A young gang member shows off his 9 mm in the hallway of a housing project, Brooklyn, New York, December 2003. © Boogie/WPN

Few Options but the Gun

ANGRY YOUNG MEN

12

INTRODUCTION

Armed and angry young men are perhaps the most feared element of any society, but they also have the most to fear. Regardless of the countries in which they live, young men represent a disproportionately high share of the perpetrators and victims of gun-related, lethal violence.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that boys are two to three times more likely than girls to get involved in fighting (WHO, 2002, p. 29). Young men—those aged 15 to 29—also account for half of global firearm homicide victims, or 70,000 to 100,000 deaths annually.[1]

While studies of youth violence have long considered the role played by young men, the issue has received little attention in the framework of small arms research. This chapter begins to fill the gap by examining the following questions:

- Why are young men the primary perpetrators of armed violence?
- What role do small arms play in this phenomenon?
- Have interventions designed to prevent or reduce armed violence adequately tackled the complex relationship that exists between young men and small arms?

The chapter first reviews the principal theories on why young men are more likely to turn to armed violence than other demographic groups. It finds that traditional biological and demographic arguments do not sufficiently take into account the multiple factors that encourage and prevent young men from resorting to violence. It argues that gender ideologies—particularly those that associate masculinity with power—offer crucial insight into why many marginalized young men see violence as an attractive means of achieving manhood and respect. The second section argues that small arms can be an important part of this complex social equation. It examines how the functional and symbolic attributes of small arms make them attractive for young men wishing to achieve power through association with or participation in violence. The final section reviews opportunities to address the problem by controlling young men's access to small arms and countering their espousal of a violent masculine ideology.

The following are among the chapter's most important conclusions:

- Young men frequently perceive violence—particularly small arms violence—as a means to reach positions of social or economic status that they feel entitled to.
- By offering empowerment in the face of exclusion from socially defined masculine roles, small arms can be strong symbols of power for marginalized young men.
- Curbing young men's access to firearms has proved an effective component of short-term strategies to reduce the number of deaths arising from youth violence.

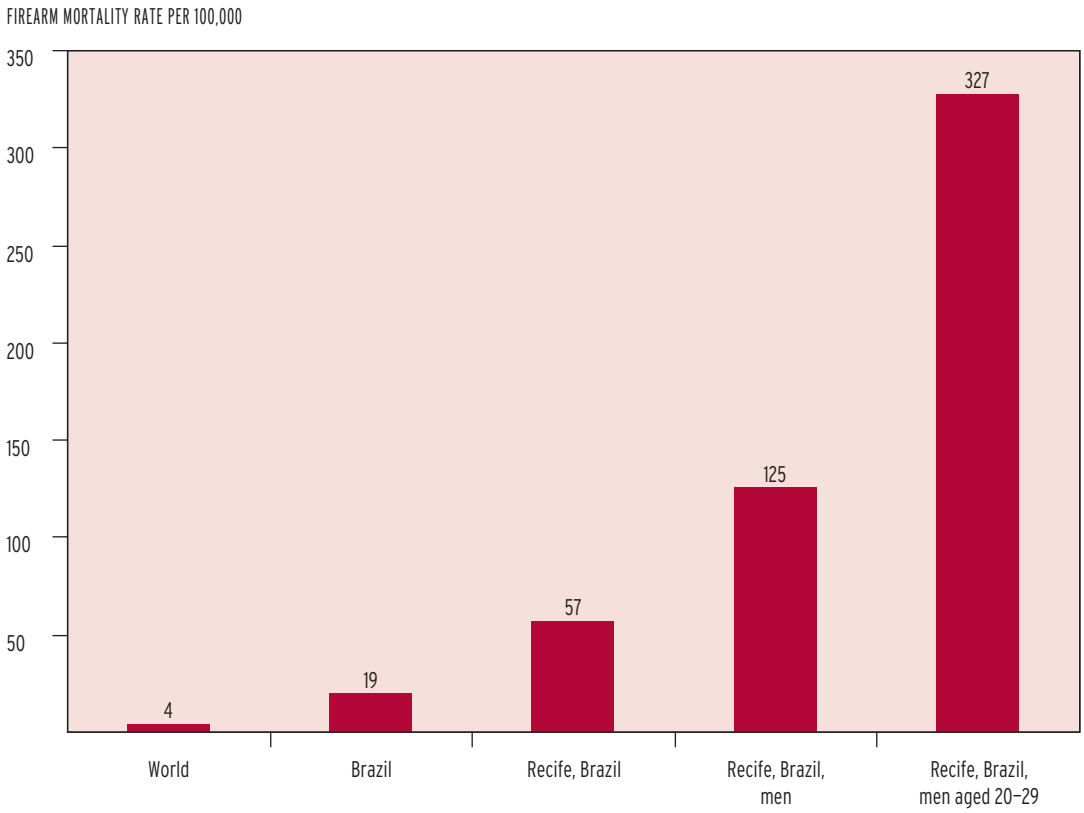
- Countering socially constructed associations between guns, violence, power, and masculinity is a key component of any effective, long-term violence prevention strategy.

YOUNG MEN AND VIOLENCE

Most research identifies young men as the primary actors in contemporary violence—as well as other forms of anti-social activity. This gender and age distinction appears to apply across very different social strata. Moreover, age and gender can be more powerful determinants of levels of armed violence than geographical considerations (see Figure 12.1).

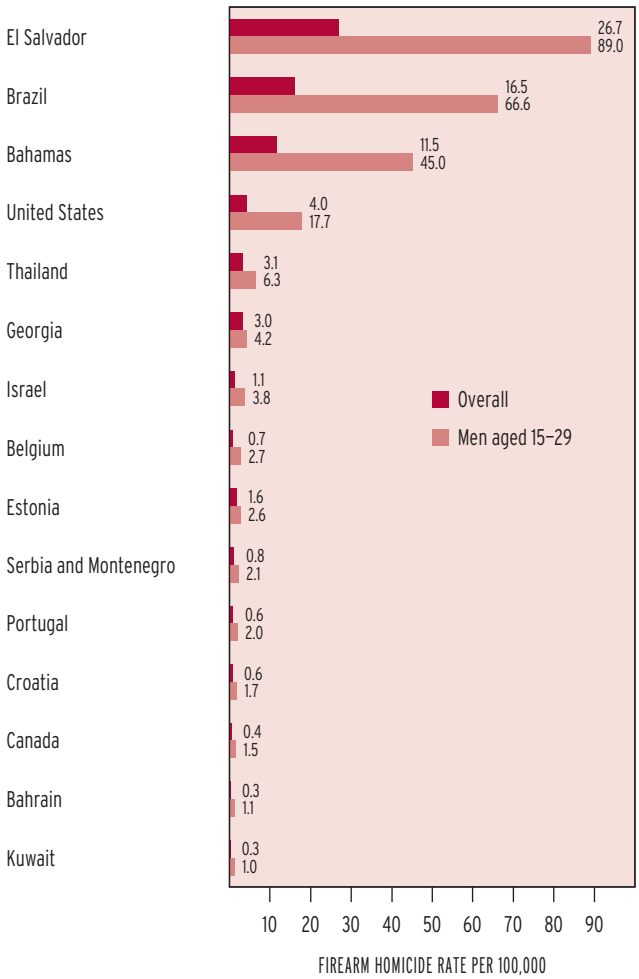
Young people in general and young men in particular comprise the largest group of perpetrators of most criminal activity. A review of more than 140 studies investigating a wide range of offences has found that people are most likely to commit a crime when aged between 12 and 30.[2] In Canada, for instance, 12–17-year-olds account for 8 per cent of the population, but as many as 21 per cent of all offenders; the overwhelming majority of these—almost 80 per cent of young offenders—are boys.[3] In Brussels, Belgium, 92 per cent of delinquent minors[4] in 1993 were male

Figure 12.1 **Age and gender as key determinants of vulnerability to small arms violence, 2000**



Sources: World: Small Arms Survey calculations based on Richmond, Cheney, and Schwab (2005, p. 348, using 229,000 annual non-conflict-related firearm deaths estimate) and UN Population Division (2005). Brazil and Recife: Peres (2004, pp. 129, 130, 132)

Figure 12.2 **Firearm homicide rates: victims per 100,000 among men aged 15–29 compared with the overall population (selected countries, latest year available)**



Source: Small Arms Survey calculations based on WHO (2005) and UN Population Division (2002)

(Vercaigne, 2001, p. 285), while 83 per cent of minors arrested in the first six months of 2002 in Davao, Philippines, were boys (Templa, 2004, p. 18).

