

Exploring a Model of Professionalism in Multiple Perpetrator Violent Gun Crime in
the UK

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Abstract

The present study examines co-offending groups that commit violent firearms offences within the UK, in order to develop an understanding of these groups in terms of their level of professionalism. A sample of 69 cases was selected from two British law databases, consisting of offences that involved the utilisation of a firearm in a violent crime committed by more than one offender. Cases were content analysed for offending behaviour. The presence of a three-way thematic model of criminal professionalism, previously identified in robbery, was tested using multi-dimensional scaling. Three themes of offences were identified as Targeted, Gratuitous and Reactive, which differed in the level of professionalism displayed. Gratuitous was the most common theme for the sample, demonstrating some evidence of planning but also gratuitous violence towards victims. In conclusion, while violent gun crime is typically a phenomenon involving young males, not all groups display the same behaviour or levels of professionalism, as evident in the existence of all three themes. These differences are important for understanding the psychology of the offences and designing operational responses.

Keywords: gun crime; criminal professionalism; firearms; violence; shootings.

Exploring a model of Professionalism in Multiple Perpetrator Violent Gun Crime in the UK

Media and government reports have highlighted an increasing ‘street gang’ culture within the UK, characterised by illegal gun ownership and extreme violence, similar to that of the USA (Bennett & Holloway, 2004a; Bennett & Holloway, 2004b). It is of great public, government and police concern that modern day, highly visible ‘gangs’ dominantly consist of youth under the age of twenty-five, with children as young as ten years old participating in this violent activity and easily accessing firearms on a daily basis (Bjerregaard & Lizotte, 1995; Bendixen, Endresen & Olweus, 2006). Co-offending is significantly high among such juvenile groups, with firearms being utilised both to generate respect and power, and also as tools to facilitate other forms of criminal activity (Levitt & Venkatesh, 2000). This has been documented as the emergence of a British ‘gun culture,’ that has changed the prevalence and nature of gun utilisation within the UK (Hales, Lewis & Silverstone, 2006; Bennett & Holloway, 2004b). In order to further our understanding of co-offending and gun crime within the UK, the aim of the present research is to empirically examine the nature of violent firearm offences that are committed by co-offending groups within the UK.

‘Gun crime’, otherwise known as ‘firearm offences’, has been defined as instances when firearms, including shotguns, airguns and imitation firearms, are involved in an offence. A recent UK Home Office report explained that “firearms are taken to be involved in an offence if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument against a person, or used as a threat” (Kaiza, 2010, p. 37). The same report highlighted that, in 2008/9, firearms were used in only 0.3% of all recorded crime in England and Wales (Kaiza, 2010). However, in an earlier report, gun crime was noted to have doubled

from the mid-late 1990's to the mid 2000's "against a background of increasingly restrictive legislation and ever more sophisticated public policy responses" (Hales, et al., 2006, p. vii). In 2004/5 the use of firearms in the UK involved criminal damage (44%), violence against a person (35%) and robbery (16%), with a gun being fired in 32% of such incidents. Those leading to injury have doubled since 1998/99, and are primarily associated with youth 'gang culture' (Hales et al, 2006). In 2008/09, 88% of recorded offences involving a non-air weapon in the UK were for violence against the person and robbery (Kaiza, 2010).

The use of firearms within robbery has been well documented (Povey, 2005; O'Donnell & Morrison, 1997), however the nature of robbery has changed, with firearms increasingly being used by youth in street level robbery rather than by older criminals on business premises (Metropolitan Police, 2004-2007; Povey, 2005). These findings can be attributed to the normalisation of firearms within the street level economy, significantly associated with youth aged 16 - 25, and class A drug distribution (Hales & Silverstone, 2005; Marshall, Webb & Tilley, 2005). The use of these weapons by such young individuals has greatly been associated with the growth of inner city 'gangs', where firearms are increasingly being displayed in public places to gain respect and power, protect territory, settle drug debts, seek revenge and in a more instrumental way to assist a range of criminal activity (Hales & Silverstone, 2005; Schneider, Rowe, Forest & Tilley, et al., 2004; Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002). The increased availability of weaponry alongside vehicles for such young individuals has made drive-by shootings a tactical, brief response to target rivals. These typically occur when both victims and offenders are intoxicated, and consist of a 'hit and run' style of offence, where innocent bystanders frequently get caught up in the crossfire (Sanders, 1994).

It is widely acknowledged that gun ownership and utility within the UK is increasingly being associated with 'gang membership' (Tita & Ridgeway, 2007). Interviews with eighty incarcerated firearm offenders revealed that the large majority of them admitted being a member of a form of 'gang' or 'crew,' with them typically committing their current offence (which varied considerably by type) with such groups (Hales et al, 2006). However, unlike in the US, the topic of 'gangs' in the UK is a relatively recent one and there is divide between academics who support the growing importance of the gang in the UK (e.g., Pitts, 2008) and those who do not (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Hallsworth & Young, 2008).

Hallsworth and Silverstone (2009) argued that terms such as 'gun culture' and 'gang culture' are not useful for exploring gun crime. Instead they looked at the culture of gun users, described as their 'life world', and proposed two predominant categories; professional criminals and those 'on road'. Those who could be described as professional were seasoned career criminals, with some degree of skill and who used firearms sparingly and instrumentally, while 'doing business'. Those who were more volatile, were described as 'on road' and tended to be young men from excluded backgrounds within a culture of violence who may not routinely carry firearms but use them for tackling other similar offenders (disputes, rivalries, perhaps robbery).

To attribute gun crime to a unifying 'gang culture', therefore, ignores the wide array of co-offending groups that exist and how they differ professionally.

