁸⁸.

To begin examining the kind of information this data may hold, the CADMIS entries for July, August and September 2003 were examined, during which time there were 239 CADMIS entries that contained a Type 65 code and 117 that contained a Class 65 Code – a total of 356. These were comprised of 241 unique CADMIS entries, the Class Text fields of which break down as follows, having been counted manually (Table 4.2):

Class Text	Count	% of total
No Class 65 code	124	51.5
65	10	4.1
65B	3	1.2
65D	9	3.7
65O	33	13.7
65N	49	20.3
65T	13	5.4
Total	241	100

Table 4.2 – Class 65 Supplementary Codes Jul-Sep 2003

⁸⁸ However, in the investigation of the application of these codes during the period July – September 2003, it is notable that any D/O/N/T codes only appeared singly, and were always appended to the code 65 – e.g. 65T.

It is not known what 65B stands for, as this does not appear to be an official code. It is furthermore not clear why 10 CADMIS entries included the firearm code 65 in the Class Text field, but did not include one of the D/O/N/T suffixes. The presence of these anomalies suggests that the D/O/N/T supplementary codes are not used as systematically and consistently as would be ideal for the type of strategic analysis being presented here.

What is apparent is that incidents where the police recorded firearms having been discharged are very rare – in this case nine times in three months. There is no information presently available to the researcher about the 13 taken into the possession of the police, or the 33 incidents where they were observed. Indeed, it is entirely possible that none of these incidents involved what are known as ‘lethal barrelled firearms’ – those capable of killing, and the most tightly regulated. Recent developments relating to the manufacture of high quality ‘imitation’ firearms can make it extremely difficult to differentiate visually between lethal and non-lethal barrelled firearms, unless they are actually fired.

Of the 124 entries where there was a Type 65 code but no Class 65 code, 34 had the Class code 59 – Duplicate Incident – attached. As previously mentioned, where there are multiple CADMIS calls relating to a single incident, the first call is coded fully, and the ‘duplicate’ calls, although being given unique CADMIS Incident Numbers and having the Type fields completed, are classified as Class 59. The remaining 90 entries had a range of Class codes attached to them.

4.5.6 CADMIS codes used in conjunction with Type 65 and Class 65 codes

A total of 241 CADMIS incidents had 407 Type codes (average 1.69 codes per incident) and 538 Class codes (average 2.23 codes per incident). Excluding the 34 incidents that had the Class 59 code, indicating a duplicate incident, the remaining 207 incidents had an average of 2.43 Class codes each. Furthermore, for the 239 incidents where there was a Type 65 code, an average of 1.69 codes was recorded, and for the 117 incidents where there was a Class 65 code, an average of 2.88 codes was recorded. It therefore appears that the Class fields tend on average to record much more detail about incidents than the Type fields, more so when one of the codes recorded is 65⁸⁹.

For indicative purposes, Table 4.3 shows the top 5 CADMIS codes (where appropriate), for the Type and Class fields, separately considering incidents where a 65 code was included, and where it was not.

Type Codes					
TYPE 65 Present - 239 Incidents, 404 Codes			TYPE 65 Not Present - 2 Incidents, 3 Codes		
Position	Code	No. Recorded	Position	Code	No. Recorded
1st	65 - Firearm Involved / Info	239	1st=	35 - Abandoned Phone Call	1
2nd	55 - Suspicious Incident/Person/Vehicle	47	1st=	52 - Missing Persons	1
3rd	26 - Disturbance in a Public Place	33	1st=	70 - Assistance Required/Rendered	1
4th	5 - Robbery	24			
5th	1 - Violence Against the Person	16			

Class Codes					
CLASS 65 Present - 117 Incidents, 337 Codes			CLASS 65 Not Present - 124 Incidents, 201 Codes		
Position	Code	No. Recorded	Position	Code	No. Recorded
1st	65 - Firearm Involved / Info	117	1st	59 - Duplicate Incident	34
2nd	55 - Suspicious Incident/Person/Vehicle	46	2nd	77 - No Offences Disclosed	22
3rd	77 - No Offences Disclosed	38	3rd	55 - Suspicious Incident/Person/Vehicle	18
4th	76 - No Trace	25	4th	60 - Other	13
5th=	5 - Robbery	15	5th=	76 - No Trace	10
5th=	60 - Other	15	5th=	79 - All Quiet on Arrival of Police	10

Table 4.3 – Top 5 CADMIS Codes Where Type/Class 65 Code Included

The importance of code 55 is interesting because it suggests that people are calling the police to report behaviour that may not itself be criminal. It is possible that prior knowledge about the prevalence of firearms in an area may result in more calls to the police mentioning firearms in the context of reporting such suspicious events. It may therefore be the case that high-profile criminality involving firearms, such as the series of firearms murders that have happened in Brent since 1999, result in an increase in the

⁸⁹ Why this is the case is not clear from the information presently available, but would be an interesting subject to consider in further research into the use of the CADMIS database. This might consider issues such as the way that 999 operators acquire and record incident descriptions from callers in the Type fields, whether more Class codes are recorded because the officers reporting them are better versed in CADMIS terminology, and whether these have any impact on the police response.

number of calls to the police that mention firearms without such an increase necessarily having happened.

The fact that the Class codes for No Offences Disclosed (77) and No Trace (76) appear in relation to calls both where the Class 65 code was used, and where it was not, might be considered to suggest that the use of the 65 code is inconsistent. This in turn implies that CADMIS data is problematic in terms of strategic analysis, but also presumably in application.

Finally, it is important to note the numerically significant presence of robbery and violence against the person in relation to those calls where a Type 65 code was present.

4.5.7 Police response times

CADMIS records include the Response time – the time between the incident being created (i.e. the time of the call to 999) and the arrival of the first police unit on the scene. In order to try and examine the impact the time taken for the police to respond may have had on the attrition between Type and Class classifications, the data for July, August and September 2003 were analysed – a total of 241 cases where there was a firearms code. Of these, 163 had a response time recorded. A histogram of the response times in whole minutes for these 163 calls is as follows and shows a heavily skewed distribution (Figure 4.13):

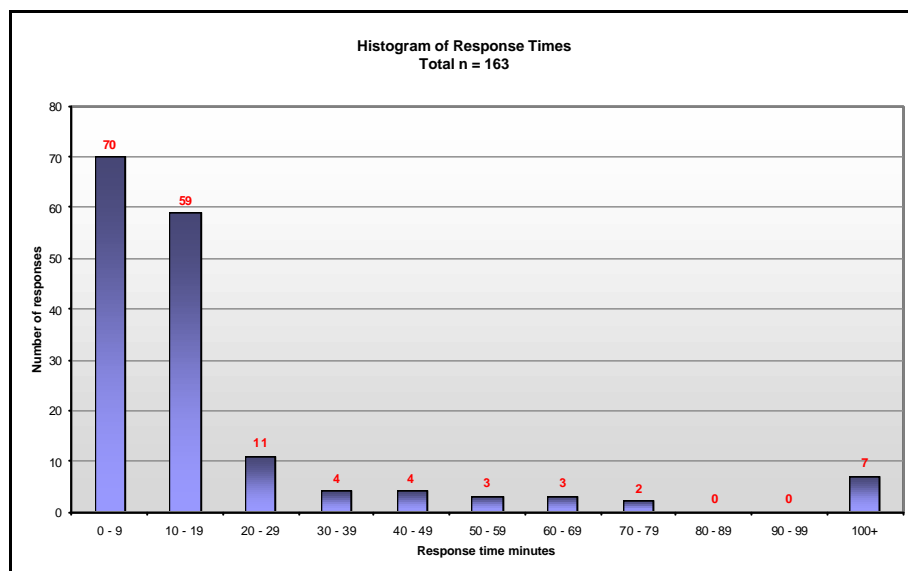


Figure 4.13 – Histogram of Response Times
July – September 2003

The data presented in this histogram have the following characteristics:

- Mean = 43.5 minutes (average response time)
- Median = 10 minutes (the middle value when all are in ascending order)
- Mode = 8 minutes (the most common value)

To some extent, it is to be expected that response times will be a function of the seriousness of the incident. Incidents are graded by the Control Room to indicate the response required. Five Incident Grades are used – for a full description see Appendix G. Even within these grades, however, response times will be influenced by the description received of the incident. For example, it may be necessary to await an armed response unit, or successive units, before an incident allegedly involving a firearm is tackled. The relationship between Incident Grade and response is therefore a potentially complicated one.

The Response Grades are as follows:

- I** *Immediate* – Immediate response required. The police Charter target is for 80% of incidents requiring an immediate response to be attended within 12 minutes.
- S** *Soon* – Response required as soon as possible, in any case within one hour.
- E** *Extended* – Response likely to be over one hour, based on a loose appointment.
- R** *Referral* – For calls that do not need a physical police response.
- P** *Police Generated* – For calls generated by the police.

The response time is not given for every CADMIS entry, however. In the case of the data examined for July – September 2003, 78 calls did not have a response time logged. The presence of a response can be broken down as follows, and again inconsistencies can be seen (Table 4.4):

Incident Grade	Count		Total
	Response Time Logged	Response Time NOT Logged	
I = Immediate	135	1	136
S = Soon	15	1	16
E = Extended	2	0	2
R = Referred	3	58	61
P = Police Generated	8	18	26
Total	163	78	241

Table 4.4 – Incident Grades and Response Times – Count

In the case of incidents where the Incident Grade is logged as “Referred”, a police unit is generally not sent to attend the incident, and as a result there is normally no response time. Similarly, in the case of “Police Generated” calls, it may often be the case that the officer originating the emergency call is attending the scene, again negating the appropriateness of a response time. The lack of response time for one “Immediate” call and one “Soon” call is not apparent from the data available. The former was a domestic burglary, attended by nine units/resources. A description for the latter mentions the caller attending a police station, which may be significant.