Young men are also more likely to use firearms when carrying out crime than any other demographic group. A 2001 study of US state and federal correctional facilities finds that 18 per cent of all inmates carried a gun for their last offence. The proportion rises to 29 per cent for inmates under the age of 25. Among inmates of all ages, men were almost three times as likely as women to have used small arms during their offence (Wolf Harlow, 2001). The same pattern applies in other contexts. In Montenegro in 2003, for instance, 99 per cent of the perpetrators of gun assaults were men, and almost half were aged 15–29 (Florquin and O'Neill Stoneman, 2004, p. 16).

Victims and perpetrators of armed violence typically know of each other and belong to the same demographic and social groups (Hemenway, 2004, p. 113; Kennedy, 1997, p. 457). Not surprisingly, young men are thus not only the main perpetrators of but also disproportionately vulnerable to violence involving small arms. In 2004, the Small Arms Survey reported that, while young men are the primary victims of violence in general, they account for an even greater proportion of gun violence victims (Small Arms Survey, 2004, p. 179). An analysis of WHO statistics confirms this assertion. Firearm homicide data available in 70 countries and territories shows that men aged 15–29 represent half of all firearm homicide victims, at a rate more than four times higher (22 per 100,000) than that of the general population (5 per 100,000) (WHO, 2005). This trend is consistent across regions and countries experiencing different rates of violence (see Figure 12.2). Extrapolating this ratio globally suggests that between 70,000 and 100,000 young men aged 15–29 die every year from gun homicides.[5]

It would be misleading to explain young men's disproportionately high involvement in armed violence with the theory that they are biologically more inclined to resort to violent behaviour. While some young men account for most of the world's armed violence, many more young men have no involvement in delinquency or violence. Recent

surveys report that a mere 6–7 per cent of young men commit 50–70 per cent of all crime and 60–85 per cent of all serious and violent crime.[6] Similarly, young men are the principal victims of small arms violence in terms of overall numbers across the globe even though they are *not* the demographic group most at risk of dying of firearm homicide in a surprisingly high number of countries and territories (33 out of a sample of 70).[7] The experiences of these countries suggest that high rates of violence among young men are not a certainty and that other factors come into play.

A mere 6–7 per cent of young men commit 60–85 per cent of all serious crime.

Young men who do engage in armed violence often belong to gangs or other armed groups that tend to emerge in contexts of social and economic marginalization (Hagedorn, 2001, pp. 42–45). Such groups usually enjoy easy access to small arms. In the United States, 75 per cent of gang members are reported to own a gun, compared with only 25–50 per cent of non-gang youth.[8]

This section has demonstrated that a relatively small proportion of the young male population is responsible for most armed violence. The next sections evaluate biological and demographic arguments that seek to explain the disproportionate involvement of young men in armed violence. While such theories provide important insight, they fail to explain variations over time, among different cultures, and within a society—such as those along class, ethnicity, race, religion, and other lines.

The biological argument: men are genetically programmed for violence

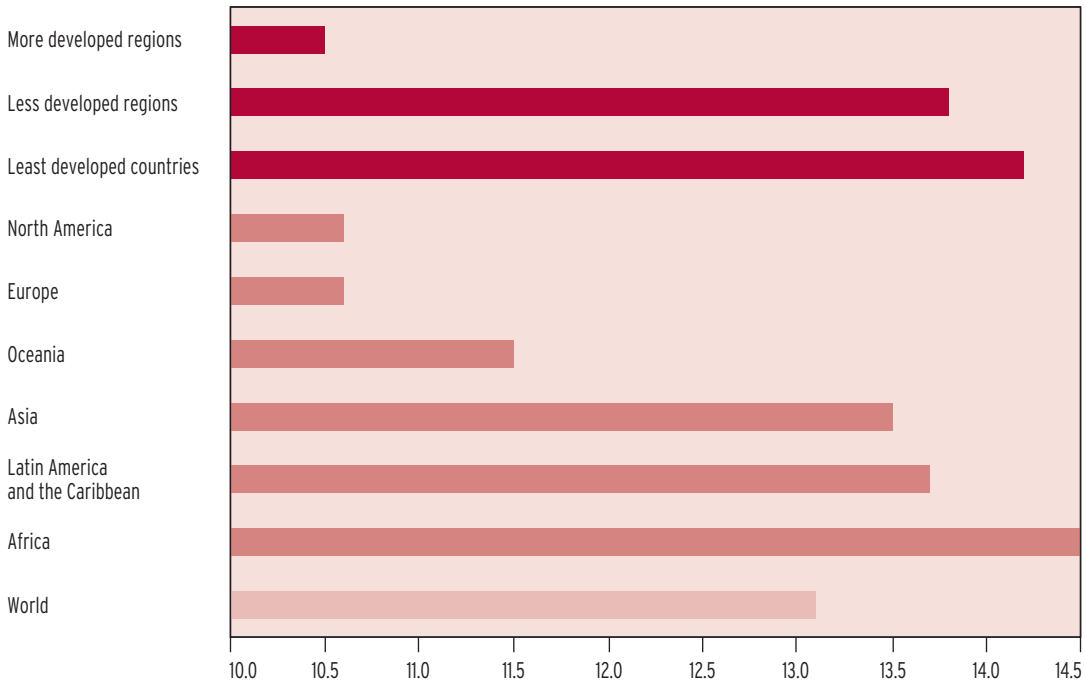
Numerous researchers have sought to explain the high rates of violent activity among men through biological and genetic theories. The results, which are relatively inconclusive, suggest a limited and bi-directional relationship. For example, higher levels of testosterone (found in both men and women, but generally at much higher rates in men) have been linked to higher rates of aggression in men and boys. Exposure to stress, violence, and feelings of subjugation causes testosterone levels to rise. In other words, chemical balance is affected by changes in the social environment. This research generally suggests that, at most, higher levels of testosterone may trigger violent or aggressive behaviour in individuals who already exhibit violent tendencies and that experiencing violence, in turn, leads to higher levels of testosterone (Renfrew, 1997; Kimmel, 2003).

Brain research has also examined genetic differences in male and female styles of communication and reasoning, including traits that might be associated with aggression and violence. Yet the bulk of this research tends to indicate that there are greater differences within each sex than there are aggregate differences between the sexes (Kimmel, 2003). Furthermore, most researchers conclude that even if there is a biological or genetic basis for aggression and violence in men, this propensity is mitigated through the social environment and through higher cognitive functions. Indeed, some brain research confirms that neocortex functions and other higher brain structures are involved in reducing aggression (Renfrew, 1997). This provides some neurological basis for confirming what has already been confirmed in psychology, namely that humans can control their aggressive tendencies through more complex levels of cognition (Barker, 2005b). Any biological propensity or predisposition towards violence or aggression is therefore mediated by the social context and individual factors.

The demographic argument: too many young men

In recent years, various researchers have argued that young men are responsible for high rates of violence wherever they represent a disproportionately high segment of the population. This demographic theory implies that regions and countries with high proportions of young men (see Figure 12.3) are more likely to experience high rates of violence. A recent World Bank report states: 'Large-scale unemployment, combined with rapid demographic growth,

Figure 12.3 **Demographic bulges: Young men aged 15–29 as a proportion of total population, by income level and region, 2005**



Source: UN Population Division (2005)

creates a large pool of idle young men with few prospects and little to lose' (Michailof, Kostner, and Devictor, 2002, p. 3). Mesquida and Wiener (1999) argue that one of the most reliable factors in explaining conflict (which they call 'coalitional aggression') is the relative number of young men (under 30 years of age) compared with men over 30. In analyzing data from more than 45 countries and 12 tribal societies, they find—even controlling for income distribution and per capita GNP—that the higher the ratio of 15–29-year-old men to older men, the higher the rates of conflict.

In a similar vein, Cincotta, Engelman, and Anastasion (2003, p. 44) ask:

> Why are youth bulges so often volatile? The short answer is: too many young men with not enough to do. When a population as a whole is growing, ever larger numbers of young males come of age each year, ready for work, in search of respect from their male peers and elders. Typically, they are eager to achieve an identity, assert their independence and impress young females. While unemployment rates tend to be high in developing countries, unemployment among young adult males is usually from three to five times as high as adults' rates, with lengthy periods between the end of schooling and first placement in a job.

In reviewing demographic data and 207 conflict onsets in 1950–2000, Urdal also concludes that countries with large numbers of youths had a higher risk of conflict than countries with smaller numbers, and especially so under conditions of economic stagnation. He finds that an increase of 1 per cent in the proportion of 15–24-year-olds relative to the total adult population (i.e. aged 15 or more) increased the likelihood of conflict by 7 per cent (Urdal,

2004, p. 9). But he contends that there is no clear threshold as to the proportion of young men needed to render a country conflict-prone. Moreover, while the effect of youth bulges on conflict was clearly significant and positive during the cold war period, it is insignificant and even negative for the post-cold war era. In the latter period, factors such as levels of development, regime type, and geography have greater explanatory powers (Urdal, 2004, pp. 15–16).