Professionalism is typically defined as '*the thorough planning, and the careful weighing of risks and alternatives, as well as pride in one's chosen profession and adherence to the code of conduct of that profession.*' (Feldman 1993, p.59). It has been established that, within crime, criminally relevant skills are formed and developed like those throughout any form of legitimate career. Research has identified

that most recorded crimes are committed by ‘amateurs,’ who tend to offend as the opportunity arises (Feldman, 1993; Feeney, 1986). Conversely, within larger scale criminal activity, where an outsized catch or high profile premises is the intended target, criminals can typically be regarded as ‘professionals,’ who clearly plan and specialize in their offence type. These offenders act to increase their ‘fix’ and minimise risk of detection. This characteristically requires careful offence planning, where the offenders often observe or familiarise themselves with their offence location/ target beforehand. Professionalism here also involves taking forensic precautions (i.e. wearing gloves) and taking particular tools to assist the offence, for example rope to restrain the victim, or police-scanner radios or walkie-talkies to communicate with group members during the offence (Gibbs & Shelly, 1982).

In an attempt to distinguish between co-offending groups, a small number of researchers have examined samples of such groups in terms of their criminal purpose and level of professionalism that they display and, by doing so, an overall distinction has been made between ‘gangs’ and ‘crime firms’. Here it has been established that ‘gangs’ are typically loosely organised, delinquent groups who commit an array of criminal activity, whereas ‘crime firms’ depict more strategically sophisticated, professional and criminally focused groups (Canter & Alison, 2000a; Marshall et al, 2005; Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002).

The way co-offending groups come to obtain, and subsequently utilise firearms also provides insight into their level of professionalism and criminal purpose. It has been documented that guns form a symbolic component of ‘gang culture,’ with numbers and types of weapon forming a significant part of a gang’s identity and their perceived authority (Sanders, 1994; Bjerregaard & Lizotte, 1995). As a result, firearms are beginning to have a ‘contagious’ effect, with rival gangs competing in

terms of their weapon supply (Decker, 2007). Due to the increased availability and accessibility of firearms within the UK, some youth groups are accessing firearms on a daily basis and publicly presenting them to their rivals (Bjerregaard, 2002; Bendixen, Endresen & Olweus, 2006). Indeed, group members often utilise their firearms within the wide array of offences that they commit, no matter how minor the offence may be (NCIS, 2002; Decker, 2007). Within this context, firearms are generally utilised in a disorganised, expressive manner, as a means to establish respect, reputation and revenge. This frequently involves protecting territory, punishing perceived disrespect and securing the local drugs market, where little consideration arises for the destructive consequences firearm utility may have (Hales et al, 2006; Harcourt, 2006; May & Jarjoura, 2006). These offence types tend to emerge within the public economy – typically in nightclubs, bars and parks, which can be regarded as ‘shared social spaces’ for youth, where status and reputation may be challenged (Tita & Ridgeway, 2007; Hales, et al., 2006;)

In comparison ‘Crime firms’ have been found to obtain and utilise firearms in a clearly dissimilar manner, where the gun is utilised solely as a tool to facilitate criminal activity and is obtained specifically to assist the commission of an explicit offence (Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002). Here it is a rational decision to obtain a firearm and to co-offend, with offenders typically coming together to take part in a crime, where some form of financial or material profit is sought, most significantly that of robbery or burglary (Stolzenber & D’Alessio, 2000; Harding, 1990). These offenders can be regarded as the most professional of criminal groups, who plan and prepare for the offence beforehand. Within such groups the firearm is utilised to manage the crime scene and control the victim, without any physical contact being required (Harding, 1990).

In one of the few studies that has empirically explored levels of professionalism in a specific crime type, Alison, Rockett, Deprez & Watts (2000) distinguished three levels of professionalism within 144 British armed robbery offences committed by an assortment of single offenders and co-offending groups. Their three-way classification model identified: *Robins Men*, who were ‘professional’ and organised thieves, who carried out non-impulsive, rational, planned offences upon high-catch premises, maintaining calm control over their victims; *Bandits*, who utilised a degree of planning but were characteristically impulsive throughout the offence, often losing control of the situation and displaying extremely aggressive and violent tactics to regain control, and enjoying the “buzz” of victim intimidation, and; *Cowboys*, who were typically spontaneous offenders who displayed reckless and chaotic behaviour and were otherwise regarded as ‘beginners’. Cowboys tended to brandish the weapon, sometimes discharging it in an impulsive response to the victim’s actions. The advantage of Alison, et al.’s (2000) approach over other methods, such as ethnographic studies, is that it empirically tests themes, using specific behavioural indicators and the relationships between them – taking descriptive theme ideas a step further to empirically identify their specific components. Thus, this approach can be used to build upon, and test, proposed themes of crime behaviour.

While Alison, et al. (2000) offered a behavioural model of professionalism, based upon empirical relationships between crime actions, only two thirds of Alison et al.’s (2000) sample carried a firearm and all involved a commercial target, such as a bank. Personal robbery offences, which are increasingly being attributed to UK ‘gangs’, were not included in that study. For gang members, the most common form of robbery is street robbery that occurs opportunistically in a nearby location. It is also

a frequent occurrence for gangs to seek out and rob rival drug dealers who may owe money, be impacting their business or solely due to the fact that these individuals generally possess large quantities of money and drugs (Springwood, 2007).

There is a shortage of psychological research that empirically examines professionalism within the wider variety of offence types that occur, particularly that of gun crime. The present study aims to examine the level of planning and professionalism within co-offending groups that commit violent gun crime. To do so Alison, et al.'s (2000) model will be adapted to encompass firearm possession to examine whether gun crime can characteristically be regarded as a 'youth phenomenon', with offenders typically consisting of spontaneous 'youth gangs', or whether gun crime is an organised, professional offence.

Method

Data collection

In order to gain in-depth insight into the nature of group firearm offences within the United Kingdom, a sample of firearm offences in the form of law reports, was extracted from two British legal databases: Westlaw and Lexis Nexis. These databases contain publicly available criminal court judgments that are electronically accessible, including by keyword search. Searches were conducted using terms such as 'gun crime' and 'firearms offence' to find potentially relevant cases.

Law reports provide a valuable source for examining co-offending, due to case reports including a narrative description of the circumstances surrounding the offence(s) for which charges are being brought. This includes details of the behaviour and the characteristics of each of those involved, as well as the specific criminal charges and outcome judgment. The criteria for inclusion of a case within the current

sample was; the presence of one or more *firearms*, within a *violent* offence that was committed by *two or more offenders*, from the years *1990 to 2006*. For a case to be included, offenders also had to be *convicted* of the crime, rendering the reported details valid (accepted as true by the judge and jury), however by doing so, limitations are placed upon the sample size.