An analysis of those instances where a Response Time was recorded (n=163), shows an interesting difference in response times according to the way in which the incident was classified. Where there was only a Type 65 code (i.e. a firearm was mentioned by the original caller, but not by the officer(s) attending), the response time is significantly greater than for calls where both Type 65 and Class 65 codes were recorded (Table 4.5):

	Only a Type 65 code	Only a Class 65 code	Both a Type 65 and a Class 65 Code
Total n	70	1	92
Total Response Time (mins)	5815	17	1260
Average Response Time (mins)	83.1	17.0	13.7

Table 4.5 – Average Response Time by Presence of Type/Class 65 Code

However, the data here for those incidents where there was only a Type 65 call have been heavily skewed by several calls with very long response times. Those calls with a response time of longer than 120 minutes were therefore removed from the analysis – there are five in total, with response times respectively of 148, 320, 1204, 1449 and 1453 minutes⁹⁰. The fact that two of these related to “Immediate response required” calls – 1449 and 1453 minutes respectively – suggests that there may have been a problem relating to logging the arrival time of the police response (hampering the attainment of police response performance targets). Having removed the five calls with a response of 120 minutes or longer, the analysis produces a similar result, albeit the average response times are much closer (Table 4.6):

	Only a Type 65 code	Only a Class 65 code	Both a Type 65 and a Class 65 Code
Total n	65	1	92
Total Response Time (mins)	1241	17	1260
Average Response Time (mins)	19.1	17.0	13.7

Table 4.6 – Average Response Time by Presence of Type/Class 65 Code (<120mins)

⁹⁰ The 120 minute cut-off is arbitrary.

In this case, calls where a firearm was mentioned only when the call was first received (Type 65 only) have an average response time of 19.1 minutes, 39% longer than the 13.7 minute average response for calls where the firearm was also mentioned in the Class codes. This might suggest that there is a relationship between the length of the response time and the outcome of a call – that the quicker the police response, the more likely it is that the responding officer(s) will report a firearm code (Class 65). Or indeed, it might suggest that the police are correctly prioritising more serious incidents, which are being responded to faster.

It is possible to explore whether the difference in response times is a function of the classification of the incident, by examining the average response time by Incident Grade (CADMIS variable RC – See Appendix F). In this case, calls where the response time was over 120 minutes have again been excluded (leaving a total n=158).

Response - Calls <120 mins - Count	Count			
	Only a Type 65 code	Only a Class 65 code	Both a Type 65 and a Class 65 Code	Total
I = Immediate	51	1	80	132
S = Soon	7	0	8	15
E = Extended	1	0	0	1
R = Referred	2	0	1	3
P = Police Generated	4	0	3	7
Total	65	1	92	158

Table 4.7 Incident Grades by Presence of Type/Class 65 Code – Count (<120mins)

Response - Calls <120 mins - Avg Mins	Minutes			
	Only a Type 65 code	Only a Class 65 code	Both a Type 65 and a Class 65 Code	Total
I = Immediate	13.9	17.0	12.1	12.8
S = Soon	47.0	0.0	31.8	38.9
E = Extended	29.0	0.0	0.0	29.0
R = Referred	14.0	0.0	11.0	13.0
P = Police Generated	36.0	0.0	9.3	24.6
Overall Average	19.1	17.0	13.7	15.9

Table 4.8 Incident Grades by Presence of Type/Class 65 Code – Avg. Mins. (<120mins)

It can be seen that there is a slight difference between the average response time across all Incident Grades, most notably in relation to the numerically important Incident Grade “Immediate” (which comprises 84% of all calls being examined here). In the case of the latter the response time averaged 12.1 minutes when both Type 65 and Class 65 codes were present, but only 13.9 minutes where only a Type 65 code was present – 15% longer.

This finding would seem to suggest that there is some support for the hypothesis that a faster police response is associated with an increased likelihood of the officer(s) attending reporting a firearm. Furthermore, this does not seem to support the assertion that incidents where the police believe that there is a firearm present may be responded to more slowly in order to await appropriate resources, such as an armed response unit.

4.5.8 Spatial changes

By mapping the CADMIS data, it is possible to scrutinise two issues. Firstly, whether the spatial location of CADMIS calls that mention firearms changes from year to year. And, secondly, whether the distribution of the TYPE 65 and CLASS 65 calls differs within any particular year. Here this is done firstly on the basis of the 69 month period covered by the data (Figure 4.14), and then on a year by year basis (Figures 4.15 – 4.20).

A note on map comparability:

- Different Type 65 maps ARE directly comparable with each other.
- Different Class 65 maps ARE directly comparable with each other.
- Type 65 and Class 65 maps are NOT directly comparable as the symbology (the scale used in the legend indicating the boundary points) is not the same.
- Comparisons CAN be made between Type 65 and Class 65 maps on the basis of the *shape* of the distributions and the *location* and *relative intensity* of higher density incident clusters.

⇒ Jan 1998 – Sep 2003

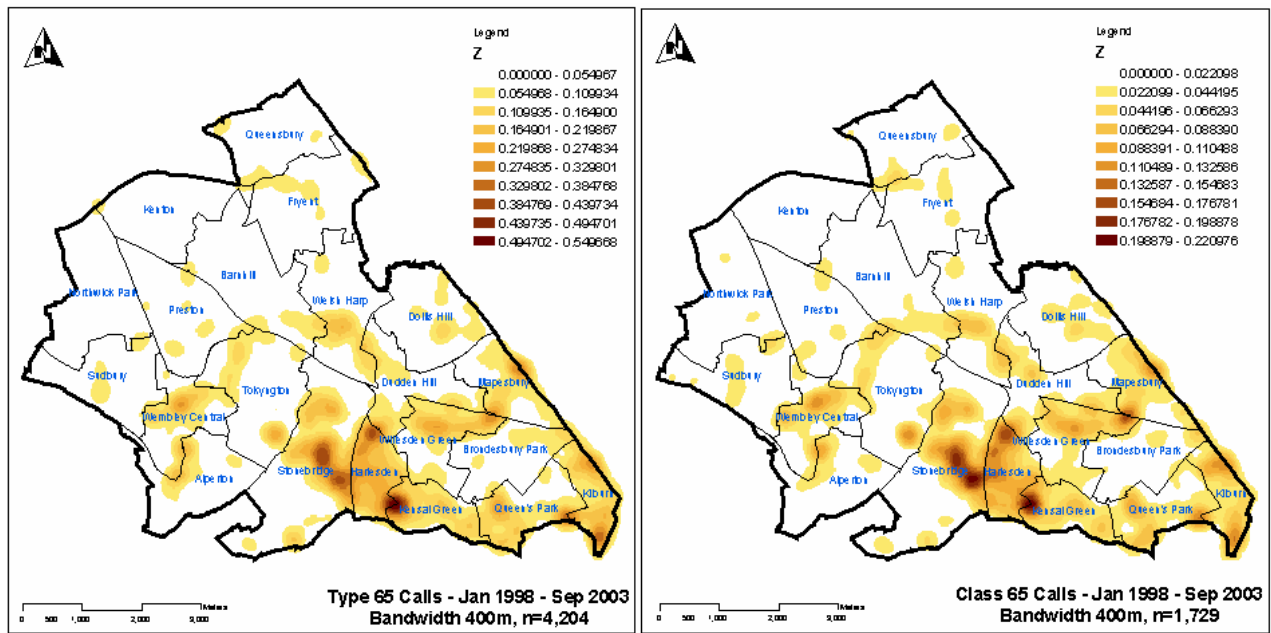


Figure 4.14: Type 65 and Class 65 Hotspot Maps, Jan 1998 – Sep 2003

The first thing to note is how consistent the Type 65 and Class 65 maps are. Any differences are very minor. To some extent, this is to be expected as 69 months of data have been aggregated in one map, which may tend to ‘average out’ any of the differences discussed above. Importantly, this suggests that despite the quantitative difference between the number of Type 65 calls (4,204) and Class 65 calls (1,729), the public and police perspectives are broadly consistent in terms of the location of incidents involving firearms.

These maps show that during the period January 1998 – September 2003 there have been a number of particularly important hotspot locations. Most notable are the two located in Stonebridge ward (both co-located with housing estates), one to north of Harlesden (co-located with a housing estate), and a fourth on the border between Harlesden and Kensal Green (in Harlesden Town Centre). These broadly represent the areas that have received most attention in the context of gun crime prevention work. Outside of these areas, however, a large part of the borough has been affected by gun crime, albeit incidents are not as numerous or as clustered. This includes hotspots in Wembley Central, Tokyngton, Welsh Harp, Willesden Green and Queen’s Park, in addition to a series of hotspots starting around the South Kilburn Estate at the southern end of Kilburn and extending north along the eastern boundary of the borough, following the route of the A5 road. Indeed, one of the notable features of these hotspots is their co-location with major high roads: The Wembley Central hotspot in the Wembley High Road area extends south along Ealing Road; The Welsh Harp hotspot extends along the A4088; and the Willesden Green hotspot extends along the A407.

The individual years are now considered, the maps being accompanied with a summary commentary.