In fact, large numbers of youths (and young men) only seem to lead to higher rates of armed violence when combined with economic stresses, and only in specific settings. There are, for example, countries with large numbers of youth that have not experienced high rates of violence or conflict, while at the same time, countries with relatively few youths suffer high rates of violence (the United States and United Kingdom in comparison with other industrialized countries, for example). Economist Steven Levitt has found, for instance, that the aging of the population had little influence on the fall of US violent crime rates in the late 1990s. Factors that did have an impact included increases in the number of police, the rising prison population, the waning crack epidemic, and the legalization of abortion[9] (Levitt, 1999, p. 581; 2004, p. 163). In sum, demographic arguments are not sufficient to explain the reasons for conflict, young men's participation in it, or the triggers or causes of specific conflicts.

Indeed, the demographic argument does not explain which young men in a given setting become involved in armed conflict. Even in countries in conflict or with high rates of violence, the vast majority of young men do not become involved in armed conflict or use weapons.

A situational approach: human ecology and gendered socialization

The biological and demographic arguments both neglect the fact that young men often differ greatly from one another in their behaviour. Some become involved in violence while others do not. It is therefore plausible that the involvement of young men in violence is 'situational'—conditioned by their interaction with the world around them (society, community, family).

Certain bundles of factors that young men are exposed to appear to have a particularly strong bearing on the likelihood that they will become involved in violence. Several major longitudinal studies in Western Europe and North America have sought to identify early childhood predictors of violent behaviour. These studies have consistently concluded that most violent behaviour is explained by multiple, interacting social factors arising during childhood and adolescence. Some of these factors figure in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1 Some of the factors leading to violent behaviour in young men

Being labelled as troublesome	Low school achievement
Coercive or violent parental controls	Limited social skills
Limited parental control	Holding more traditional or rigid views about gender
Having witnessed or experienced violence in the home or community	Having been shamed or experienced significant shame and humiliation as a child
Socializing with delinquent peers	Having been brutalized or violently subjugated
Perceiving hostile intentions in others	Having used violence and seen that violence produces respect

Sources: Elliott (1994); McAlister (2000); Sampson and Laub (1993); Barker (2005a); Rhodes (1999); Gilligan (1996)

Socialization into a violent masculinity? A child dressed as a combatant and armed with a replica assault rifle, Jerusalem, January 2006. © Central Imaging Agency/WPN

Taken as a whole, this research provides strong support for an 'ecological' model that emphasizes the interaction among multiple factors in explaining human development and human behaviour. These factors or levels include the family, local community, and the wider context of social, political, and cultural norms and realities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In this ecological model, young men go through a process of socialization in which they are not merely passive receptors of social norms; rather, they participate actively in internalizing, reframing, and reproducing norms that they receive from their social settings, their families, and their peers. Further, a young man's behaviour—such as involvement as a combatant, use of small arms, or use of violence against a woman—is not attributed to one specific factor. External factors such as cultural norms are filtered through the community, family, peer group, and other close groups and influences before they are internalized and acted upon by the young man himself.

From this perspective, a young man's gender is not the sole determinant of his association with or willingness to use armed violence; in fact, his understanding and use of social and cultural ideologies of masculinity will largely determine whether he turns to armed violence. While the ideologies of masculinity and femininity are constructed in relation to each other, they are not equivalent. They reflect the dynamics of any given 'field of power'—in which men as a group have power over women as a group, and some men have power over other men (Kimmel, 2005, p. 6).

Young men who are marginalized, whether socially or economically, frequently lack power, despite being socially conditioned to seek it. Kimmel argues that this condition is a linchpin of young, male violence. Violence can allow a man who seeks to appear rich, powerful, and strong to counteract social marginalization and humiliation. For young men denied their place in society, violence—especially armed violence—evens the score (Kimmel, 2003).

SMALL ARMS: FUNCTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC

Where do small arms fit in the situational model? The following sections consider the functional and symbolic roles small arms play for some young men.

The appeal of small arms to young men can be expected to vary considerably across the world as a function of social and economic conditions. This chapter argues that the strength of their appeal is conditioned by the young man's social environment, both specific (his family, peers, and community) and broad (cultural norms).

From a functional perspective, societies, communities, and peers may legitimize young men's use of small arms to achieve certain (often shared) goals. This is particularly so when young men (and their communities) are excluded from non-violent avenues of social and economic advancement, or if they face discrimination or threats to their security. In these situations, violence can have a powerful functional appeal, with small arms making it even more effective.

Box 12.1 Small arm functions: the word from the street

Rites of passage and building reputation:

'I was 13 years old when they gave me a test for entering the group. They told me to give a gun to a guy leaving school. . . When I left the school some [rival] gang members began to follow me and I tried to lose them. They followed me and I had no alternative but to use the gun. I shot twice in the air and they took off. . .'[a]

13-year-old boy, Ecuador

Proof of masculine identity:

'One day I started to hang around with the men . . . I started to carry a backpack, a bag full of bullets, and I continued hanging around with the men. Now I'm a *gerente de boca* [drug sales overseer] and I carry my own pistol.'[b]

16-year-old male gang member, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Status, wealth, and women:

'. . . they see you walking with a rifle all over the place, see you riding a motorbike, [wearing a] gold chain. These things influence [kids] a lot. So a youth will say "I want that, too." I want to have lots of women. I want a car. This influences minors to enter crime more and more each day: new clothes, new sneakers, new cap.'[c]

18-year-old male former gang member, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

A means of defence/resistance:

'I had to use firearms. When your friend gets killed you have plenty of motives.'[d]

Young male gang member, Medellín, Colombia

'Gun is nice, gun is protection. When you have it no guy can disrespect you.'[e]

Young male former gang member, August Town, Jamaica

'. . . the government thought we were not serious and used our oil money to kill our people. . . . Now we have the guns they are beginning to respect and recognize us.'[f]

Young male armed group member, Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

Sources:

a Punctuation of original source edited for readability. COAV (2005).

b Dowdney (2003, p. 124).

c Dowdney (2003, p. 134).

d Dowdney (2005, p. 112).

e Dowdney (2005, p. 242).

f Dowdney (2005, p. 256).

From a symbolic perspective, small arms may be valued irrespective of their practical utility—for example, as symbols of resistance, defence, or self-sufficiency. Such characteristics are often connected to, or juxtaposed with, violent interpretations of manhood. For some young men, small arms also symbolize the transition from boyhood to manhood.

The functions of small arms[10]

Researchers have identified specific risk factors that appear to influence whether young men become involved in small arms violence. These are related to young men fulfilling—or attempting to fulfil—what they perceive to be socially expected of a man. In the most serious cases, young men may take violent action repeatedly to force peers and communities to recognize them as men or to generate the material and social wealth they perceive necessary for greater social status.

Risk-taking and rites of passage

A nearly universal aspect of male socialization is that manhood means having to publicly prove that one is a man. This may include rites of passage in some parts of the world, and informal tests of courage, bravado, and risk-taking in most regions. Outwardly risky or antisocial behaviour may be a way for a young man to prove himself, become part of a group, or simply be recognized—in short, to define himself as a 'real man' according to prevailing social standards.

Involvement with small arms can help young men define themselves as 'real men'.

Involvement with small arms is one such type of behaviour, as evidenced by a 2004 survey of 5,800 California adolescents. The study finds that respondents who engaged in high-risk behaviour such as smoking or binge drinking—often interpreted by young men as manly—were also more likely to have used a gun in self-defence or to have been threatened with one (Hemenway and Miller, 2004, p. 396).

Very young armed gang members from countries such as Brazil, El Salvador, and Jamaica report how their initiation into using firearms starts with, for instance, shooting into the air while 'hanging around' with the group, or borrowing a gun from a friend or other gang member. In other cases, they describe how carrying weapons and ammunition on behalf of older members brings important recognition (Dowdney, 2005, pp. 101, 222, 242).

The vast majority of young men, while just as intent on affirming their manhood, do not become involved in sustained delinquent behaviour or armed violence. What distinguishes them from those who turn to violence?

Building reputation

One of the chief hallmarks of manhood worldwide is achieving some level of financial independence, securing employment, and subsequently starting a family. Numerous studies have confirmed that when men are out of work, or otherwise unable to fulfil these requirements, their self-esteem suffers.

One hypothesis asserts that, when avenues to socially accepted manhood are closed or made more difficult, alternative sources of wealth generation and social status become more appealing. One such alternative is becoming associated with, or involved in, small arms violence.

Involvement with small arms can help young men define themselves as 'real men'. A 'bad boy' instils fear and wields power. He leaves behind anonymity and attracts immediate attention.