Cases

Sixty-nine violent (primarily murder and assault) offences were selected to be content analysed for features associated with professionalism. Cases were found as described above and retained if they contained sufficient offence details for content analysis to be conducted¹.

Offenders. The 69 cases involved a total of 190 offenders: 39% of groups consisted of two members, 22% of three members and 39% of four or more members (four 25%; five 10%; seven 2%; nine 2%). The mean number of offenders was 3 ($SD = 1.35$).

Over 90% of the groups ($n=63$) were all male, with only one group consisting of all female offenders. Five of the groups consisted of both males and females. In terms of the offenders' age, information was available for 54 cases and, of these, 76% of all members under 25 years old, seven per cent of groups consisted of all members over 25 years old, and 17% consisted of mixed age offenders (both under and over 25 years).

Firearms. Sixty-five of the 69 offences involved a real and loaded firearm, with three involving an imitation firearm and one unknown from the data. However, despite the

¹ It should be noted that the sample here does not represent all UK convictions for multiple perpetrator violent gun crime between 1990 and 2006: some law judgments may not be made public, and so would not appear in the databases; selection of cases from the databases was by author-generated keywords, and, while care was taken to provide broad terms, some cases that use different terminology in their text may have been missed; while most judgments provide a good deal of detail on the offence, cases are documented for legal purposes and not psychological research, thus, occasionally, the level of detail needed for this study was lacking and cases had to be excluded.

majority of cases involving a loaded firearm, in five cases (seven per cent) the weapon was not discharged during the offence, 12% of groups had an alternative weapon alongside a firearm, and 25% of groups had more than one firearm in their possession.

Victims. A total of 98 victims were involved in the 69 cases. Most frequently only one victim was involved per case (68%) while 25% of cases involved two victims and seven per cent of cases involved three or more victims (maximum five victims). In 84% of cases, the victims were all male, nine per cent of cases involved only female victims and a further seven per cent of cases involved both male and female victims. In terms of the relationship between the offenders and their victims, offenders and victims knew each other in the majority (85%) of cases, with 12% of cases perpetrated against strangers and three per cent where the victim was a police officer. While the ages of the victims were only available for 32 of the cases, similar to the offenders the majority (61%) of cases involved victims who were all under age 25, 29% of cases involved victims all over age 25 and 10% of cases involved victims of mixed ages (both over and under 25 years).

Limitations of the dataset

The utilisation of any form of archival material for research has potential limitations, due to the fact that the case information is not gathered by the research team or for research purposes. This renders certain cases incomplete or open to selective bias (those who gather such information may selectively edit or bias the recorded facts for their own purpose). However, if used with caution, law reports provide lengthy details of offences, gathered from a wide array of sources that researchers alone could not access (Canter & Alison, 2003). A thorough discussion of

law reports as a data source can be found in Porter (2008), but some main points of note will be given here. Publicly available law reports may offer a select sample for study, some reasons for this have already been noted but, fundamentally such a source only captures those cases that have progressed to court, thus ignoring unsolved cases. Further, law reports contain facts relevant to the legal issues of the case and may omit other information. However, if one is careful in selecting variables of interest for which robust information is likely to be presented (for example, the observable actions of the defendants rather than their motivations), and careful with the generalisations of conclusions, such shortcomings are outweighed by the strengths of the data. For example, that the reports contain information from a variety of sources, presented in an accessible way and that has undergone a stringent process to ascertain the validity of the information presented. As such, information from such sources is likely to be more reliable than sources that provide only one perspective (for example offender, victim or witness accounts), or which have not undergone the test of the courtroom (for example, police data).

Data Coding: Constructing and assessing the coding dictionary

A coding dictionary of offender behaviour was constructed in order to test the level of professionalism evident in the sample cases. The coding dictionary comprises a set of behaviours that can be either present or absent in each case, and that have some association with the underlying themes of interest (in this case professionalism). Alison, et al.'s (2000) model of professionalism and planning within armed robbery was utilised as a starting point for the coding dictionary, using the variables (behaviours) that they specified were evident in the themes *Robin's Men*, *Bandits* and *Cowboys*. This was so that the presence of the same categorisations could be assessed

within the violent gun crime dataset to examine whether the model fits this crime type.

Given that the present data is gun crime and not robbery, some of Alison, et al.'s (2000) original variables were adapted and additional variables added in order to efficiently capture professionalism within the current dataset. Thus, this stage was data driven, with an underpinning of the literature review to guide variable construction. However, in order to preserve the validity of Alison, et al.'s model for testing, new variables were only added to the coding dictionary if they could be reliably associated with one of the three themes. Inter-rater independent agreement was calculated to assess whether raters could sufficiently agree on which theme a variable should be assigned to. Only variables that showed an agreement of 60% or above were added to the coding dictionary (variables that showed more variation were deemed too ambiguous to be included).

When coding the sample cases it also became clear that some variables that existed within Alison, et al.'s robbery framework did not occur within the violent firearms offences. This included using apologetic, demeaning or reassuring language; forcing the victim to the floor; and, victim participation. These variables were, therefore, removed from the final coding dictionary.

A total of 33 variables were included in the final coding dictionary, each of which were judged sufficient for inclusion within the hypothesised three theme structure and, therefore, appropriate for testing these themes by Multi-dimensional Scaling (MDS) (see appendix for variable details and their hypothesised themes). MDS analysis has been chosen in order to replicate the method of Alison, et al. (2000) as well as in acknowledgment of its advantages for the current study aim: specifically its suitability to the data type, and its ability to analyse the relationships between

multiple variables for the existence of themes. This will be described in more detail later.

An additional 19 variables that were derived from the content analysis could not be reliably hypothesised to belong to a particular theme, but were still considered relevant features of the offences. As a result, these variables were not included in the multidimensional scaling to test the hypothesised thematic structure. Instead, they were reserved for an exploratory second stage of analysis. Details of all 52 variables are given in the appendix.