⇒ 1998

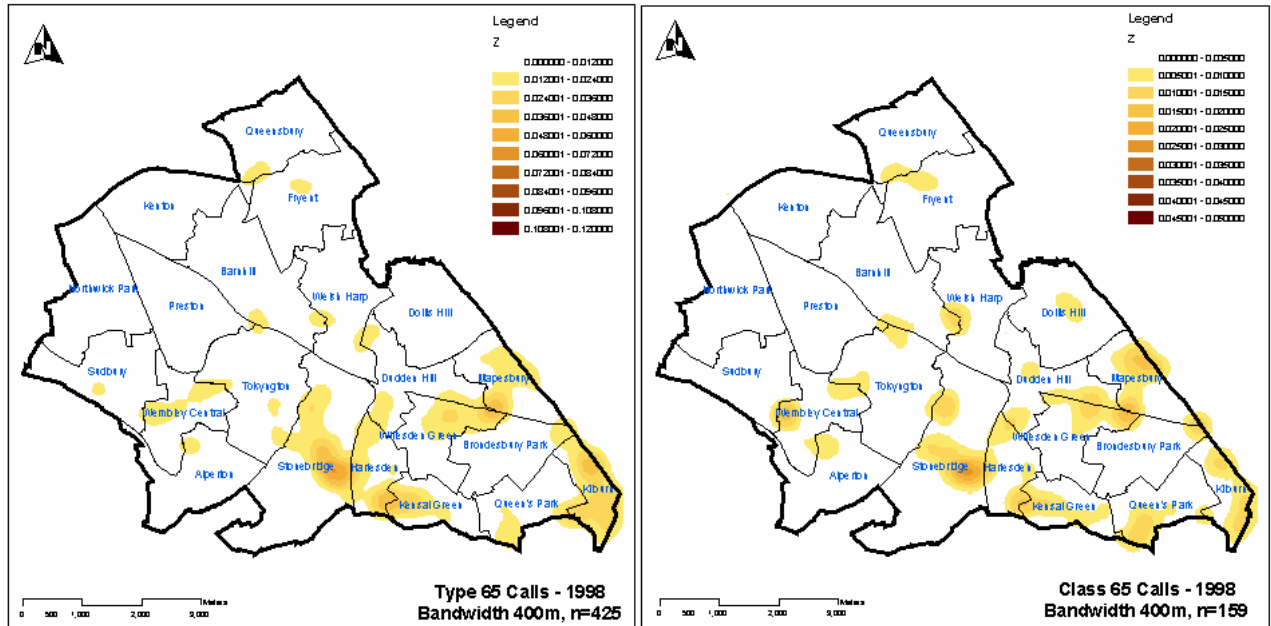


Figure 4.15: Type 65 and Class 65 Hotspot Maps, 1998

Limited overall coverage. Focus on Stonebridge, plus the boundary between Harlesden and Kensal Green and Kilburn. Wembley Central also shows as a weak hotspot, with a stronger one evident at the boundary between Willesden Green and Mapesbury wards. Type 65 and Class 65 maps broadly consensual, but there are some minor differences. For example, the Type 65 map shows a small hotspot in Sudbury that is not evident on the Class 65 map.

⇒ 1999

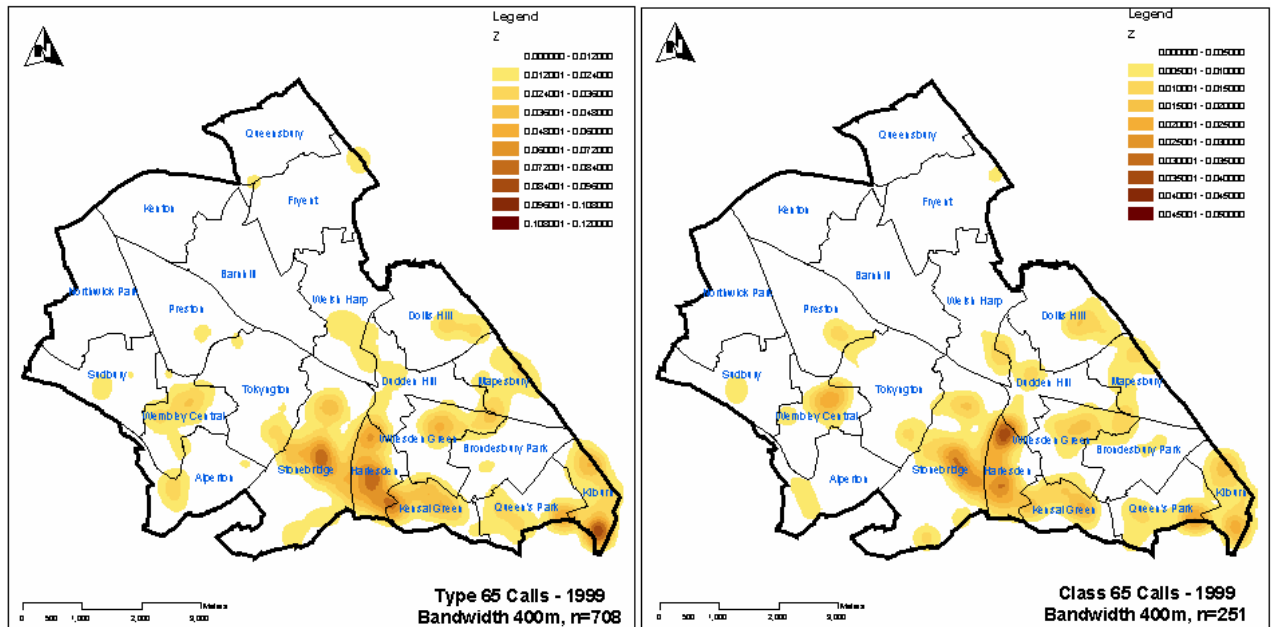


Figure 4.16: Type 65 and Class 65 Hotspot Maps, 1999

Marked increase in the overall distribution of incidents and intensity of clustering (reflected in the darker 'hotspot' colours on the map). Increasing focus on Harlesden, with further hotspots in Stonebridge and the Southern part of Kilburn. Class 65 map places more emphasis on the North of Harlesden, around the Church End estate. Wembley Central appears to be becoming more important, as does – to a lesser extent – Dollis Hill. There is also a new hotspot in Preston.

⇒ 2000

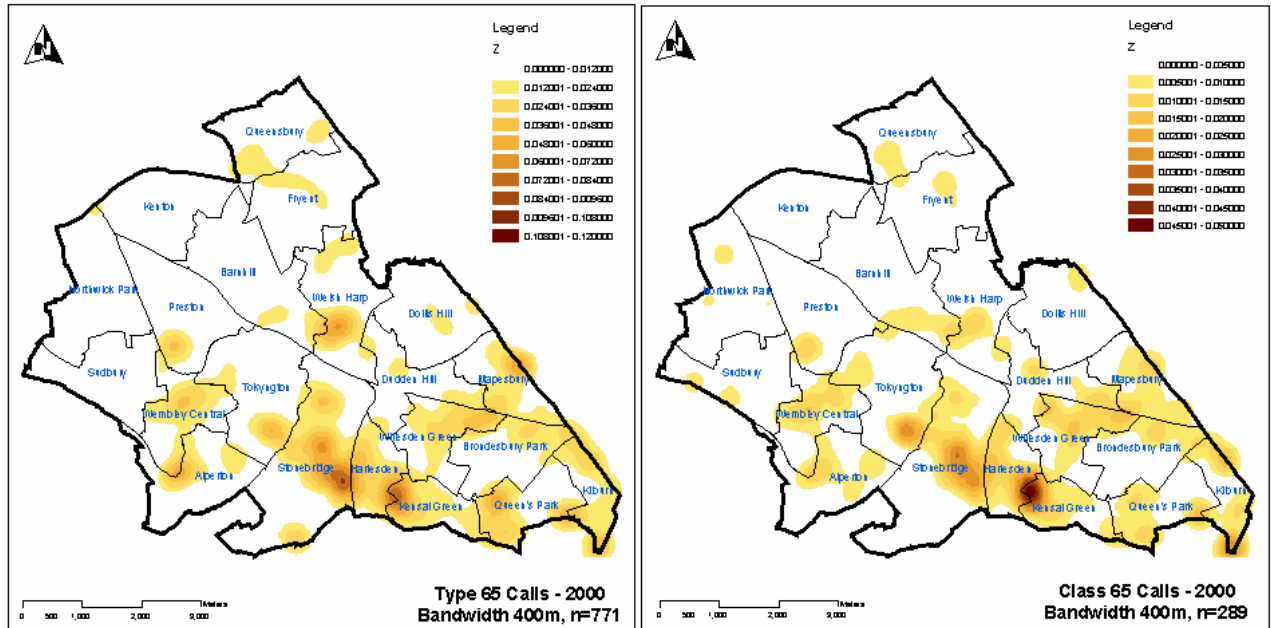


Figure 4.17: Type 65 and Class 65 Hotspot Maps, 2000

Further increase in the overall spatial distribution (area covered), but some clear differences in relation to the location of hotspots. Whereas in 1999 there was a particular focus on the centre of Harlesden, this has now diminished. Instead two hotspots on either side have emerged, returning to a pattern akin to that in 1998 in terms of location, albeit with a much greater number of incidents and greater clustering (darker colours on the hotspot maps). There is some evidence of a nascent hotspot in the north of the borough in Queensbury and Fryent. Increasing intensity of a hotspot in Welsh Harp ward. Tokyngton showing more strongly. Type 65 and Class 65 maps broadly consensual, although the latter places a particular importance on the hotspot that straddles the boundary between the Harlesden and Kensal Green wards around Harlesden Town Centre.

⇒ 2001

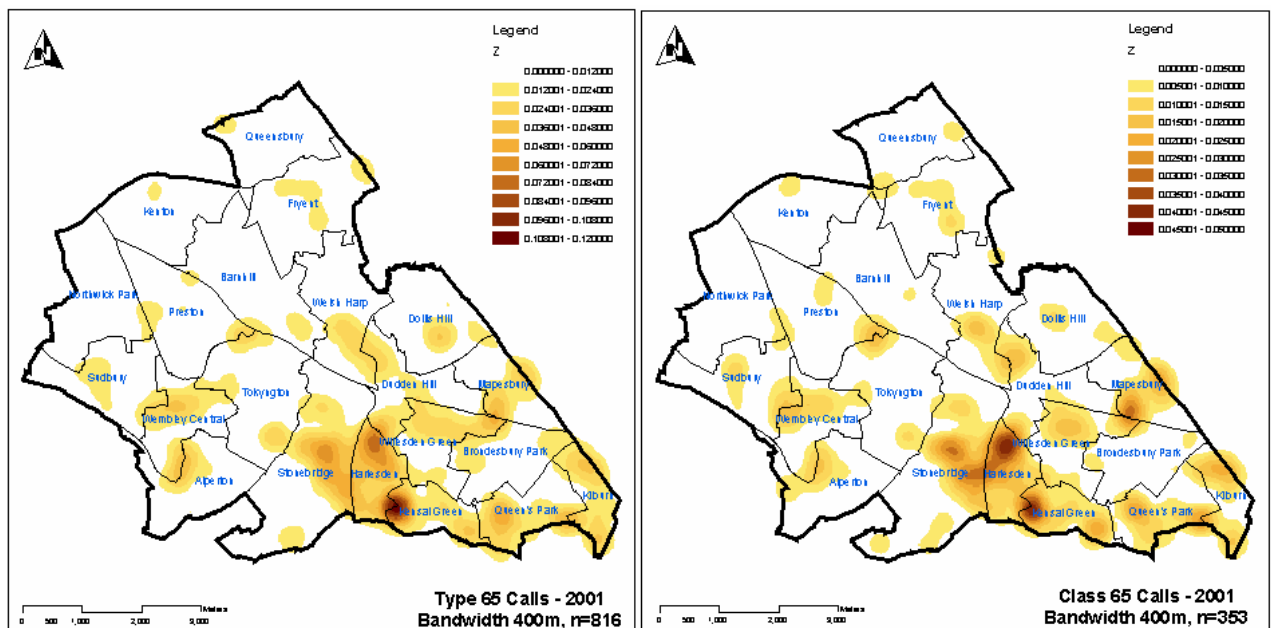


Figure 4.18: Type 65 and Class 65 Hotspot Maps, 2001

Another important hotspot shift, this time with the focus returning to the northern part of Harlesden and the Church End estate. The boundary between Kensal Green and Harlesden (the Eastern end of