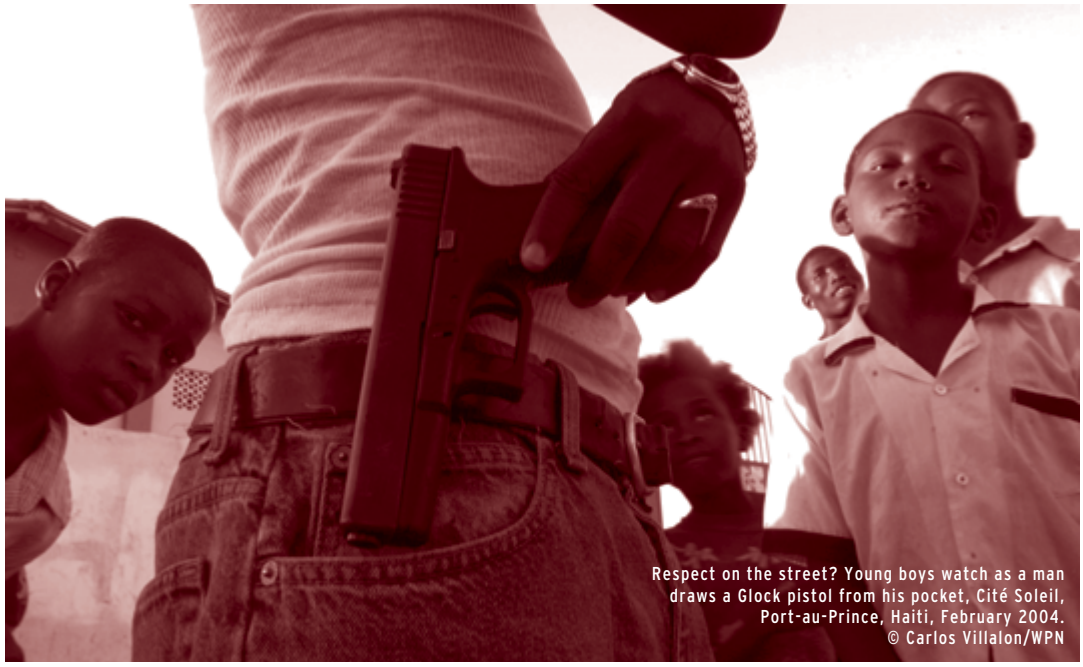
Emler and Reicher (1995) have suggested that violence and antisocial behaviour for these young men is a deliberate 'reputational project', an effort to affirm an identity as delinquent or violent in order to fit into an antisocial

peer group. This strategy may be particularly attractive to young men who see mainstream goals and identities as beyond their reach, or who feel they have been rejected by mainstream social institutions. Small arms may be instrumental in their pursuit of wealth, respect, and security.

Proof of masculine identity

In many low-income areas, wielding a gun is often considered a sign of status, male affluence, and power. In many parts of South Africa, for instance, for much of the 1980s, 1990s, and with lingering effects today, both white and black young men have often been socialized into a militaristic version of manhood through the formation of a kind of brotherhood of combatants, usually involving small arms, whether for or against apartheid. As one commentator notes, 'The gun is a convenient peg on which to hang traditional notions of masculine power' (Cock, 2001, p. 49). In a similar vein, Wilkinson and Fagan (1996, pp. 81–82) conclude that for inner-city young men in the United States, guns provide a sense of power, even if they are not used. Likewise, in Rio de Janeiro, young men are reportedly drawn into the drug trade, not least because they are able to acquire small arms that they can openly display to the community. A nine-country[11] study of young men involved in organized armed violence found that they saw the carrying of guns as an effective way to gain respect and achieve status (Dowdney, 2003, p. 133).

If a young man carries a small arm, however, he may be called upon to use it. An analysis of homicides in Australia finds a common pattern of contests of honour and reputation, public challenges to men's reputation (and the associated perceived loss of self-respect), and unpredicted escalation to lethal violence in which the 'audience' provides important cues to appropriate behaviour (Polk, 1994). Similarly, in South Africa and the US city of Chicago, researchers note that when numerous young men carry small arms 'would-be fistfights in a less well-armed community become fire-fights' (Dowdney, 2005, p. 303; Cook et al., 2005, p. 7), leading to an arms race in which young men believe they need to be armed (DEMAND).



Respect on the street? Young boys watch as a man draws a Glock pistol from his pocket, Cité Soleil, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, February 2004.
© Carlos Villalon/WPN

Empowerment in the community

Small arms may enable young men, who would otherwise have little influence in their communities, to exert considerable control—even over traditional figures of authority. In some cases (see Box 12.2), young men simply follow in the footsteps of existing figures of community authority. In others, they seize authority through violence, reversing or destroying the existing social order.

Violence is more attractive where the peer group or broader community recognizes it as a viable, even acceptable, means of achieving material or social goals (see Box 12.2).

Boys involved in armed conflict in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, more recently, the Democratic Republic of the Congo may be responding to socially accepted interpretations of manhood. By controlling a given setting and bringing violence to bear on those around them, they become, in essence, what are frequently known in Africa as 'big men' (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003). These young men may, however, have strayed too far from their communities and traditions. Observers of young male combatants in West and Central Africa note that the violence and fear tactics that they utilize take a socially accepted interpretation of manhood to its extreme (Ellis, 1997; Jourdan, 2004, pp. 162–63). As one study concludes, 'In many of these wars [in West Africa], both local and foreign observers have detected an element of youth out of control, adolescents and even children who, in societies with strong gerontocratic traditions, seize power by force' (Ellis, 1997, p. 110). These studies illustrate how, in certain settings, young men use small arms to bypass traditional structures and gain power. Further research is needed to improve our understanding of the social organization of violence and the role small arms may play in disrupting these controls.

Box 12.2 'Big men', armed violence, and social recognition in Belfast, Davao City, and Manenberg

Belfast in Northern Ireland, Davao City in the Philippines, and Manenberg, South Africa, differ in many respects. Yet they are all characterized by high unemployment, poverty far exceeding the national average, and relatively high levels of violence, both in the home and community-wide. These factors come together to produce environments in which young men, faced with few prospects, find violence an attractive, and sometimes necessary, course of action.

The three cases suggest that, for young men with few opportunities, being a member of an armed group is a rational activity. Young men often choose to adopt the violent means they recognize as inherent to their communities in the hope of achieving status and material gain. In the case of Belfast, however, few young men have access to small arms. Armed violence is consequently lower than in Manenberg and Davao City even though the underlying attractions of violence for young men do not differ significantly.

Where it is integrated into the fabric of the community, armed violence may bring social recognition. In Belfast, some people turn to paramilitaries to 'police' the community. The punishment attacks they inflict on perpetrators of 'unacceptable crimes', witnessed by young men growing up in the city, serve to normalize violence within the community (Fox, 2002; Smyth and Campbell, 2005, p. 5). Similarly, gangs in Manenberg have come to define everyday life through their violent control over territory and people. Some two-thirds of children interviewed in a school in Manenberg reported that they had seen someone be shot; this proportion rose to 79 per cent among 18-year-old men (Legget, 2005, p. 18). In Davao City, youths also witness high levels of violence, both on the street and at home. For example, about 90 per cent of Davao gang members report having experienced domestic abuse (Bonifacio et al., 2004).

In all three cities, violence receives additional community support as it is often oriented around defence of the family and ultimately the neighbourhood. Youths are thus linked to their communities, which can help them gain respect (BIP, 1998; Conway and Byrne, 2005, p. 14). In all three cases, young men receive social recognition for acting violently, whether from their peers or communities at large. Different levels of access to small arms yield different levels of armed violence in each community. Yet where weapons exist, they tend to confer status and respect on their (young) holders. Joining an armed group becomes part of the transition from subordinate child to dominant man.

Status, wealth, and women

Young men who use violence, and particularly armed violence, often seem to do so to gain status indirectly, namely by acquiring the kinds of material and social goods they are often denied because of poverty, exclusion, or a lack of respect from their communities.

Researchers have extensively documented the use of small arms by young men as a means of accruing wealth, such as in the illicit drugs trade (Cook et al., 2005; Dowdney, 2005; Wolf Harlow, 2001). Perceived benefits of being armed need not be linked to the use of firearms, but rather to their public display, which can produce a sense of respect, status, or the ability to inspire fear in others.