It is important that any coding dictionary developed has variable descriptions that are clear and unambiguous to allow for replication and re-testing. The reliability of the variables was, therefore, calculated. This was achieved by two independent researchers coding the presence/absence of the variables in 10% of the cases (seven cases randomly selected). Agreement between the independent coders' responses was high, indicating that the dictionary is sufficiently reliable and unambiguous (Cohen's Kappa = .88, $p < .001$). Once the coding dictionary had been finalised and reliability tested, all 69 cases were coded for the presence/absence of the 52 variables, where presence was coded as 1 and absence as 0, yielding a data matrix of 69 by 52. This data was then analysed in two stages, detailed below.

Results

Stage One Analysis: Assessing themes of professionalism using multidimensional scaling

In order to explore whether Alison, et al.'s (2000) three-way classification system exists within the current dataset, the same method of Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) (Shye, Elizur & Hoffman, 1994) was utilised to examine the hypothesised

relationships between the 33 derived variables for the violent firearms offences. SSA allows the examination of the relationships between all variables in a set (rather than just pairs of variables) in order to most clearly depict the underlying structure, or themes. The advantages of SSA over other methods for exploring themes in data are that it does not have strict assumptions regarding the data, it does not itself impose any themes or structure on the data, and it is flexible in the choice of association measure used. Further, it provides a visual output that simplifies complex inter-variable relationships.

SSA works by producing correlation coefficients between all of the variables, representing how often they co-occur in the same case. SSA then rank orders these and represents them visually as points in space. Each point is a variable (behaviour), and the closer points are together, the higher the association (or co-occurrence) between them (Shye, et al., 1994). In other words, variables that are closer together in the output plot are behaviours that are likely to be evident in the same firearms case, while variables far apart are less likely to happen in the same incident.

To calculate the co-occurrences between the variables in the present data set, Jaccard's correlation coefficient was used. Given the data source, we cannot be sure of true absences. That is, the absence of information regarding a specific variable does not necessarily mean that it did not occur (but could have been omitted due to reporting bias). Jaccard's coefficient was used as it can measure the association between the variables, whilst ignoring joint absences of variables (Shye, et al., 1994). By utilising this technique, missing data will have less impact upon the overall results than they would if other association measures were used.

Given that the visual representation is based on ranks, and not the raw correlation values, a measure of 'fit' is provided to indicate how closely the true

correlation coefficients are represented by the plot. This fit between the original correlations and the way they are represented spatially is measured by the coefficient of alienation. The smaller the coefficient of alienation, the better the fit.

Testing for the presence of the three themes within the current dataset utilised an approach known as Facet theory (Canter, 1985). The facets are the overall classification types of the variables, in this case hypothesised to be the three themes of Robin's men, Bandits and Cowboys. The principle of 'contiguity' highlights that the existence of the facets, or themes, will be empirically demonstrated in the SSA plot structure by variables from the same facet grouping close together. This means that variables that share the same underlying theme (e.g. all those associated with Robins men) should be closer together than variables from different themes. This allows meaningful partitioning of variables into regions that represent the themes. K-R 20 coefficients were calculated to further test the internal reliability of the variables in each plot region, where a higher coefficient indicates a higher association between the variables. Thematic findings from the SSA plot were compared to the hypothesised structure (based on that found by Alison, et al., 2000) to assess the consistency of the model.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

[Insert Table 1 here]

The SSA of the 69 group violent firearms offences produced a 3-dimensional solution with a co-efficient of alienation of 0.15, in 26 iterations (see fig. 1), indicating a reasonable fit to the data. Each of the 33 offence variables is represented by a point on the SSA plot. The plot was successfully partitioned into the three-way classification system developed by Alison, et al. (2000) identifying three regions similar to *Robin's men*, *Bandits* and *Cowboys*. However, to reflect the current crime

type, regions were re-labelled as *Targeted*, *Gratuitous* and *Reactive*, respectively. Partitions were based on the hypothesised themes and also internal reliability assessment using K-R20 coefficients. Table 1 lists the variables that appear in each region as well as their frequencies and resulting K-R 20 coefficients. Over all, 26 of the 33 variables were in the region hypothesised, seven were in unexpected regions (three of these were variables from the Alison, et al. model, and four were new variables with the hypothesised region based on inter-rater agreement). The themes are discussed in more detail later.

Stage 2 analysis: Exploratory correlations between derived themes and further variables

As outlined earlier, 19 dichotomous variables were coded that could not be reliably hypothesised as belonging to a specific theme. These variables were explored using Pearson point-biserial correlations² to ascertain which of the themes derived above (*Targeted*, *Gratuitous* or *Reactive*) each was most associated with, in order to further contextualise the picture provided by the SSA. Thus, each of the 19 variables was separately correlated with each SSA *theme*. To do this, theme scores were calculated for each of the 69 cases. The number of offence variables that each case displayed within each theme in the SSA (fig 1) was calculated and these frequency scores then standardised across each individual theme. Standardisation was achieved by converting each frequency score to a percentage of the overall number of variables that are assigned to that theme (e.g. the *Targeted* theme has 16 variables, so if a case had 8 of those variables present, the *Targeted* theme score of that case would be 50%). Each case was, therefore, assigned an individual score for its percentage of

² Pearson Point-biserial correlations calculate associations between a continuous variable and a dichotomous variable.

Targeted, Gratuitous and Reactive offence variables. Pearson Point-Biserial correlations were then calculated to examine the relationship between each of the 19 additional dichotomous variables and the theme scores. Results are given in table 2.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Behavioural Themes from the SSA and Pearson Point-Biserial Correlations

The analysis shows that violent firearms offences can be distinguished in terms of their level of planning and professionalism. The core, high frequency, features of the offences were: the offenders knowing the victim (83%); the offenders *not* wearing a disguise (80%), and; gratuitous gunfire towards the victim (71%).

While these variables were common to the majority of the cases, it is beyond these ‘core’ behaviours where the distinction can be made in terms of Targeted, Gratuitous and Reactive Shooters.