Harlesden High Street) continues to show a particularly high concentration of incidents. Hotspot strengthening around the Willesden Green/Mapesbury boundary. Some evidence that firearms are now affecting all wards. Type 65 and Class 65 maps broadly consensual.

⇒ 2002

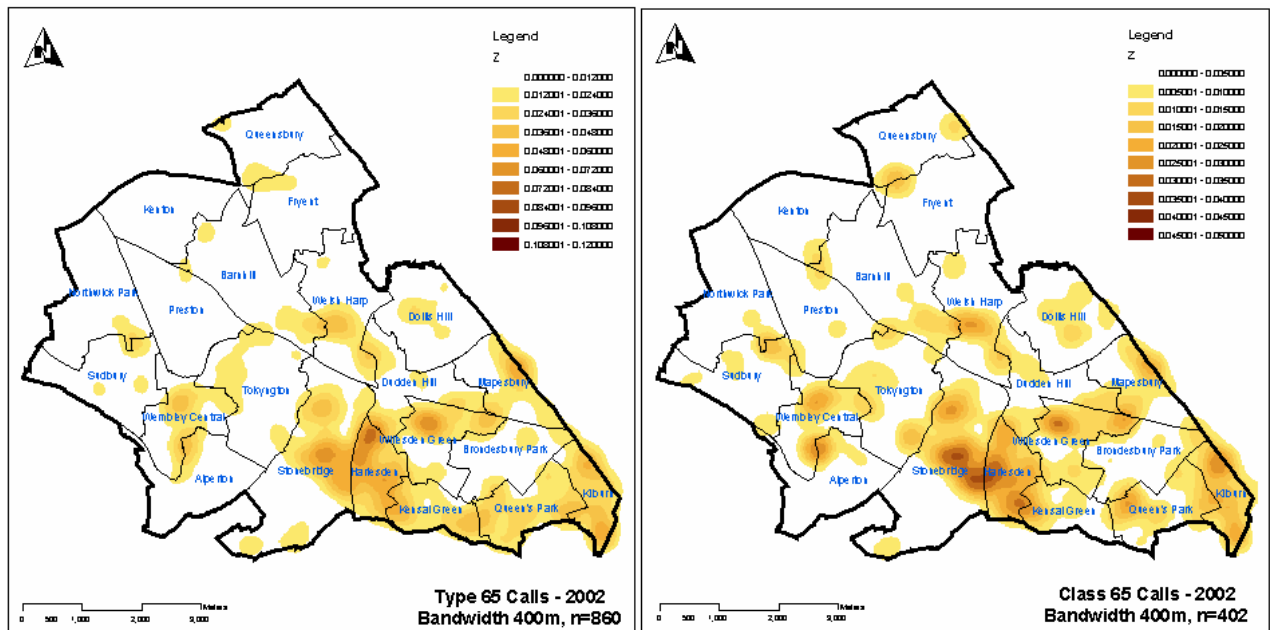


Figure 4.19: Type 65 and Class 65 Hotspot Maps, 2002

Very apparent differences between the distribution of Type 65 and Class 65 incidents in relation to Harlesden and Stonebridge – the former focussing on the North of Harlesden (Church End), the latter further South towards the Stonebridge Estates. No clear evidence as to why, although one possibility is a focus of policing activity around the Stonebridge Estates, another is that the public in that area were fearful of calling the police and reporting firearms. Otherwise the distributions are very consistent. The overall area covered is still increasing, and it appears that the hotspot map is now characterised by more areas of darker colours – both of these are to be expected as the total number of Type and Class 65 calls continues to increase. Brondesbury Park, an affluent residential area, appears as an “island” in the South East of the borough.

⇒ Jan – Sep 2003

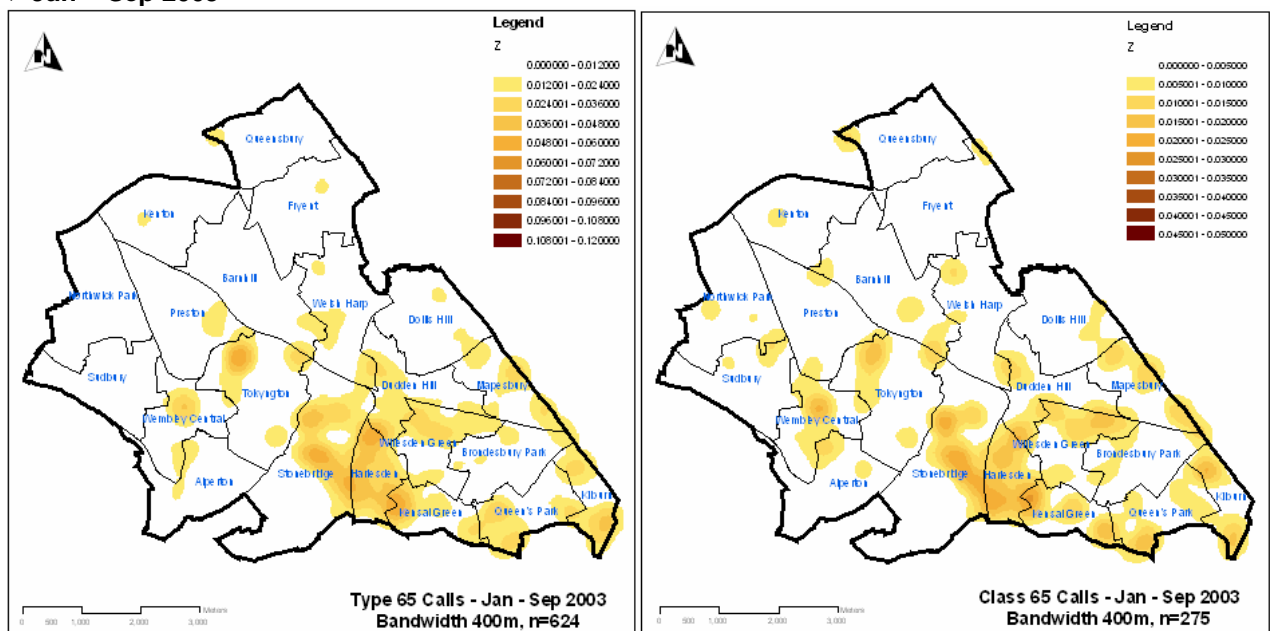


Figure 4.20: Type 65 and Class 65 Hotspot Maps, Jan-Sep 2003

In many respects 2003 (to September) is consistent with 2002, but with some changes to the shape of the distribution. Key differences to previous years include the emergence of a hotspot in Tokyngton where there hasn't previously been one and the diminution of a hotspot in the centre of the Welsh Harp ward which first emerged in 2000. Dollis Hill also appears to have become less important. There is evidence of a more even distribution of firearms across the Stonebridge and Harlesden wards. The Type 65 and Class 65 maps are broadly consensual.

4.6 Conclusions

4.6.1 Conclusions from the CADMIS quantitative data analysis:

- The total number of CADMIS calls displays a seasonal trend and has been generally falling since 1999, although there appears to be a slight upturn in 2003. Average daily calls per month over the period January 1998 – September 2003 have ranged from 241 to 370, a 54% difference.
- The number of CADMIS calls where a firearm has been mentioned has generally been increasing since 1998, both in crude terms and as a percentage of all CADMIS calls. There seems to have been a marked increase after March 1999. A seasonal trend is apparent from 1999 onwards.
- There is some evidence for a levelling off of the number of CADMIS firearm calls between 2002 and 2003 (to September).
- There is a significant rate of attrition between the initial classification of an incident as involving a firearm (the TYPE), and that assigned by the police officer(s) responding (the CLASS).
- This attrition rate has been decreasing as the ratio between Type 65 and Class 65 counts has narrowed. There are generally between two and three Type 65 calls to every Class 65 call.
- This attrition may in part be a consequence of a failure on the part of CADMIS operators to ensure that Type 65 calls are responded to with a Class 65 code, utilising one or more of the D/O/N/T suffixes. If every Type 65 call had an appropriate corresponding Class 65 D/O/N/T code, it would be possible to develop a more systematic picture of the relationship between public perception and police operational reality. As it is, the majority of CADMIS incidents for which there is a Type 65 call do not mention the firearm in the Class fields.
- There is some evidence to support the hypothesis that the attrition observed might arise at least in part as a function of police incident response times. Calls with both Type 65 and Class 65 classifications are on average responded to faster than those with only a Type 65 classification. This is the case even when comparing calls given the same Incident Grade. Further research on the relationship between response time and call outcome would be appropriate.
- Incidents which record the involvement of a firearm in the Class fields have an average of 2.88 CADMIS codes in the Class fields, whereas incidents which record the involvement of a firearm in the Type fields record an average of only 1.69 codes in the Type fields. Further research would be required to understand why this difference exists.
- Further development of the CADMIS database could make it more amenable to strategic analysis. In particular, the use of free text fields for the recording of CADMIS codes makes analysis difficult, as does the unsystematic application of the D/O/N/T suffixes. Resolving the latter would allow a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between public perceptions and police operational conditions.