As one non-gang-affiliated young man in Chicago noted:

> When I bought [my .357], no, I didn't see if it was good [working]. Look man, I can get one of those guns that fires, but shit, sometimes you just need to show it, you know, and you get the respect you looking for. And, this thing was big man, I didn't give a shit if it fired or not, I could have killed somebody with it just hitting them over the head! (Cook et al., 2005, pp. 7–8)

One respondent to a survey in August Town, Jamaica, described how he had used a variety of weapons for reasons of status and, in particular, to attract women (COAV, 2005; Dowdney, 2005, p. 117). In a Rio de Janeiro *favela,* a young man observed, 'You see lots of hard workers without a woman, but you never see a gangster without a woman' (Barker, 2005a, p. 32). Also in Rio, a female youth made a similar comment: 'Sometimes guys will even borrow guns, just to walk around with them, to show off for the girls . . . . They use them because they know that pretty girls will go out with them.'[12]

Research in New York City neighbourhoods suggests similar connections between small arms and status. Possessing a gun is perceived as an important means of impressing peers, along with having a car or a girlfriend. The study concluded:

> For a generation of adolescents, gun violence has had instrumental value that was integrated into the social discourse of everyday life among urban youth. Guns were, and remain[,] salient symbols of power and status and strategic means of gaining status, domination, or material goods. (Wilkinson, 2003, p. 252)

'. . . notions of "manhood" are tied to gaining respect, women and guns.'

A study of armed groups in nine countries similarly found that, in many of the communities studied, 'notions of "manhood" are tied to gaining respect, women and guns; all of which are made available to adolescent boys when joining an armed group' (Dowdney, 2005, p. 117). Further research, including biographical research, would shed light on why young men become attracted to small arms and ultimately choose to use them. Key questions include how, exactly, small arms confer status. Does their principal value lie in their symbolic role (e.g. their association with a successful gangster or other authority figure) or in their direct use to acquire wealth and status through crime or confrontation? What effect does one type of use have on the other?

A means of defence and resistance

For some low-income men, violence is a way of maintaining status in their peer groups, but it is also a way of protecting themselves from violence.[13] Researchers writing about young men in the United States have concluded that violence, including gun-related violence, can be a form of self-protection—both physical and psychological. As one young Chicago gang member noted:

> Who [is] going to fear me? Who [is] going to take me seriously? Nobody. I'm a pussy unless I got my gun. (Cook et al., 2005, p. 7)

Studies on gangs in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, and the Philippines suggest protection, whether ultimately successful or not, is a prime reason why young men carry small arms (Dowdney, 2005, pp. 188, 204, 223, 242, 283).

Elsewhere in the world, small arms appear to serve similar functions. In the case of politically motivated armed groups, such as in the Delta region of Nigeria, small arms are often considered tools of resistance to oppression. Joining the group enables young men to acquire weapons with which to confront their enemies (Ukeje, 2001, p. 363). As often happens, however, once young men are armed and encouraged to use weapons, political motives may give way to potentially lethal hooliganism and harassment (ARMED GROUPS).

Several studies have pointed to the important defensive function that small arms have for some young men. There has been little consideration, however, of the relationship between this and other reasons for carrying weapons, including those outlined above. An especially important goal of future research would be to determine why the carrying of weapons may translate into actual use for crime or confrontation. In particular, this research needs to examine claims that the mere carrying of small arms can have an escalatory or 'arms-racing' effect (Cook and Ludwig, 2003; Cook et al., 2005, p. 7; Dowdney, 2005, p. 303).

The symbolic role of small arms

Young men who are denied regular paths for social and economic advancement appear especially susceptible to the symbolic—as opposed to the merely functional—appeal of guns.

Small arms pervade the types of media that are expressly marketed to young men.

One of the most noticeable aspects about small arms is that they pervade the types of media that are expressly marketed to young men. The link between these media and real-world violence is a contested one, but a growing body of evidence suggests it may well be real. As one survey of research into the influence of violence in popular culture on youth notes:

> Research on violent television and films, video games, and music reveals unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviour in both immediate and long-term contexts. (Anderson et al., 2003, p. 81)

Across the board, young men are the prime consumers of violent movies (Fischoff, 1999), in which the gun is often the chosen instrument of violence. They are also the main consumers of music that features small arms violence and video games that involve the contestant in violent, armed scenarios.[14]

A number of psychological studies demonstrate that aggressive thought is activated or 'primed' in people when they are exposed to images (or concepts) of weapons, including small arms.[15] In turn, these people may be more prone to consider aggressive behaviour in certain situations.[16]

The degree to which aggressive responses are stimulated, however, differs among individuals. For instance, in one study of the 'weapons priming effect' in hunters (individuals with prior gun experience) and non-hunters (individuals with no direct gun experience), hunting guns were found to be more likely to trigger aggressive thoughts among non-hunters. By contrast, hunters were more likely to experience aggressive thoughts when exposed to pictures of assault rifles rather than hunting guns (Bartholow et al., 2005).

The results indicate that hunters associate hunting guns with non-aggressive activities (at least in relation to other people) and assault rifles with shooting at humans, while people unused to guns tend to associate all guns with aggression. The authors conclude that 'an object serves as a cue to aggression insofar as it is closely linked with aggression-related concepts in memory, regardless of how those links were established' (Bartholow et al., 2005, p. 57). This research therefore suggests that small arms can bring out aggressive thoughts depending on an individual's prior experience of guns.

A 15-year longitudinal study of children's exposure to television violence and violent behaviour in young adulthood concluded that children were receptive to violent images only to the extent that they could identify with the perpetrator, relate his or her circumstances to their own, and see rewards from violence (Huesmann et al., 2003, p. 218).

Firearms may also appeal to some young men for reasons other than social or material gain. One commentator has asserted that young men who grow up without fathers often seek violent, substitute role models.

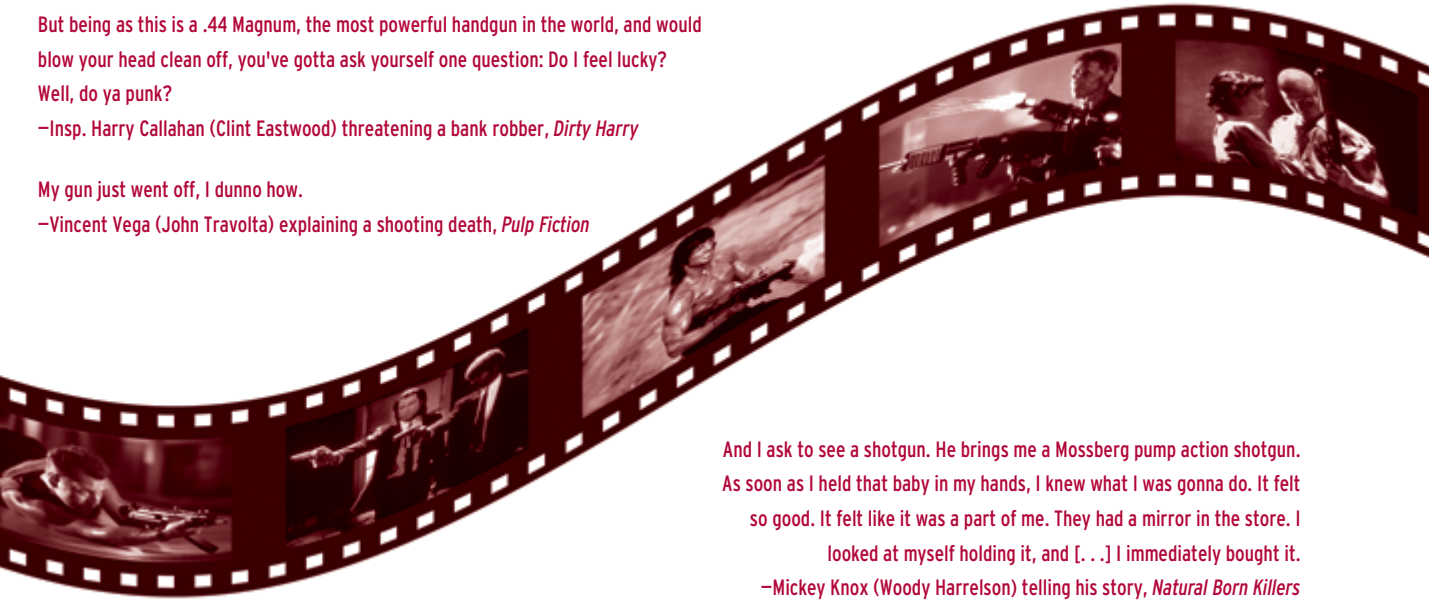
> Strong, powerful, high-status role models such as those offered in movies and on television fill the vacuum in their lives. We have taken away their fathers and replaced them with new role models whose successful response to every situation is violence. (Grossman, 1996, p. 322).

Anderson et al. (2003) admit that there are some inconsistencies in research to date. Nevertheless, they conclude that most studies point strongly to interactions between, on the one hand, the characteristics of the viewer, such as a tendency to identify with aggressive characters, and, on the other, content—in particular, whether violence is portrayed positively or negatively.