Targeted. Similar to the region of *Robin’s Men* for robbery, the theme of Targeted shooters is characterised by a carefully planned and controlled event. Figure 1 (and table 1) highlights that these offenders know the particular victim to be targeted, and commit their offence in an organised and efficient manner. Their planning involves making disguises and waiting for their victim to be alone. Such groups frequently utilise a confidence approach or sometimes use physical force, to gain access to private areas (such as a particular dwelling or sometimes the victim’s vehicle) to initiate a surprise attack on their chosen victim. Offenders here are habitually associated with highly organised drugs networks, often carrying out such violent offences and securing hostages as a means to enforce drug debts or to deter rival dealers from their territory (table 2). This contention is supported by Targeted shooters often stealing from the victim whilst committing the violent offence. Such

groups verbally instruct and manipulate their victims, using spontaneous verbal threats and often securing them within the particular premises. Within violent crime as a whole, this region has the most contact behaviours with the victim (physical and verbal) and even though they possess a loaded and capable firearm, such groups often carry additional weapons, prefer to utilise physical violence or, rather than discharging the firearm, use it as a blunt instrument to instil fear in, rather than kill, the victim.

Gratuitous. As found within the *Bandit* region of robbery, the offenders that fall within the region of *Gratuitous* display some evidence of planning but utilize a highly aggressive and gratuitously violent approach. This region is characterised by larger groups, where at least four members (and as many as nine recorded members) are involved in the incident and more than one of them possesses, and fires, a loaded firearm. However, other gang members may be present but not directly involved in approaching or firing at the victim. The spark for such offences is often a response to some previous incident or rival conflict, with victims also often known to be in a gang (table 2). As a result, the offenders adopt a degree of planning and gather a larger, armed group, who improvise their disguises (however, not necessarily all are disguised) to then carry out a blitz attack on the chosen target/s. Figure 1 shows that these offenders tend to target their victims in an open public place, as the opportunity arises. Drive-by shootings are common within this theme, with offenders randomly discharging firearms out of vehicles that are likely stolen or have had the registration plates changed (table 2). These offenders frequently gratuitously open fire at property, as well as people, most commonly houses of people they have grievances with. Their impulsive nature is evident in their rash use of violence, where frequently each group member gratuitously discharges a firearm (i.e. repeatedly) at their chosen victim/s.

This relatively random and gratuitous firing means that often innocent bystanders are injured or killed in the event. Such a theme can be attributed to moderately organised criminal ‘gangs’, who are serial violent offenders (table 2), due to the rivalry nature of British ‘gang culture’.

Reactive. In line with the *Cowboy* region, the theme of *reactive* shooters identifies co-offenders who carry out unplanned and impulsive violent crimes. Such incidences tend to happen in social venues, and involve responsive behaviour that escalates from verbal threats to more physical violence, with or without a weapon (other than a firearm) and can culminate in reactive firing towards the victim. Victim resistance, however, often deters these offenders and they do not necessarily intend to kill, but sometimes do so as a result of accidental firing of the gun (although this was infrequent). The impulsivity and also unprofessional nature of these offences is reinforced by the significant negative correlations with taking forensic precautions and discussing/planning the offence beforehand.

Summary

The themes depict the nature of the offending groups in the same way as Alison, et al.’s (2000) original classification, capturing the degree of planning, impulsivity and general offence behaviour of offending groups. The Targeted theme clearly depicts the most professional and organised offenders, and the Gratuitous theme captures the preoccupation with violence that semi-professional offending groups have. Finally the label Reactive encapsulates the chaotic nature and impulsivity displayed by amateur offenders who commit crime reactively and, sometimes, accidentally. Regarding category assignment, 31% of the sample could be labelled Targeted, 47% Gratuitous and 22% Reactive. Unfortunately, given the unequal distribution of age groups among the sample, no meaningful comparisons can

be made with regard to the age associated with each theme type. It can only be concluded that, in general, these violent firearms were committed predominantly by males under age 25.

Discussion

As hypothesised, levels of professionalism in multiple perpetrator violent gun crime were found to be distinguishable through replication of Alison, et al.'s (2000) three-way thematic classification system. Alison, et al.'s themes of Robin's Men, Bandits and Cowboys translated to Targeted, Gratuitous and Reactive, respectively, for violent firearms offences. The findings of the present study have implications for our understanding of gun crime and the types of co-offending groups that participate in this increasing form of criminal behaviour. Not only do such findings shed light in terms of our theoretical understanding of gun crime, they also have potential practical implications, where such models of criminal behaviour can be utilised operationally to assist the investigation and prevention of gun crime.

The established research findings supported previous research that co-offending groups would predominantly consist of male offenders under the age of 25. Three quarters of the current sample of offending groups were identified to consist solely of members under the age of 25, with over half also being associated with 'gang' membership. These findings serve to strengthen the previous findings of Weerman, (2003) and Feldman (1993) by confirming that co-offending is typically a male youth phenomenon.

Despite previous findings suggesting that violent crime is predominantly a disorganised offence type (Marshall, et al., 2005), the three themes present in the current violent gun crime sample indicate variation in offences through differing levels of professionalism. Here, despite a few variations that exist according to the

differences in the two crime types, the overall structure fell thematically similar to that of Alison, et al. (2000) depicting the regions of; Targeted, Gratuitous and Reactive that varied in terms of the level of professionalism and general offence approach.

When comparing the two offence types in terms of professionalism it became clear that robbery can generally be regarded as a more professional offence than violent gun crime, with a higher frequency of professional behaviours being displayed in the former. Most significantly, the highest frequency variables in violent gun crime showed that it typically involves the offenders knowing their victims, firing the gun gratuitously at their victims and making no attempt to disguise their appearance. Indeed, there is characteristically little evidence of planning, in terms of minimising the likelihood of detection and taking forensic precautions. In support of this contention, only one third of the present cases were regarded as Targeted.

The label Targeted describes those offenders who choose their target carefully and with purpose and who show a degree of planning and professionalism in carrying out the offence. These offenders show clear strategic decision-making and also control over their victims, using verbal commands and threats, as with the robbery Robin's Men. However, the current Targeted offenders also show evidence of more 'hands-on' behaviour that did not occur with Robin's Men. For example, the Targeted shooters also displayed gratuitous physical violence and used the firearm as an instrument (for example, as a blunt object to inflict injury). Thus, while these offenders may be more controlled and instrumental in their actions than the other two themes of offenders, there is an undercurrent of violence to these offences that differentiates them from the professional commercial robbers. This could be due to the young age of the current sample, with youth being associated with impulsivity, or

due to the emotionality and need for status displays that are likely to be associated with gang rivalries. The fact that these offences were related to drug dealings and drug use may also fuel the violence.