4.6.2 Conclusions from the hotspot mapping:

The series of maps above illustrates four important features of the distribution of CADMIS firearms calls over the period being considered:

- Overall, despite the differences in the total number of calls recorded, Type 65 and Class 65 maps show very consistent distributions. 2002 is an important exception.
- The total area affected in Brent has increased over time; it is not merely the case that the total number of offences has increased in situ.
- The distribution has differed from one year to the next, in particular in relation to the location of hotspots.
- Deprived housing estates and major high streets appear to be particularly important.

Returning to the research questions detailed in the Aims in section 4.3, the following conclusions can be drawn from the consideration of nearly six years of CADMIS data:

1. Is gun crime a growing problem in Brent?

Hypothesis: Gun Crime is a growing problem in Brent

Conclusions: The analysis presented above in this chapter suggests that gun crime is a growing problem, although there are some suggestions following year-on-year deterioration from 1998 to 2002, that 2003 may have seen a slight improvement. Certainly relative to all crime and disorder as recorded in the CADMIS database, which has fallen since 1999, gun crime appears to have been growing in significance, representing an increasing proportion of all calls to 999. Furthermore, the evidence from the mapping of CADMIS data suggests that gun crime has been affecting an ever-increasing proportion of the borough's area.

2. Is the location at which an offence takes place significant? Does this differ by offence type?

Hypothesis: Location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal firearms

Conclusions: Although Chapter 4, unlike Chapter 2, has not been able to consider whether the location of 999 calls mentioning firearms has varied by crime type, it is possible to say that location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal guns. This is because the distribution of gun crime offences is not uniform, certain areas being disproportionately affected. It is worth noting, however, that the distribution changes from one year to the next, suggesting that variables other than spatial location and physical environment are significant.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Conclusions

A large body of analysis has been presented that takes stock of formal police data and the accounts of some of those actually involved in gun crime as offenders. The crime data highlights the range of crime types in which firearms feature in Brent, and points to important differences between men and women and between ethnic groups in relation to both offending and victimisation. It illustrates the fact that gun crime impacts on all groups, albeit not equally. In this regard, the discussion in Chapter 2 about disproportionality needs to be given careful consideration: for example, just because *X* percent of those suspected of gun crime are from ethnic group *Y* does not mean that *X* percentage of ethnic group *Y* are gun criminals. The question about whether disproportionate figures arise as a consequence of disproportionate *offender* rates or disproportionate *offending* rates (or some combination of the two) remains unresolved and certainly merits further consideration.

What can be said is that the illegal use of firearms cuts across the criminal spectrum and defies simple deconstruction, encompassing both symbolic and instrumental functionality. As such it is not conceptually straightforward, despite the articulation by the media and politicians of compelling two-dimensional folk devils such as the 'Yardie' drug-dealer, the 'gangsta rapper' and the street gang member. It follows that there is no such thing as a singular 'gun culture', although that is not to suggest that firearms do not carry significant cultural weight in certain settings. Rather, the issue is that the various motivations and contexts for firearm possession and use are not all manifestations of the same cultural imperative. It has further been shown that the spatial distribution of gun crime offences does not remain static, suggesting that gun crime in Brent cannot simply be described as a symptom of the physical environment. In acknowledging this complexity, it inevitably follows that any efforts to tackle gun crime must also be complex. While efforts to curtail firearm availability will cut across the full range of gun crime offences, approaches concerned with particular contexts, particular attitudes, particular groups or particular areas will not.

Returning to the broad hypotheses posed at the beginning of this document:

1. Is gun crime a growing problem in Brent?

Hypothesis: Gun Crime is a growing problem in Brent.

Conclusions: It appears that over time the form of gun crime in Brent has changed, from being dominated by relatively organised criminal firms to a more opportunistic, entrepreneurial and disorganised criminal culture. In the long term it seems fair to conclude that gun crime has been a growing problem, particularly since early 1999. In the context of the past five or six years, however, there are some indications that a rise to 2002 was followed by a fall in 2003. Whether this marks the turning of a corner or a brief reprieve remains to be seen, however. The small numbers of offences mean that even relatively large percentage changes may result from random variations that may not necessarily be indicative of underlying changes. Nevertheless, both the crime data (CRIS) and 999 call data (CADMIS) are consensual.

Importantly, however, the interviews with convicted offenders highlighted problems of contagion with what appears to be a widening circle of individuals being drawn into firearms ownership, and violence that may once have been limited to distinct criminal groups spilling over into the wider community. Undoubtedly there is demand for firearms, and it is very plausible that any increase in the availability of firearms would quickly result in an increase in offence numbers. This contagion may also be reflected in the increasing area of the borough that has been affected by gun crime from year-to-year, as illustrated in the mapping in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

2. Profiling Offences, Offenders and Victims

Hypothesis: There is a relationship between individual characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity and the illegal use of firearms/victimisation.

Conclusions: The first thing to say is that gun crime is something that affects both men and women, all ethnic groups, all age groups and all parts of the borough. More specifically, however, there is no question that certain groups are over-represented (notably men), although it is important to note that this differs by crime type. In this regard, one can conclude that there does appear to be a relationship between individual characteristics and the illegal use of firearms and victimisation. Two neat examples of that relationship concern firstly robbery and secondly the most serious form of violent crime, murder and attempted murder. Clear age differences are evident in the data relating to

robberies of the person and robberies of business property, where the average ages for victims and suspects in the case of the former are 27.2 and 21.7 years, as compares with 34.2 and 24.6 years in the case of the latter. Similar marked differences exist in relation to attempted murder and murder, as well as a range of other offences. In relation to the robbery victims, these differences can be understood to some extent as a function of economics – victims of business robberies may be older because it is older individuals who are the business owners. Similarly, the relatively old group of criminal damage victims may reflect those in Brent who are most likely to own the houses, cars and other property that is then at risk of being damaged. In relation to murder and attempted murder, however, it is possible that the significance of age (murders having older victims and offenders than attempted murders), may be a function of factors such as greater access to more lethal firearms, greater skill in using the guns, and greater levels of motivation among the older groups. More work is required to better understand these factors.

3. Is the location at which an offence takes place significant? Does this differ by offence type?
Hypothesis: Location is important in the commission of offences involving illegal firearms.

Conclusions: The fact that gun crime offences are not evenly distributed across Brent suggests that the location of these offences is significant, although changes in the spatial distribution of offences from year-to-year further suggests that other factors may be important. In relation to the offender interviews, they did not in general suggest that there was any symbolic significance in the location of the offences described, although there were some settings, notably parties, nightclubs and other social venues, where that might have been the case. The importance of a social audience, as highlighted in other criminological literature, deserves further consideration⁹¹. More commonly, however, it was the location of potential or intended victims that was significant, and to some extent their uneven distribution may be important.

4. Why do certain individuals in Brent carry and/or use firearms (including imitations)?
Hypothesis 1: Firearms may have symbolic and/or instrumental importance to the possessor.
Hypothesis 2: Illegal firearm possession is limited by availability rather than demand.

Conclusions: On the basis of the offender interviews, there is no question that firearms may have either symbolic or instrumental importance, or indeed some combination of the two. It is nevertheless suggested that this relationship may be age-sensitive, with younger offenders attributing greater symbolic significance to their firearm than their older and more instrumental peers. At least one of the offenders further suggested that there may also be a racial/cultural dimension to this division.

The question of whether possession is limited by availability or demand is, as yet, much less equivocal. Certainly, from the interviews there are suggestions that if an individual has the right contacts, then procuring a firearm may be relatively straightforward. On the other hand, there are also indications that manufactured-for-purpose firearms may not be widely available, hence the innovation of converted imitation firearms. In any case, since those interviewed for this research had in most cases previously obtained a firearm of some description, the interviews are arguably not well placed to comment on those who might wish to obtain firearms but are unable to do so.

The evidence and analysis presented in this research has only focussed on one London borough, a relatively small period of time, and a small sample of 15 offenders. It does not therefore make any claims to present a final conclusive truth, either about what is happening in Brent or elsewhere. A more modest claim is that it has begun to unpick the complex relationship between guns, crime and wider society. By examining the official police data it has been possible to explore the range of offences in which guns are used, examine questions about who, when and where gun crime impacts, take stock of trends over time, and begin looking at the police response. Importantly, the research has also gone a large step further, interviewing 15 individuals who have been convicted of gun crime offences, exploring the reasons why their offences occurred, how and why they were in possession of guns, and how their offending relates to the lives more generally. Taken altogether, this research has highlighted the sheer complexity of 'gun crime', even in one relatively small geographical location. The scale of the challenge in tackling these crimes is therefore obvious. It is now imperative that gun crime discourse moves on from simplistic platitudes about gangsta rap and drug turf wars, to acknowledge the nuanced and dynamic relationships between guns and crime.

⁹¹ The theme of the significant social audience features strongly in research literature relating to topics such as alcohol-related violence (e.g. Tomsen, 1997) and confrontational homicide (e.g. Polk, 1994)

Appendices

- A.** Violent Gun Crime Offences by London Borough
Financial Years 2001/2 to 2003/4
- B.** Brent Gun Crime Offences by Ward 1999 to 2003
- C.** CRIS Variables Obtained
- D.** CRIS Firearms Feature Codes
- E.** CADMIS Codes
- F.** CADMIS Fields
- G.** CADMIS Incident Grades
- H.** Glossary
- I.** Useful Websites
- J.** Bibliography

Appendix A:

Violent Gun Crime Offences by London Borough Financial Years 2001/2 to 2003/4. Sorted by Total 2001/2004

Source: Various MPS Monthly Management Reports, BIU Brent.