The debate over the influence of popular culture on the use of violence still rages. The idea that weapons, and small arms in particular, activate or stimulate aggression is also contested (Kopel, Gallant, and Eisen, 2002). Nevertheless, a growing body of evidence shows that guns are sometimes perceived as symbols of armed violence. As a result, a focus on violence in popular culture is now a prominent feature in proposals to prevent armed violence,

But being as this is a .44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world, and would blow your head clean off, you've gotta ask yourself one question: Do I feel lucky? Well, do ya punk?
—Insp. Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) threatening a bank robber, *Dirty Harry*

My gun just went off, I dunno how.
—Vincent Vega (John Travolta) explaining a shooting death, *Pulp Fiction*



And I ask to see a shotgun. He brings me a Mossberg pump action shotgun. As soon as I held that baby in my hands, I knew what I was gonna do. It felt so good. It felt like it was a part of me. They had a mirror in the store. I looked at myself holding it, and [. . .] I immediately bought it.
—Mickey Knox (Woody Harrelson) telling his story, *Natural Born Killers*

such as the Armed Violence Prevention Programme of the UN Development Programme and WHO (UNDP and WHO, 2003, p. 14).

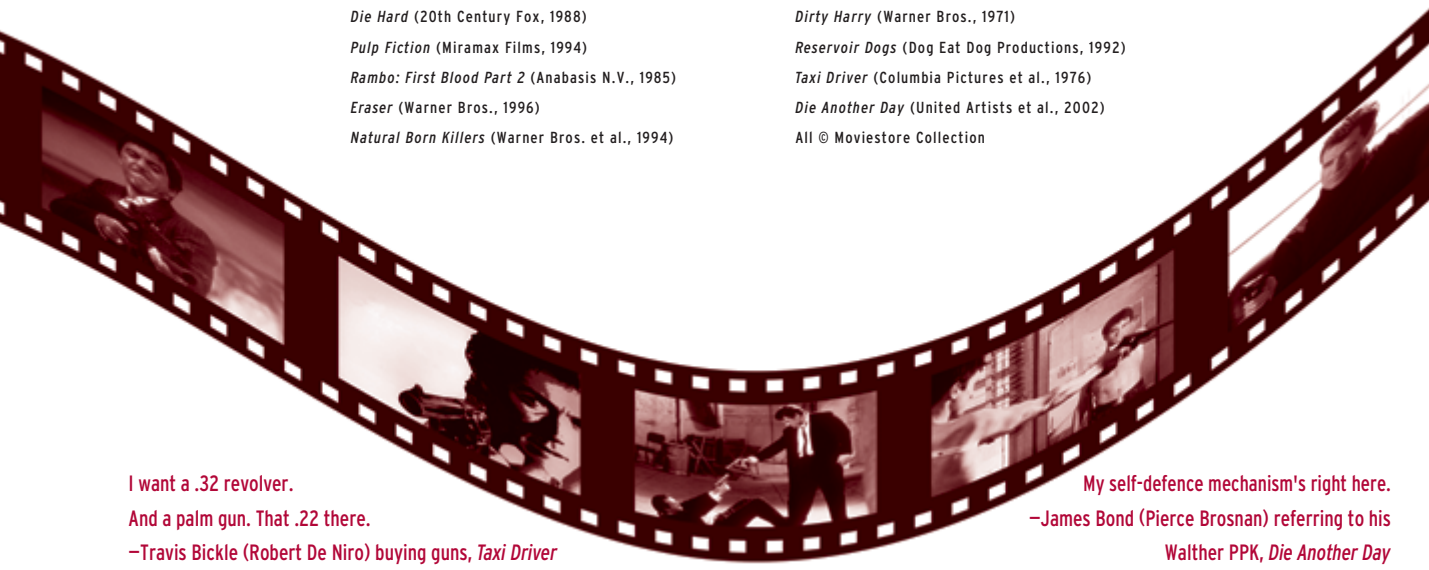
Visual culture frequently associates firearms with other popular symbols of male 'success', including fast cars, women, designer clothing, and jewellery. Young men involved in armed violence offer the same objects as proof of the better life that small arms make possible (Wilkinson, 2003, pp. 103, 252). High-risk groups of young men appear to relate closely to such images, as they justify, even glorify, their own use of small arms. The young men who are most prone to engage in armed violence, namely those who perceive success as unattainable through non-violent means, may be the very ones who tend to be responsive to popular representations—and particularly glorification—of gun violence.

Concomitant with widespread gun imagery is colloquial speech with well-developed firearm-related vocabulary. Wilkinson's glossary of slang terms used by New York minority youths lists ten different words for 'gun', while seven refer to the act of shooting. Only the words used for 'money' are more numerous (Wilkinson, 2003, pp. 283–86; see Box 12.3).

Over time, the gun imagery, style, and jargon that was formerly the purview of gang culture has permeated general popular culture. In Europe and the United States, for instance, the diffusion of gang culture into larger youth culture has led to the adoption of many of the symbols of gang life, including small arms (Klein et al., 2001, p. 3).

It appears that small arms are important to many young men, but the specifics of this relationship are not well understood. In examining the functional and symbolic aspects of small arms, the chapter has largely relied on research dealing with young male violence in general. Guns, though part of this broad canvas, are not usually the focus of analysis. There are exceptions, but these studies—where guns are brought squarely into the foreground—tend to concentrate on the United States (Wilkinson, 2003; Wilkinson and Fagan, 2001). In order to better understand why and under what circumstances young men around the world see weapons as functional and symbolic tools to achieve their goals, future research must be conducted across national, regional, and socio-economic boundaries.

Stills (left to right)
Die Hard (20th Century Fox, 1988)
Pulp Fiction (Miramax Films, 1994)
Rambo: First Blood Part 2 (Anabasis N.V., 1985)
Eraser (Warner Bros., 1996)
Natural Born Killers (Warner Bros. et al., 1994)
Scarface (Universal Pictures, 1983)
Dirty Harry (Warner Bros., 1971)
Reservoir Dogs (Dog Eat Dog Productions, 1992)
Taxi Driver (Columbia Pictures et al., 1976)
Die Another Day (United Artists et al., 2002)
All © Moviestore Collection



I want a .32 revolver.
And a palm gun. That .22 there.
—Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) buying guns, *Taxi Driver*

My self-defence mechanism's right here.
—James Bond (Pierce Brosnan) referring to his Walther PPK, *Die Another Day*

Box 12.3 Gun words in US hip-hop slang and street culture

22	Grip
38	Heat, Heater
380	Jammy
4 pound (.45 pistol)	Joint
40	Mossberg
9/9 mm	Oowop
AK/AK-47	Paddle
Biscuit	Pump
Blix	Shotty
Burner	Steel
Chrome	Strap
Cronze	Tec 9
Deuce, Duce Duce (.22 pistol)	Thompson
Gat, Gatt, Ghat	Toast/Toaster
Gauge	Toolie
Glock	Uzi

Note: The ten terms for guns listed by Wilkinson (2003, pp. 283–86) are marked in red. Wilkinson also lists blasted, barking, busting, bucking, spraying, wetting and letting off, as common terms used to describe shots and shooting. Other terms come from the *rapdict* online dictionary. The dictionary notes, 'Slang for gun and penis is almost always interchangeable.'

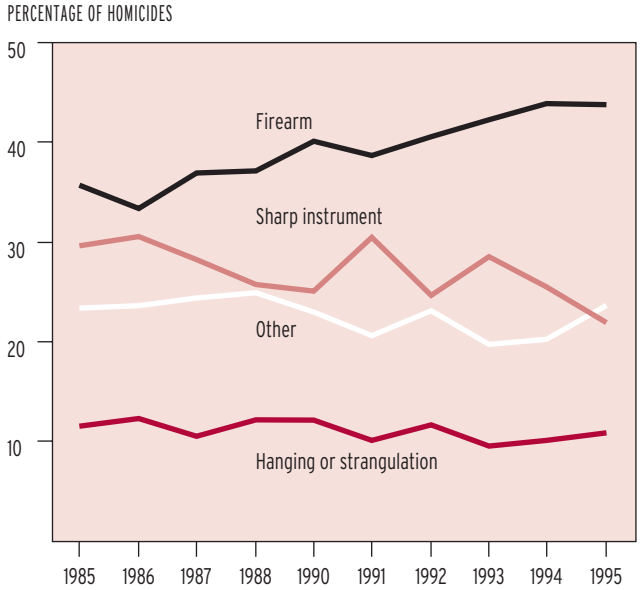
Sources: Rap Dictionary; Urban Dictionary; Wilkinson (2003, pp. 283–86)

YOUNG MEN AND SMALL ARMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTIONS

The following sections assess some of the programmes that have been launched worldwide to address the problem of armed violence perpetrated by young men. By and large, there are two types of programmes: those aiming at arms reduction and those seeking to change social, community, and ultimately individual attitudes towards armed violence. To date, the arms reduction approach has been dominant; however, results from both programme types indicate that small arms are central to the lives of some young men. Most violence reduction programmes have focused on guns as either a functional or a symbolic tool, with arms reduction initiatives more concerned with function and behavioural programmes paying more attention to symbolic aspects.