The remaining variables that did not appear in the correct (hypothesised) theme predominantly involved the location of the victim. For example, it was hypothesised that Cowboys (Reactive shooters) would target people in the open, taking more risks, while Bandits (Gratuitous shooters) would more likely target people in social venues and be likely to be deterred by victim resistance, displaying less risk-taking and some-what more rational behaviour. However, the opposite was true, with Gratuitous shooters actually more likely perpetrating the open air attacks, including drive-bys. However, when contextualising this among the other variables present, such events, while in public places show higher levels of planning and professionalism than the impulsive and reactive shootings perpetrated in social venues.

The fact that victim resistance deterring the shooter was more associated with Reactive shooters than Gratuitous shooters shows a difference between the present crime type and Alison, et al.'s (2000) robbers. While resistance deterring the offenders in robbery was more associated with Bandits' "lack of planning and proactive ability" (Alison, et al., 2000, p.97), here Reactive shooters were more likely to be deterred. The difference between robbery and the violent gun crimes in the present sample may likely be motive. While undoubtedly some of the violent gun crimes in this sample were financially motivated, this was more likely with the Targeted shooters, where motive was often related to drug money. The Gratuitous and Reactive shooters were perhaps less financially motivated and more emotionally motivated by rivalry and gang membership. This motivational difference likely

explains the differences in variable placement outlined above. First, with regard to target location, for robbery a dwelling was considered a low yield target and so less professional and more associated with Cowboys. However, for the purposes of the Targeted shooters, who were often seeking particular drug-related personal targets, the target's dwelling signifies professionalism and pre-planning in the knowledge and forethought demonstrated. Second, that the Cowboy robbers were unlikely to be deterred might have been related to their motivation of getting money to fund their personal drug habit, whereas the present corresponding theme of Reactive shooters are demonstrating more of an emotional outburst in response to the victim.

The highest frequency theme among the present sample was Gratuitous shooters. Such categorisation can be attributed to gang membership, where firearms are utilised in rival disputes and when the group exists in larger numbers in a shared social space (Shropshire & McFarquhar, 2002). These groups tended to commit their offences in an open public place often as the opportunity arose, typically robbing or assaulting a lone victim known to them, supporting that found by Bjerregaard, (2002) and Bendixen, et al., (2006). Drive-by shootings also comprised almost half of these offences.

The current model provides a replicable structure that can be utilised to assess professionalism in differing offence types and offending groups. Considering professionalism in terms of planning and impulsivity can be of operational utility where the behaviours displayed throughout the offence potentially mirror the behaviours that these offenders display in their everyday activity. For example, even Reactive shooters typically possess the firearm before making the actual decision to commit the offence, so targeted interventions upon such youth groups who openly display firearms would serve to minimise the number of violent offences that occur.

Further, increased security in social venues to detect and deter the carrying of firearms, or training of private security personnel to diffuse disputes before they escalate to displays of firearms might also be beneficial. In terms of the increase in drive-by shootings, prevention could involve 'stop and search' of groups of young males travelling in vehicles within gang-affiliated areas.

However, despite the current study replicating the structure of Alison, et al.'s (2000) armed robbery interviews with a sample of violent gun crime law reports, there are still potential cautions in terms of the direct applicability of the findings to an operational approach. The current law report sample provided a number of firearm offences and offending groups to be analysed in terms of the current research focus, but how representative such cases are to gun crime in the UK as a whole can be debated. For example, using convicted cases ignores those cases that do not come to police attention or make it through the criminal justice process. In many incidents of gun crime, no gun is fired, no weapon is retrieved and/or no forensic evidence left, causing 40% of firearm homicides to remain undetected and unresolved (Brockman & Maguire 2003; Marshall et al, 2005). Here witnesses and surviving victims are increasingly relied upon to provide accurate eyewitness accounts, but since many firearm victims are involved in illegal activity themselves, they prefer to take personal action and revenge and, as a result, many cases remain unrecorded (Marshall et al, 2005; Rosenfeld et al, 1999; Perterson, Taylor & Esbensen, 2007; Zawitz, 1995). However, the limitations of the present study fall in line with limitations of using any form of archival information for research purposes.

Future research should, therefore, aim to utilise larger samples from different sources in order to further examine professionalism across a variation of offence types, to allow general comparisons to be made. However, the present study has

successfully replicated the structure that it hypothesised and has done so by using a different crime type and data source to the original Alison, et al (2000) study. This, therefore, adds weight to the model.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current research served to highlight that violent gun crime, while essentially an activity of young males, can vary in the level of 'professional' behaviour exhibited by offenders. The existence of the three different offending modes would suggest a more diverse criminal range than one gun or gang culture and, therefore, supports a more diverse range of responses than interventions focussed on gangs in a general sense. However, the large proportion of cases that involved gang membership cannot be overlooked, as well as the higher degree of violence, when compared with robbery. It is clear that firearms are not being used merely for instrumental purposes, but by young and often impulsive people as a means of expression and communication. The challenge is to identify those at risk of involvement and provide viable behavioural alternatives.