Rank 01/04	Borough	Total 01/02	Total 02/03	Total 03/04	Total 01/04	% of Total 01/04
1	Lambeth	316	327	297	940	8.6
2	Hackney	253	290	250	793	7.3
3	Southwark	246	254	247	747	6.9
4	Haringey	199	231	190	620	5.7
5	Brent	176	213	158	547	5.0
6	Newham	148	186	173	507	4.7
7	Waltham Forest	157	165	158	480	4.4
8=	Lewisham	143	138	188	469	4.3
8=	Tower Hamlets	136	162	171	469	4.3
10	Croydon	130	135	150	415	3.8
11	Enfield	116	143	140	399	3.7
12	Ealing	107	127	151	385	3.5
13	Islington	114	153	107	374	3.4
14	Camden	139	140	78	357	3.3
15	Westminster	117	108	105	330	3.0
16=	Wandsworth	83	105	106	294	2.7
16=	Barnet	98	104	92	294	2.7
18	Redbridge	87	82	85	254	2.3
19	Greenwich	97	76	78	251	2.3
20	Barking & Dagenham	72	73	89	234	2.1
21	Hounslow	48	91	80	219	2.0
22	Bromley	61	71	76	208	1.9
23	Hillingdon	61	62	54	177	1.6
24	Hammersmith & Fulham	49	64	57	170	1.6
25	Havering	44	60	54	158	1.5
26	Bexley	48	58	49	155	1.4
27	Kensington & Chelsea	49	62	39	150	1.4
28	Merton	39	61	41	141	1.3
29	Harrow	40	39	50	129	1.2
30	Sutton	29	23	31	83	0.8
31=	Richmond upon Thames	23	37	8	68	0.6
31=	Kingston upon Thames	26	19	23	68	0.6
	<i>MPS Total</i>	<i>3,451</i>	<i>3,859</i>	<i>3,575</i>	<i>10,885</i>	<i>100</i>

Appendix B:

Brent Gun Crime Offences by Ward 1999 - 2003

Ward	Burglary	Criminal Damage	Drugs	Fraud or Forgery	Other Accepted Crime	Other Notifiable Offence	Robbery	Sexual Offences	Theft and Handling	Violence Against the Person	Total
Alperton	4	4			1	4	22			20	55
Barnhill		3			1	4	6			21	35
Brondesbury Park		5				6	7			12	30
Dollis Hill	1	3		1	1	4	13			11	34
Dudden Hill	5	6			1	2	25	1	2	14	56
Fryent		11				1	20			3	35
Harlesden	8	13				13	68	2	1	56	161
Kensal Green	3	4			1	11	26	1	1	35	82
Kenton	1	2					6			6	15
Kilburn	9	5	1			12	35	2	1	37	102
Mapesbury	3	3				2	37			18	63
Northwick Park		2			2	1	7			4	16
Preston		4			2	6	13			12	37
Queens Park	4	5				6	27		1	25	68
Queensbury	1	8				1	19	1		7	37
Stonebridge	6	18		1	2	11	55	1		71	165
Sudbury	7	5			1	5	23	1	1	10	53
Tokyngton	2	7			1	8	13		1	17	49
Welsh Harp	2	9				5	10		3	16	45
Wembley Central	2	5			2	2	25		1	24	61
Willesden Green		2			2	6	26	1	1	32	70
<i>Outside Ward Boundaries</i>		1			1	3	17	3		16	41
Total	58	125	1	2	18	113	500	13	13	467	1310

Table B1: Major Crime Types 1999-2003 by Electoral Ward

Ward	Reported Year				Total	% of Total	
	1999	2000	2001	2002			2003
Alperton	11	13	7	19	5	55	4.2
Barnhill	6	5	7	8	9	35	2.7
Brondesbury Park	4	5	8	5	8	30	2.3
Dollis Hill	3	7	8	12	4	34	2.6
Dudden Hill	8	13	2	22	11	56	4.3
Fryent	6	9	12	6	2	35	2.7
Harlesden	41	15	32	37	36	161	12.3
Kensal Green	16	9	19	17	21	82	6.3
Kenton	4	3	6	2		15	1.1
Kilburn	20	10	21	28	23	102	7.8
Mapesbury	10	16	12	13	12	63	4.8
Northwick Park	5	2	1	5	3	16	1.2
Preston	4	4	10	10	9	37	2.8
Queens Park	14	6	12	25	11	68	5.2
Queensbury	7	4	4	15	7	37	2.8
Stonebridge	29	33	29	43	31	165	12.6
Sudbury	6	11	17	7	12	53	4.0
Tokyngton	5	9	14	8	13	49	3.7
Welsh Harp	7	13	8	8	9	45	3.4
Wembley Central	14	16	8	13	10	61	4.7
Willesden Green	7	12	12	21	18	70	5.3
<i>Outside Ward Boundaries</i>	7	11	7	8	8	41	3.1
Total	234	226	256	332	262	1310	100.0

Table B2: Annual Total Gun Crime 1999-2003 by Electoral Ward

Appendix C:

CRIS Variables Obtained

Offences	Victims	Suspects	Accused
Crime Number	Crime Number	Crime Number	Crime Number
Police Division	Police Division	Police Division	Police Division
Code Count (# crimes)	Summary Distinct Hit Count (# victims)	Suspect Count	Code Count (# accused)
Allegation Code	Allegation Code	Allegation Code	Allegation Code
Major Crime Type	Major Crime Type	Major Crime Type	Major Crime Type
Minor Crime Type	Minor Crime Type	Minor Crime Type	Minor Crime Type
Home Office Main Class Code	Home Office Main Class Code	Home Office Main Class Code	Home Office Main Class Code
Home Office Subclass Code	Home Office Subclass Code	Home Office Subclass Code	Home Office Subclass Code
Firearm Feature Code(s)	Firearm Feature Code(s)	Firearm Feature Code(s)	Firearm Feature Code(s)
Grid Reference	Grid Reference	Grid Reference	Grid Reference
Reported Month	Reported Month	Reported Month	Cleared Up Month
Committed on/from Day	Committed on/from Day	Committed on/from Day	Committed on/from Day
Committed on/from Date	Committed on/from Date	Committed on/from Date	Committed on/from Date
Committed on/from Time	Committed on/from Time	Committed on/from Time	Committed on/from Time
Location Code(s)	Location Code(s)	Location Code(s)	Location Code(s)
Branch Flag Codes (Domestic Violence, Racial Harassment)	Branch Flag Codes (Domestic Violence, Racial Harassment)	Branch Flag Codes (Domestic Violence, Racial Harassment)	Branch Flag Codes (Domestic Violence, Racial Harassment)
	Age	Age	Age
	Gender	Gender	Gender
	Ethnicity	Ethnicity	Ethnicity
	Victim / Informant / Witness Number (only victims shown)	Suspect Count	Code Count
	Victim / Informant / Witness Reported Crime Record in Past 12 Months? (only victims shown)		

Appendix D:

CRIS Firearms Feature Codes

Source: Metropolitan Police Performance Information Bureau (PIB)

The following Firearms Feature Codes were in use until March 2004:

BP – CS Gas or Pepper Spray Used	FH – Handgun Fired
BQ – CS Gas or Pepper Spray Carried	FJ – Rifle Carried
FA – Shotgun Carried	FK – Rifle Used
FB – Shotgun Fired	FL – Explosive Used
FC – Sawn-off Shotgun Carried	FM – Incendiary Used
FD – Sawn-off Shotgun Fired	FO – Other Firearm Carried
FE – Airweapon Carried	FP – Other Firearm Fired
FF – Airweapon Fired	FR – Firearm Converted/Adapted
FG – Handgun Carried	

As of April 2004, they have been replaced with the following Firearms Feature Codes (although FL and FM are still being used)⁹². The intention of these new codes is to improve the level of analytical detail possible; however the inclusion of only a single code for 'Air Weapon' seems to be a potential limitation. Arguably, it would have made more sense to distinguish between air rifles and air pistols.

Feature	Code	Usage Rules
Shotgun (long barrelled)	RA	Use only one of these codes for each firearm
Shotgun (sawn off)	RB	
Handgun	-	
Handgun (converted imitation)	RC	
Handgun (reactivated)	RD	
Handgun (converted air pistol)	RE	
Handgun (other)	RF	
Handgun (unknown)	RG	
Imitation handgun	RH	
Unconverted starting gun	RI	
Rifle	RJ	
Air weapon	RK	
Soft air weapon	RL	
Ball bearing gun	RM	
Deactivated firearm	RN	
Blank firer	RP	
Other imitation	RR	
Supposed firearm	RS	
CS gas	RT	
Pepper spray	RU	
Machine gun	RV	
Stun gun	RW	
Other converted imitation firearm	RX	
Other reactivated firearm	RY	
Disguised firearm	RZ	
Other firearm	RO	
Any firearm carried	SC	Always use only one of these codes for each firearm
Any firearm fired	SF	
Suspect not seen	MU	Use this code only where suspect was not seen

⁹² Source: Correspondence with PIB, 25th August 2004.