While the factors that lead to violence are numerous, complex, and difficult to influence in the short term, small arms may represent a potential choke point in violence prevention efforts, given their role in facilitating young men's recourse to violence. This has been the rationale behind a number of apparently successful initiatives that have tried to curb the availability of small arms to youth at risk. Perhaps most important for longer-term violence prevention, it is evident that some young men are resistant to involvement in criminal or violent behaviour, despite circumstances that would appear to push them in that direction.

Figure 12.4 **Trends in method of attack in homicides among youths aged 10–24, 1985–94**



Source: WHO (2002, p. 27), based on WHO data for 46 countries

Restricting young men's access to firearms[17]

Given what appears to be the powerful functional and symbolic appeal of small arms, measures that seek to restrain young men's exposure and access to guns should be an important component of violence prevention initiatives. In most Western countries, however, little public policy, research, or action was devoted to the issue of gun use among children and youth, nor to its prevention, until the 1980s. With the exception of the United States, there was relatively little gun violence in criminal activity in these countries. To a large extent, the focus was on adults, and on the restriction of gun ownership.

This situation changed, especially in the United States, from 1985 to 1998, when an epidemic of gun violence committed by young men focused attention on an urgent need to develop prevention policies and programmes (Fagan, 2002, p. 134). At the peak of this epidemic, in 1994, nearly 6,000 young men under the age of 20 were killed by firearms in the United States, and many more were injured. Firearm homicide was largely responsible for the overall increase in youth homicide over the period, and there was often a high degree of overlap between victims and offenders (Braga, 2004, p. 7). While levels of gun use by young men have historically been far lower in other developed countries, from 2000 onwards there have similarly been reported increases in gun carrying and use by young men in a number of these countries (see Figure 12.4), including England and Wales (HMIC, 2004, pp. 32–33; Bullock and Tilley, 2002, pp. 33-34) and Canada—most notably the City of Toronto (Reuters, 2005).[18]

Given this situation, the great majority of youth gun violence prevention experience is US-based. It is also closely intertwined with strategies and programmes that aim to reduce or prevent general youth violence, gangs, and drug abuse. In the case of the United States, successful initiatives involved more than mere regulation; they attempted to identify and control the supply of guns used in crime by adopting a community-based, problem-solving approach.

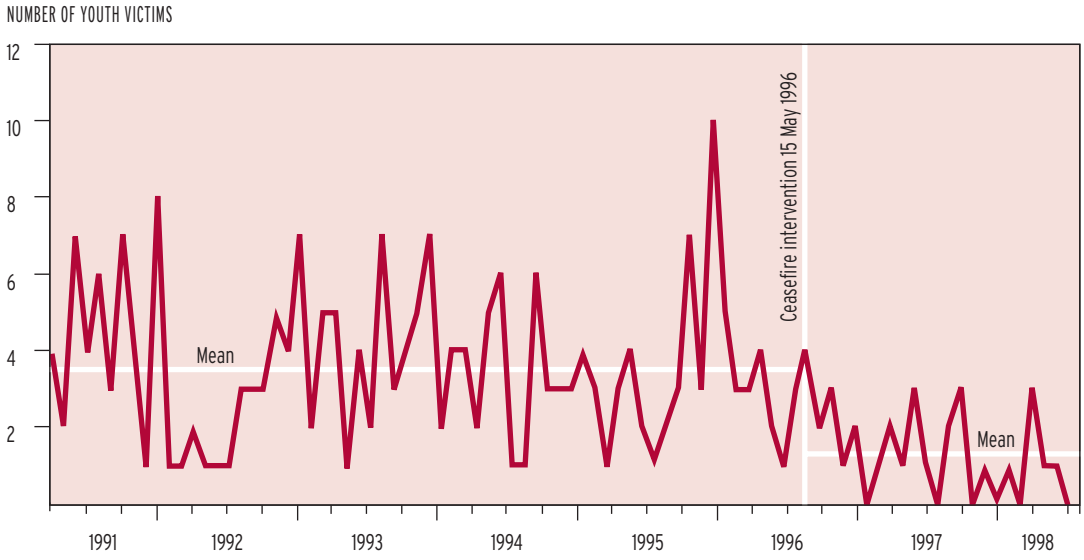
One example is the 'Consent-to-Search' programme, implemented in St. Louis from 1994 to 1996. The programme's innovative approach emerged from consultations between police and residents of a crime-prone community (Decker and Rosenfeld, 2004, p. 1). It involved police officers knocking on doors in high-crime areas and asking parents for permission to search their homes for guns that their children might have hidden. Parents who opened their doors received a form, which clearly stipulated that any illegal guns found in their home would be confiscated without prosecution (Decker and Rosenfeld, 2004, pp. 9–10). Communities worked with the police to identify houses that should be offered a search. Parents and youths who requested help were referred to agencies or community-based groups that made appropriate services available.

The initiative, as originally implemented, was extremely successful, with 98 per cent of approached households consenting to the search. Within 18 months, 510 guns were recovered from half of these houses, at a rate of three guns per house (Decker and Rosenfeld, 2004, p. 12). By contrast, following the departure of the programme's founding police chief, a shift towards traditional coercive crime control measures and search warrants yielded much more limited results—netting only 31 firearms in nine months. In a third phase, the police switched back to a consent-to-search programme but this time relied primarily on its own intelligence to select the houses they would approach. Only 42 per cent of households agreed to a search, however, thereby demonstrating the necessity to work with communities to better identify problems and their solutions.

Carefully planned deterrence and punitive strategies that target illegal gun carrying among youth have also generated promising results. The Kansas City 'Gun Experiment', designed jointly by local police and academics, aimed specifically at increasing gun seizures through increased field interrogations in crime hot spots. While crime levels remained steady in areas around the intervention zone, within the zone such additional patrols augmented gun seizures by 65 per cent and reduced gun crime by half in the space of six months (Sherman and Rogan, 1995, pp. 677, 683–84, 691).

Another example is the Boston 'Gun Project' (Kennedy et al., 2001). The project's local working group, facilitated by a small team of Harvard researchers, established that a relatively small number of young gang members was responsible for and suffered most from violence in the city. The youths represented less than one per cent of Boston's population and could be easily identified. Through discussion forums and posters, the project issued strong warnings to gangs that violence would not be tolerated. The threat of prosecuting gang members under federal law—excluding any possibility of parole—if they did not respect initial calls for a 'ceasefire' made these warnings particularly credible. Yet members who wanted to renounce violence were given access to various support programmes made available by the community and government members of the working group.

Figure 12.5 **Monthly youth (under 24) homicide toll in Boston before and after the 'ceasefire' intervention***



* Horizontal axis spans the period from January 1991 to May 1998.

Source: Kennedy et al. (2001, p. 58)

The Boston Gun Project resulted in significant reductions in youth homicide rates (see Figure 12.5). The initiative differed from traditional punitive strategies in that it targeted only gangs engaged in violence, establishing clear rules of behaviour for staying out of trouble (Kennedy, 1997, p. 463). Gun violence—and not gangs, people, or neighbourhoods—was the problem that needed to be resolved. The project's accomplishments suggest that successful youth gun crime reduction not only focuses on removing guns, but is also accompanied by credible carrots and sticks and the provision of non-violent alternatives. An attempt to replicate the Boston Gun Project in Los Angeles proved unsustainable, however. The lack of local ownership and accountability for the project, as well as insufficient funds for social services to balance law enforcement efforts, limited the project's performance and sustainability in this new setting (Tita et al., 2003).

The success of some of the strategies listed above highlights the importance of establishing a working partnership between local authorities, community workers, and academics to accurately define the problem to be treated and identify solutions that are appropriate for the local context. Primarily, however, strategies that target youth at risk involve criminal justice organizations and 'typically require a concerted concentration of police manpower and resources over an extended period of time' (Lab, forthcoming, p. 39). Implementation may thus be difficult where resources are scarce. Furthermore, measures are not designed to target the deep social and economic conditions that result in poverty and exclusion, nor can they necessarily help promote long-term prevention.

Strengthening protective factors

Long-term prevention of youth gun violence requires comprehensive initiatives that address both risk and protective factors (Lizotte and Sheppard, 2001, p. 1). Nevertheless, many youth violence prevention interventions focus heavily on high-risk youth or their families and pay less attention to the social and economic conditions that help generate youth violence, gangs, and gun use. Reducing violence requires a willingness to invest in young people and their communities (UN-HABITAT, 2004a, pp. 27–29; 2004b).