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Appendix: Coding Dictionary

33 SSA Variables

Robin's Men

Variables utilised from Alison et al (2000)

1. **Knowledge - Implied knowledge-** Attacks where the offenders appear to know something about the target. Such as personal details, home address.
2. **WeaponOth - Weapon, other-** The offenders carry weapons during the offence that are not firearms, for example, knives, baseball bats, noxious sprays etc.
3. **SpontVerb - Spontaneous verbal threat-** Any verbal threat that the offenders use that implies harm to the victims/s to control them, and is not a response to victim resistance.
4. **PrivateCont - Enters private area, control-** The offenders enter a private area of the premises in order to assert control over the victims, this includes entry by confidence trick, or entering a room/vehicle.
5. **Surprise - Surprise attack-** An attack by the offenders on the victim/s, whether preceded by a confidence approach or not. The attack is sudden, and characterised by the use of verbal threats and threats of harm, including with a weapon, verbal abuse but not physical violence.
6. **Hostage - Hostage taken-** This variable determines those cases where the offenders take a hostage to enforce control over the victim. This includes victims held whilst demands are made, or other persons, not directly involved with the target, such as relatives held at other locations.
7. **Con - Confidence approach-** Style of approach involves contact with the victim/s in order to give false impression of legitimacy, by means including, a false story, asking for direction, posing as a customer or inviting them round as a friend.
8. **privateLater - Enters private area, later** – The offenders enter a private area having gained control, i.e. forcing the victim into a room or vehicle.
9. **Verbinstruct - Verbal instructions-** Language used by the offenders which instruct/s the victim/s to do or not do an act, and includes demands for goods or money.
10. **MadeDisg - Made Disguise-** An item used by the offenders to disguise their appearance, which has been made or altered specifically for that purpose, including stockings, woollen sleeves with eyeholes cut.

11. **VicSecurity - Victim security-** The offenders take action to secure the victim/s or other persons present by physical means, including binding, locking them in a room.

Added from inter-rater reliability

12. **StealVic - Steal from victim-** During the offence the offenders steal personal/non-personal property from the victim.

Bandits

Variables utilised from Alison et al (2000)

13. **GratPhys - Gratuitous Violence-physical/other weapon-** The offenders physically assault or use a weapon other than firearm against the victim, which is more than necessary to assert or maintain control over them. In some cases apparently for its own sake.
14. **ImprovDisg - Improvised disguise-** An item used to disguise the offenders appearance that is an everyday item, for example, glasses, hood or hat.
15. **Blitz - Blitz attack-** An attack that is either sudden or preceded by a confidence approach in which there is an immediate use of physical force or an assault, that permanently/ temporarily incapacitates the victim.
16. **>Three - More than three offenders** – More than three offenders are involved in the incident, including getaway drivers, instigators etc.
17. **ResDeter - Resistance, deterred-** The offenders actions or intentions change in some way due to victim resistance or intervention.

Added from inter-rater reliability

18. **FireOff - More than one offender fires the gun-** more than one offender in the group fires a gun during the offence.
19. **SomeDisg - Some offenders are wearing a disguise-** At least one offender in the group is wearing some form of disguise while at least one offender in the group is wearing no disguise.
20. **GratGunProp - gratuitous gunfire property** – A firearm is discharged at property, the floor or the ceiling proactively, not in response to victim non-cooperation or resistance.

21. **>1Firearm - More than 1 firearm-** The offenders have more than one firearm in their possession during the offence.
22. **Fire>1 - Gun fire more than once-** A gun is fired more than once during the offence.
23. **GratGun - Gratuitous Violence-gunfire person-** A firearm is discharged at a person proactively, and not in response to victim non-co-operation or resistance.
24. **SocialVenue - Target, social venue-** The target it is a social venue i.e. a club, pub or leisure centre.

Cowboys

Variables utilised from Alison et al (2000)

25. **NoDisg - No disguise-** The offenders make no attempt to disguise their features.
26. **RespViolPhys - Response violence physical/weapon other-** The offenders are prepared to use physical violence or a weapon other than a firearm in response to victim resistance or non-co-operation.
27. **RespVerb - Responsive Verbal threat-** Any verbal threat or intimidating language that the offender/s use as a result of non-co-operation by the victim/s
28. **Dwelling - Target, Dwelling-** The target is in a private property i.e. victim or offenders home.

Added from inter-rater reliability

29. **AccFire - Accidental gunfire-** The offender/s discharge the weapon during the offence by accident.
30. **Vehicle - Target vehicle-** The target is in a vehicle when offence is committed.
31. **Open - Target person, open-** The target is a person in an open public place, where it may be visible by the public.
32. **Instrument - Firearm instrument-** The offenders are prepared to use a firearm as a form of blunt instrument (not fired).
33. **RespPerson - Response gunfire, person-** The offenders are prepared to fire a gun at a person in response to resistance or non-co-operation.

Additional 19 variables for exploratory correlations

34. **Forensic precautions destroy-** The offenders take forensic precautions by attempting to destroy evidence, e.g. burning out a vehicle used in the offence.
35. **Vehicle own-** A vehicle owned by the offenders is used in the commission of the robbery.
36. **Vehicle disguised or stole-** The offenders use a stolen vehicle in the commission of their offence or they disguise their own vehicle by changing the registration plates.
37. **More than one vehicle** – the offenders use more than one vehicle in the commission of the offence.
38. **Plan/discuss the offence** – The offenders get together to plan or discuss the offence beforehand. This also includes the offenders familiarising themselves with the location before they carry out the offence, i.e. by visiting/ observing the location or enquiring with others about i.e. where the cash is kept or where the victim will be at a particular time.
39. **Victim alone-** victim alone when the offence is committed.
40. **Offender drug dealer/ taken drugs -** The offenders are drug dealers/ couriers or have taken drugs at the time of the offence
41. **Firearm not discharged** – Offenders do not discharge firearms during the offence.
42. **Forced entry-** The offenders force their entry in to the establishment.
43. **Serial-** The offence is among a series of crimes of the same nature.
44. **Offender alcohol-** The offender/s have consumed alcohol at the time of the offence.
45. **Target drug dealer/criminal network-** The target is a person known to the offenders to distribute drugs or be involved in a criminal network.
46. **Victim friends/family-** Victim is with friends or family when the offence takes place
47. **Drive-by-** The offenders discharge the firearm from a vehicle and then make a quick escape.
48. **Rivalry/retaliation-** The offence is carried out as a response to a previous incident involving the victim or a rival group.
49. **Offender gang-** The offenders are known to be ‘gang members’.

50. **Victim gang** – The victim/s are known to be a member of a ‘gang’.
51. **Others involved** – offenders are involved in the incident as part of the group but do not directly approach/enter the victim/target.
52. **Bystander killed/injured** – a person unrelated to the incident is injured or killed unintentionally by the offender(s).