Appendix E:

CADMIS Codes

Source: Brent Metropolitan Police Management Information Unit (MIU), 29-Sep-2003

0	Error / Test	45	Explosion
1	Violence Against the Person	46	Bomb Threat
2	Sexual Offences	47	Suspect Device
3	Burglary Dwelling	48	Animals
4	Burglary other than a Dwelling	49	Collapse/Illness in the Street
5	Robbery	50	Child at Risk
6	Theft of Motor Vehicle	51	Escapees/Absconders/Absentees
7	Theft from Motor Vehicle	52	Missing Persons
8	Other Thefts	53	Sudden/Suspicious Death
9	Fraud & Forgery etc	54	Lost/Found Property
10	Criminal Damage	55	Suspicious Incident/Person
11	Drugs	56	Insecure Premises
12	Threatening Behaviour	57	Hazard - Non Traffic
13	Shoplifting	58	Cancel
14	Not Used	59	Duplicate Incident
15	Other Unlisted Crime	60	Other
16	Damage Only accident	61	Suspect on Premises
17	Personal Injury Accident	62	Suspect Disturbed
18	Other Motorway Incident	63	Suspect Detained
19	Obstruction of Road	64	Suspect Being Chased
20	Abnormal load/escort	65	Firearms Involved/Info
21	Road Signing Defect	66	Police Require urgent assistance
22	Traffic Offence Involved	67	Vehicle Pursuit
23	Abandoned Vehicle	68	Vehicle Location System
24	Not Used	69	Suspect Armed
25	Other Traffic Incident	70	Assistance Required
26	Disturbance in a Public Place	71	Go to/ Meet
27	Disturbance on Licensed Premises	72	Hoax Call
28	Disturbance on Private Premises	73	Complaint Against Police
29	Domestic Incident	74	Vehicle Clamp Removal
30	Civil Dispute	75	Fly-Tipping
31	Racial / Ethnic Incident	76	No Trace
32	Community Problems	77	No Offences Disclosed
33	Industrial Dispute	78	Informed
34	Drunkenness	79	All Quiet on Arrival of Police
35	Abandoned Phone Call	80	No Reply
36	Noise Nuisance	81	Advice Given
37	Not Used	82	Satisfactory Stop/Search
38	Not Used	83	Process/FPN
39	Other Unlisted Disorder	84	Red Route Offences
40	Not Used	85	Charter Comments
41	Fire/Gas/Electricity	86	Other Alarms/Vehicle etc
42	Water/Flood/River/Lake	87	Central Station Alarm
43	Chemical/Radiation Incident	88	False Alarm - Error Fault
44	Aircraft/Railway Incident	89	Banned Alarm

Appendix F:

CADMIS Fields

Source: Metropolitan Police Management Information Unit, Brent, 24-Sep-2003

Header	Description	Definition
Incdt No	Incident Number	CAD incident number.
Entry Date	Date of Creation	Date incident was created.
Time	Time of Creation	Time incident was created.
RB	Received By	How information was received = A-alarm, E-emergency, R-radio, O-ordinary.
Ty01	Type Code 01	First Type Code (Primary Code).
Ty02	Type Code 02	Second Type Code.
Ty03	Type Code 03	Third Type Code.
Type Text	Type Text	Secondary Incident Type Codes and/or relevant text.
Sub Div	Sector	Sector code (is automatically generated by association with location field, or manually input by operator).
Map Ref	Map Reference	12 number map or grid reference - refers to the Nicholson Greater London Street Atlas.
Location Of Incident	Location of Incident	Location of incident
DL	Duplicate Location	Flag indicating other incidents have been created with the same location within the previous 30 days.
CI01	Class Code 01	First Class Code (Primary Code).
CI02	Class Code 02	Second Class Code.
CI03	Class Code 03	Third Class Code.
Loc Ent	Location Entered	Where the incident was entered i.e. CCC, Borough or Pseudo division code.
Class Text	Class Text	Secondary Incident Classification codes and/or relevant text.
Cris No	CRIS Number	The number allocated to a crime taken from the Crime Report Information System (CRIS)
Phone No	Telephone Number	Telephone Number of informant.
DP	Duplicate Phone No	Flag indicating other incidents have been created with the same phone no within the previous 30 days.
NoAs	Number Assigned	Total number of units/resources assigned at the point the incident was last passed to CADMIS.
Oper Id	Operator Identifier	Warrant number or pay number of the operator entering the details.
Term Id	Terminal Identifier	CAD terminal number.
RC	Incident Grade	Grade of incident - I-immediate, S-soon, E-extended, R-referral, P-police generated.
TOA	Time of Arrival	Time of arrival of first unit on scene.
Response	Response Time	Response time. Time between incident creation and the arrival of first unit on scene (TOA).
Incdnt Date	Date of Creation	Date of Creation (format YYYYMMDD - Year 2000 compliancy).
GC	Grade Change	Identifies if there has been a grade change Y or N, but not what it has been changed from.
TC	Time Change	Identifies if time of arrival has been changed (if Y reason will appear in the PREVIOUS ACTIONS on the CAD incident).
TOA Date	Time of Arrival Date	Time of Arrival Date.
Div	Division	Code of the Borough or Pseudo division where the incident was located.
PI Date	First Routing Date	Date when the incident was first routed i.e. passed.
PI Time	First Routing Time	Time when the incident was first routed i.e. passed.
Ack Date	Acknowledgement Date	Date when the incident was first acknowledged.
Ack Time	Acknowledgement Time	Time when the incident was first acknowledged.
AV Date	First Assignment Date	Date when the first unit was assigned to the incident.
AV Time	First Assignment Time	Time when the first unit was assigned to the incident.

DA Date	Last De-assignment Date	Date when the last unit was de-assigned from the incident.
DA Time	Last De-assignment Time	Time when the last unit was de-assigned from the incident.
CI Date	Copy Incident Date	Date of copy incident action - this only applies to incidents copied to Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs).
CI Time	Copy Incident Time	Time of copy incident action - this only applies to incidents copied to Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs).
IE to PI Duration	Call Receipt Duration	Time between incident creation and first routing.
PI to ACK Duration	Routing Duration	Time between first routing and first acknowledgement.
Ack to Av Duration	Deployment Duration	Time between first acknowledgement and first unit assignment.
Av to Toa Duration	Arrival Duration	Time between first unit assignment and the time the first unit arrives on scene (TOA).
Av to Da Duration	Time On Scene	Time between time of arrival and de-assignment of last unit.
CI to Av Duration	Copy Inc To Assg (MDT)	Time from copy incident action to acceptance by MDT.

Appendix G:

CADMIS Incident Grade

Source: Police Notices, Metropolitan Police Service 2003. Provided by the MPS Borough Intelligence Unit, Brent, 11-Nov-2003

I – IMMEDIATE

An incident to result in the immediate deployment of an officer (mobile or on foot, uniform or other) who will arrive at the scene in the shortest possible time.

Such a response could be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- Where serious injury to people, or damage to property, has occurred or where there is a potential for such injury or damage.
- Where a crime is in progress.
- Where a suspect is present or there is potential for the immediate arrest of an offender. In situations where the suspect is detained and the circumstances of the detention are, in the judgement of the controller, such that there is no danger to any person or potential for damage to property or loss of evidence, the lesser grade of response, by way of 'As soon as possible' ("S") may be appropriate, but the incident must be dealt with as a matter of priority.
- Where witnesses or other evidence might be lost if police do not get to the scene quickly.
- Where there is clear potential for further crime.
- Where a victim is suffering from extreme distress, even though other factors indicate a less immediate response.
- Where for any other reason, the operator considers that an immediate response is appropriate.

Charter target: To arrive at urgent incidents within 12 minutes 80% of the time.

S – SOON

To attend as soon as possible and in any case within one hour. This response would be used where a police deployment of a less urgent nature is required and where such a response would not materially affect the outcome. If it becomes apparent that the police cannot attend within the time scale, the informant should be contacted by telephone and an explanation given.

This response would be possible where:

- No serious injury has occurred or is likely to occur.
- A crime has already taken place and the immediate attendance of an officer would make no difference to the outcome.
- There are no suspects, no witnesses and no potential loss of witness and evidence.
- Victims are not in need of immediate help and are not suffering from stress to the extent that they need urgent or quick support.

Internal target: To arrive within 60 minutes.

E – EXTENDED

An extended response applies when it is known or believed at the time of the call that attendance will be later than one hour from the time of origin. In these cases, a 'loose' or 'firm' appointment (e.g. 10.00am to 10.30am or at 10.30am) should be made with the caller and a scheduled appointment set on Computer Aided Despatch (CAD).

An extended response would be possible:

- Where no resource is available to meet the "S" grade time scale. It is important that when a delay is anticipated, the caller is made aware at the start. It is far better for police to arrive within an agreed time scale than for the caller to expect us "soon", and be dissatisfied when the officer finally arrives two hours later.

- Where awareness of imminent commitments makes this the most suitable response
- Where an appointment is made, at a mutually agreed time, to be dealt with by an officer who has particular skills or knowledge, either of the subject matter of complainant/victim
- In a non-urgent domestic or "neighbours" dispute where a local officer has knowledge of the parties involved and there are no aggravating circumstances
- Where the incident is of such a nature that it does not warrant a faster response, for example, collection of lost property

It is imperative when an appointment is made that it is kept. If police cannot keep the agreed appointment, the informant must be contacted, an explanation given and a new appointment made.

R – REFERRAL

This category is reserved for calls which do not need a physical police response. Police might, however, still be required to give advice or refer the caller - or details of the call - to another police department, such as the crime desk, to record details of a crime where police attendance at the scene is not required, or other outside agency, for example, the local authority, citizens advice bureau, solicitor and so on.

P – POLICE GENERATED

This response applies to calls that do not come directly from the public and will include:

- Calls from police for urgent or other assistance e.g. van, electronic screening device etc. where no CAD incident already exists (calls for assistance which stem from an existing CAD incident would normally form part of the original message).
- Where police come across an incident direct, contact the Control Room and as a result a CAD incident is created.
- Any call from another police force.

Appendix H:

Glossary

Please note: where relevant these are not legal definitions.