Figure Captions

Fig 1: Vector 2 x 3 of the 3 dimensional SSA plot.

Fig 1:

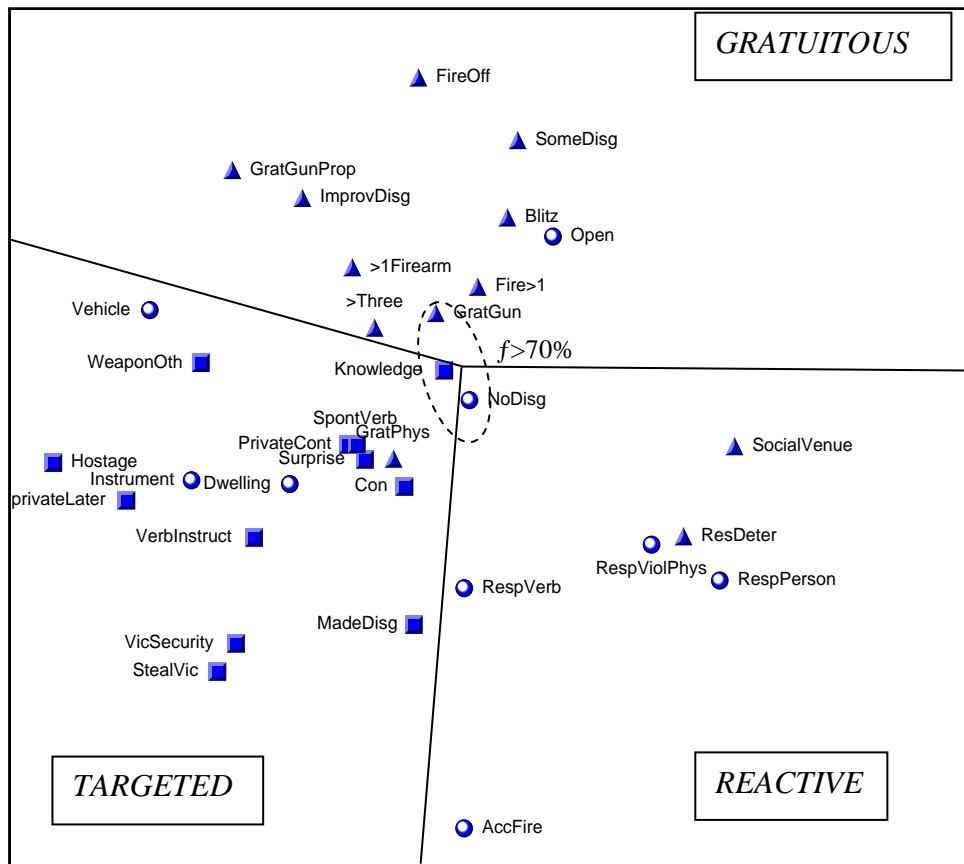


Table 1: Offence variables in the three SSA themes in Fig. 1 with their frequencies.

Targeted	f	Gratuitous	f	Reactive	f
Knowledge	83%	More than one offender fires gun	12%	No disguise worn	80%
Weapon, other	16%	Some Offenders disguised	7%	Responsive physical violence	17%
Spontaneous verbal threat	42%	Gratuitous gunfire at property	22%	Responsive gunfire at person	12%
Enters private area, control	16%	Improvised disguise	16%	Responsive verbal threat	23%
Surprise attack	48%	Blitz attack	48%	Accidental Fire	4%
Hostage taken	10%	More than one firearm	23%	Target in a social venue*	12%
Confidence approach	22%	Firearm discharged more than once	52%	Resistance deterred*	16%
Enters private area, later	16%	More than 3 offenders	41%		
Verbal instructions	26%	Gratuitous gunfire at person	71%		
Made disguise	3%	Target victim in an open public place*	44%		
Victim security	15%				
Steal from victim	12%				
Firearm used as a blunt instrument*	12%				
Target, dwelling*	41%				
Target, vehicle*	20%				
Gratuitous physical violence*	38%				
K-R20 = .7		K-R20 = .6		K-R20 =.6	

* Highlights the variables whose region placing did not match the findings of Alison et al (2000) or reliability analysis.

Table 2: Pearson Point-Biserial Correlations between the murder/assault themes and further offence variables.

Variable	<i>f</i>	Targeted	Gratuitous	Reactive
1. Offender take drugs at time or drug dealer/courier	22%	0.425(**)	-0.127	-0.176
2. Target drug dealer or owes money or drugs	25%	0.342(**)	0.069	-0.305(*)
3. Force entry into the establishment	12%	0.289(*)	-0.176	-0.038
4. Firearm not discharged	7%	0.266*	-0.384**	0.081
5. Victim alone when targeted	28%	0.243(*)	-0.059	-0.152
6. Offender known to be part of a gang	54%	-0.415(**)	0.438(**)	-0.013
7. Victim known to be part of gang	33%	-0.412(**)	0.338(**)	0.078
8. Offence carried out in response to previous incident/rival group	73%	-0.325(**)	0.335(**)	0.028
9. Offenders discharge firearm out of vehicle	23%	-0.283(*)	0.385(**)	-0.215
10. Victim with friends or family at time of offence	58%	-0.265(*)	0.222	0.101
11. Offence part of a series of similar crimes	26%	-0.109	0.392(**)	-0.088
12. Offenders stole the vehicle used in the offence or changed the registration plates of their car	10%	-0.091	0.350(**)	-0.274(*)
13. More than 1 vehicle used in commission of offence	17%	-0.001	0.264(*)	-0.282(*)
14. Others involved that do not enter/approach victim/target	44%	0.029	0.257(*)	-0.450(**)
15. Bystander or innocent person injured/killed	12%	-0.088	0.254(*)	-0.107
16. Offender consumed alcohol at time of offence	10%	0.083	-0.251(*)	0.167
17. Take forensic precautions and destroy evidence	22%	-0.046	0.207	-0.311(**)
18. Offenders discuss/plan the offence beforehand or familiarise themselves with the location	54%	0.143	0.22	-0.280(*)
19. Offenders' own vehicle used in offence	57%	-0.04	0.226	-0.265(*)

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level