For police acronyms, a useful point of reference is www.met.police.uk/foi/glossary.htm

Airgun	Fires small lead pellets by way of compressed air (either self-contained or generated by way of a powerful spring). Unlicensed up to a certain power and sold through high street retailers, mail order and the internet.
Airsoft	Highly realistic replica guns that fire small plastic pellets (0.2 grams) by way of a battery-powered piston or compressed gas. May be single shot (e.g. replica pistols and handguns) or automatic (e.g. replica machine guns). Used recreationally in a manner akin to paintballing. Unlicensed 'toys'.
ANPR	Automatic Number Plate Reader technology. Uses CCTV and computer software to automatically read vehicle license plates. Can be linked to databases to alert the police (or other authorities) to the presence of e.g. stolen or unlicensed vehicles, or those known to belong to wanted suspects. This technology is also used to enforce the Congestion Charge.
Automatic Firearm	A firearm that discharges multiple shots with a single press on the trigger.
BB Gun	Typically an imitation firearm that fires plastic or metal ball bearings (hence BB) by way of a spring mechanism. Unregulated and sold through high street retailers, mail order and the internet.
BIU	Borough Intelligence Unit. Borough-based police unit responsible for analysing intelligence and supporting police operations.
Blank Firer	A gun manufactured to fire 'blanks', that is to say ammunition that does not contain a bullet or other projectile, merely some explosive. Must have the barrel largely obstructed. May be used legally for e.g. starting races or film/theatre productions.
Blood	Street term for friend or family.
BTP	British Transport Police – national force responsible for policing trains, tracks, stations and other railway property.
Brown	Street term for heroin.
CADMIS	Computer Aided Despatch Management Information System – Police database that logs calls to 999.
CDRP	Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership – a statutory partnership of Local Authority, Police, Probation, Fire and other authorities established under the terms of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998).
Converted Firearm	A firearm manufactured for one purpose and converted to be used for another. For example, a firearm may be manufactured as a starter pistol, firing blanks, but converted to fire live ammunition.
Crack Cocaine	A crystalline derivative of cocaine that is typically smoked, during which it 'crackles'. (See also: <i>Rocks, Stones</i>)
CRIS	Crime Recording Information System – Metropolitan Police crime database. Used, amongst other things, as the basis for recorded crime data.
CS Gas / Spray	Irritant used by police to disperse crowds or incapacitate violent offenders. Affects the eyes and lungs.
Deactivated Firearm	A firearm that was manufactured to fire live ammunition and which has been modified to prevent shots being fired. Must be certified as such by a Proof House. (See also: <i>Proof, Reactivated Firearm</i>)
Ethnographic Research	Participant observation research – where the researcher integrates him or herself into the lives of the people being studied.
Firearms Feature Codes	Codes used to record the involvement of a firearm in a crime on CRIS. (See also: <i>Appendix D</i>)
Flying Squad (SCD7)	Central Metropolitan Police unit, primarily responsible for investigating armed commercial robberies. Known in the Metropolitan Police as SCD7, being part of the Serious Crime Directorate. (See also: <i>Operation Trident</i>)

GIS	Geographical Information System/Science – the application of computer technology to the geographical representation of spatially located data, for example mapping the location of crimes.
Green	Street term for cannabis.
Gun-Enabled Crime	The Home-Office definition used by the Metropolitan Police Service since April 2004 to measure gun crime in London, based on a subset of crime types and Firearms Feature Codes. (See also: <i>Firearms Feature Codes</i>)
Handgun	A gun designed to be held and fired with one hand. (See also: <i>Pistol</i>)
HMIC	Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary – “charged with examining and improving the efficiency of the Police Service in England and Wales”.
HMPS	Her Majesty’s Prison Service.
Hotspot Map	A ‘temperature’ map used to indicate, by way of a coloured surface, the distribution of underlying data points (e.g. crimes). Typically, darker colours indicate a greater concentration of points.
IAG	Independent Advisory Group – a group comprised of local residents with whom the police consult on matters of policing strategy. IAGs are intended to serve as a ‘critical friend’ to the police. In relation to gun crime in London, there is both a London-wide Trident IAG and local borough IAGs.
IC Codes	‘Identity Codes’ – used by the police to indicate an approximate ethnic identity of victims, suspects etc. Not directly compatible with the Census 16+1 classification system.
Imitation Firearm	A non-live firing firearm manufactured (possibly under license) to accurately replicate a brand of made-for-purpose live-firing gun. Note that this is a legally ambiguous term.
Instrumental Value	Something (e.g. a gun) can be said to have an instrumental value if it is used as a tool. For example, a gun may have an instrumental value in a robbery, serving to ensure the compliance of the victim(s).
Machine Gun	A rapidly firing automatic firearm.
MMR	Monthly Management Report – Metropolitan Police Service crime performance document prepared on a monthly basis presenting comparative crime data for London boroughs (excluding British Transport Police).
MPA	Metropolitan Police Authority – the independent body that oversees the work of the Metropolitan Police Service. (See also: <i>MPS</i>)
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service – responsible for policing in London (except where covered by the British Transport Police).
National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)	Change to police crime recording practices introduced in April 2002 to improve their consistency and to make the process more victim-focussed. Resulted in an increase in recorded crime.
Nine Bar	A 9oz/quarter kilo quantity of drugs.
Operation Trident (SCD8)	Central Metropolitan Police unit – part of the Serious Crime Directorate (SCD) – with a remit to investigate shootings in which both the victim(s) and offender(s) are black.
PIB	Performance Information Bureau – a corporate department of the Metropolitan Police Service responsible for producing crime and police performance data.
Piece	Street term for a gun.
Pistol	A gun designed to be held and fired with one hand, typically capable of firing only one shot at a time. (See also: <i>Handgun</i>)
Proof	“Proof is the compulsory and statutory testing of every new shotgun or other small arm before sale to ensure, so far as it is practicable, its safety in the hands of the user.” (Source: http://www.gunproof.com/Proofing/proofing.html). There are two Proof Houses in the UK, one in London and one in Birmingham. These also ‘prove’ (certify) that a firearm has been deactivated. (See also: <i>Deactivated Firearm</i>)
Qualitative Research	Research exploring a subject in-depth. For example, what people think about a particular subject and why they hold those views. Does not seek to make statistically robust statements.
Quantitative Research	Research collecting data for statistical analysis, e.g. to allow generalised statements about a population to be made on the basis of a sample.

Reactivated Firearm	A Deactivated Firearm that has been modified to fire live ammunition, invariably illegally. (See also: <i>Deactivated Firearm</i>)
Response Time	In relation to calls to 999 this is the time between a 999 call being received by the police and officers attending the scene. (See also: <i>CADMIS</i>)
Revolver	A gun (pistol) with a rotating cylinder containing several cartridges (usually six) which can be fired in succession.
Rifle	A long barrelled firearm with a 'rifled' barrel, designed to be fired from the shoulder. (See also: <i>Rifled Barrel</i>)
Rifled Barrel	Spiral grooves along the inside of a gun barrel which cause a fired bullet to spin. Leaves unique markings on the bullet which can be used to forensically link a bullet to a gun.
Road (on road)	Living 'on road' – street term for living a street life (e.g. street-level social/criminal lifestyle).
Rocks	Street term for crack cocaine. (See also: <i>Stones, Crack Cocaine</i>)
Sawn-Off Shotgun	A shotgun that has had its barrel shortened, typically to make it easier to conceal.
SCD7	See: <i>Flying Squad</i>
SCD8	See: <i>Operation Trident</i>
Situational Crime Prevention	The development of strategies to reduce the opportunities for crime by influencing the victim, offender, offence location, property etc. Examples include the use of lighting and CCTV to deter offending and improving car security to tackle motor vehicle crime.
SO19	Central Metropolitan Police armed police unit. Supports borough police teams.
Stones	Street term for crack cocaine. (See also: <i>Crack Cocaine, Rocks</i>)
Stop and Search	A policing tactic in which members of the public may be stopped, asked to account for their behaviour and searched, for example if they match the description of a wanted suspect.
Strap	Street term for a gun. Hence, <i>Strapped Up</i> – carrying a gun, and <i>Strap Man</i> – a gunman. (See also: <i>Piece</i>)
Stun Gun	Discharges a high voltage electric current that can temporarily disable a person. Not a gun in the sense of firing a bullet. (See also: <i>Taser</i>)
Symbolic Value	Something (e.g. a gun) can be said to have a symbolic value if it has a cultural significance that is not merely limited to its use as a tool (See: <i>Instrumental Significance</i>). For example, a gun may be used to signify the status of the possessor, much in the same way that an expensive car may convey the symbolic message "I am rich".
Taser	Fires barbed prongs connected to wires that conduct a high-voltage electric current to temporarily disable a person. (See also: <i>Stun Gun</i>)
Test Purchase	A policing strategy used to collect evidence about drug dealing, in which undercover police officers buy drugs from dealers.
Thug (Tug)	Street term indicating someone who does not have anything but himself. (Cf. Tupac). Also used to indicate a gangsta.
Trafalgar (Operation)	Complements and under the responsibility of Operation Trident, but with responsibility for non-Trident shootings. (See also: <i>Operation Trident</i>)
Trident	See: <i>Operation Trident</i>
Vest	Street term for a bullet-proof/ballistic vest/body armour.
Wards	Electoral Wards – the smallest political area in a Local Authority, each being represented by an elected Councillor. Brent is sub-divided into 21 wards.
Weed	Street term for cannabis.
White	Street term for cocaine.
Verbatim	'Word for word'. In relation to transcribing interview recordings, this means noting down exactly what someone has said.
Violent Gun Crime	A definition used until March 2004 to measure gun crime in the Metropolitan Police Service region encompassing Violence Against the Person, Sexual Offences and Robbery.
Yardie	Someone recently arrived in the UK from Jamaica. The term is often used in relation to international Jamaican criminals.

Appendix I:

Useful Websites

Brent Council	www.brent.gov.uk
British Shooting Sports Council	www.bssc.org.uk
Census 2001	www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001
Connected (Home Office)	www.connected.gov.uk
Gun Control Network	www.gun-control-network.org
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)	www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic
Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS)	www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk
Home Office	www.homeoffice.gov.uk
Home Office – <i>Gun Crime & Firearms Controls</i>	www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/guncrime
Home Office – <i>Research, Development & Statistics</i>	www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds
Metropolitan Police Authority	www.mpa.gov.uk
Metropolitan Police Service	www.met.police.uk
Metropolitan Police Service – <i>Firearms Enquiries</i> (licensing, legislation etc.)	www.met.police.uk/firearms-enquiries
Metropolitan Police Service – <i>Glossary of Acronyms</i>	www.met.police.uk/foi/glossary.htm
National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS)	www.ncis.co.uk
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Deprivation Indices)	www.odpm.gov.uk
Operation Trident	www.met.police.uk/trident www.met.police.uk/scd/units/trident.htm www.stoptheguns.org
Small Arms Survey	www.smallarmssurvey.org
University of Portsmouth Institute of Criminal Justice Studies	www.port.ac.uk/icjs
Urbandictionary.com (street slang definitions etc.)	www.urbandictionary.com

Appendix J:

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