Reducing violence requires a willingness to invest in young people and their communities.

This perspective rests on the observation that some youths choose not to become involved in crime and violence. While young men are the primary actors in armed violence, many more young men who face the same risk factors are reluctant to participate in delinquency or violence.

Indeed, a number of studies illustrate how young men possess 'protective' factors that serve to reduce the risks of becoming involved in crime and violence. Research on young men who live in Brazilian and US communities where gang violence is prevalent has identified factors that reduce the probability of a young man's involvement in gangs. These factors include: (1) having a valued, stable relationship or multiple relationships with people (a parent, a grandparent, a female partner) whom they would disappoint by becoming involved with gangs; (2) having access to alternative identities or some other sense of self that was positively valued by the young man and by those in his social setting, particularly the male peer group (for example, being a good student, being a good athlete, having musical skills, having a good job); (3) being aware of the risks associated with the violent version of masculinity promoted by gang members; and (4) finding an alternative male peer group that provides positive reinforcement for non-gang-involved male identities (Barker, 2005a, pp. 146–57; Barker and Ricardo, 2005, pp. 53–54).

Preliminary analysis on what leads youths from Rio's *favelas* to join, or refrain from joining, armed gangs also points strongly to certain protective factors (Dowdney, 2005, p. 93). While all children interviewed in the research were exposed to the same risk factors—namely poverty, few economic options, social marginalization, exposure to

violence, family problems, and a lack of non-violent recreational activities—it was their ability to respond to those risks, as conditioned by their personal environments, that kept them out of violence. Typical responses included staying in school, taking part-time work to continue studies, belonging to a sports team, receiving support from their grandparents, and learning to play an instrument. Reduced personal exposure to violence, which lessened young men's perceived need to seek revenge or protection, was another crucial protective factor.

The existence of such protective factors provides important opportunities for the design of community-based development projects that are extremely relevant to violence prevention (WHO, 2002, pp. 43–45; USDHHS, 2001, p. 57). Such projects will seek to provide youth with stable home environments, better economic options, and alternative sources of respect within their community. They will also act to negate perceptions among young men that guns and violence are associated with manliness and social status.

In recent years, campaigners for violence reduction have sought to uproot the identification of gun violence with popular conceptions of 'manliness'—thus targeting the symbolic appeal of small arms. A review of such campaigns reveals that there are two main strategies (see Box 12.4). The first involves working with young men to bolster their

Bad boy mystique? A young gang member embraces his girlfriend while holding a 9 mm pistol, Brooklyn, New York, December 2003. © Boogie/WPN

Box 12.4 Relabelling guns: a review of campaigning strategies in Rio de Janeiro

Research on (mostly male) youth gun violence in Rio confirms that demand for guns is related to the desire for income, status, and women.[19] A certain 'bad boy mystique' or romanticism of gun-wielding males is assimilated and propagated by young women in the context of gun violence in Rio de Janeiro. This phenomenon is especially evident in *favela* communities, or urban shantytowns, where opportunities are few and where heavily armed drug traffickers organized into factions or *commandos* vie for territorial control to conduct their illegal trade.

In these contexts, one of the few opportunities to 'be someone' is to become a drug trafficker—or to 'go out' with one. This is evident in the slang. For example, women who are attracted by gun-toting men are called *Maria AK47s* (an adaptation of *Maria Gasolina,* which is used for women attracted to men with nice cars). For some young people in these settings, the status and attractiveness of young men involved in the drug trade increases with their rank or position within the drug gang hierarchy. Likewise, the female partners of the higher-ranking drug bosses are called *Primeira Dama* or First Lady.

The Rio-based NGO ProMundo's 'Programme H' aims to transform violent constructions of masculinity that directly influence the behaviour and attitudes of young men with respect to gender equality, health, and violence. One component of Programme H involves discussion groups that use teaching materials to promote discussion and reflection on the 'costs' associated with traditional masculinity and the advantages of more equitable gender behaviour. Programme H also uses social marketing campaigns to promote changes in community norms related to notions of what it means to be a man. These show, for example, men actively involved in childcare and child rearing, and in supporting and caring for their partners. Their approach is innovative in that it places great emphasis on 'voices of resistance' (those who successfully resist traditional constructions of violent masculinity) and seeks to promote alternatives to violent or dangerous behaviour.

MV Bill, a renowned rapper from Rio's City of God *favela*—made infamous in the eponymous film—helped launch the Programme H campaign. MV Bill cuts a 'manly', 'cool' figure and enjoys considerable 'street cred' as a rapper. After his brother, a trafficker, was killed in a gun battle with rival drugs factions, however, he dedicated himself and his music to speaking out against violence. One of his most famous, and polemical, tracks was entitled *Soldado do Morro* (Favela Soldier), which he followed with *Soldado Morto* (Dead Soldier) on his next album. The lyrics of *Soldado do Morro* push young men and women to rethink traditional concepts of masculinities and violence:

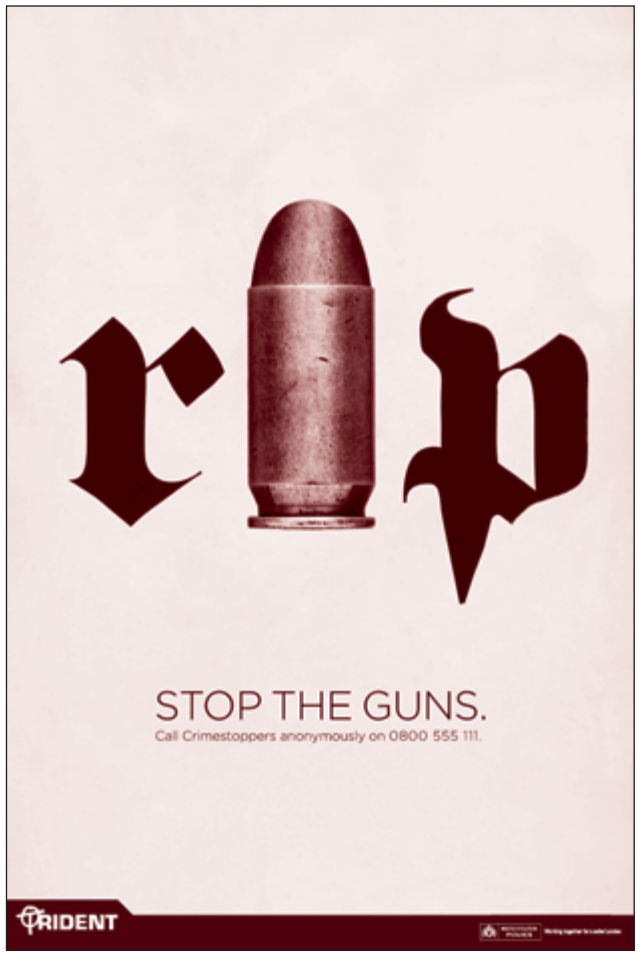
Another baby left crying, another crazy guy goes down
That's it, war with no end
Too late for me to have regrets now
With no friends / With no family
Men don't cry—what a lie.

Drugs, guns in the sights of a young black man
With no respect, no money, no Nike
No life, no faith, no name
I was prepared to kill, but I wasn't prepared to die
It's been a long time since I've seen my mother cry.[20]

A 2001 campaign called 'Choose Gun Free! Its Your Weapon or Me', organized by the NGO Viva Rio attempted to target young women's attraction to men with guns. Focus groups conducted at the outset of the campaign told organizers that simply telling people that men with guns are more likely to die (something most of them already knew) would not achieve results. Instead the campaign decided to take a lighter, more humorous approach, using well-known and respected female television and music celebrities to transmit somewhat novel campaign messages. On nationally aired TV spots, a famous comedian said, 'Guys who use guns must have a little problem. . .', using a gesture to insinuate that they may be overcompensating for a small penis. Another campaign slogan was a play on words, 'A good man is one who does not expire before his time', mixing the ideas of premature ejaculation with dying young.

The campaign represented the first attempt to mobilize women around disarmament in Brazil. The funny, youth-specific messages were complemented by mobilizations by groups of mothers who had lost their sons to gun violence. The campaign was considered quite successful in galvanizing women's support for efforts to reduce gun violence, equipping them with supporting arguments and evidence. Nevertheless, campaigners saw a need to follow up these public awareness efforts with programmes designed to increase women's self-esteem, provide spaces for reflection, and generate opportunities for work and other meaningful forms of participation in society. This was particularly important in *favela* communities where opportunities for women outside of associations with drug traffickers are scarce. Research is currently being undertaken in Rio to address this gap.[21]

Source: Galeria (2005)



A poster aimed at changing Londoners' perception of armed violence.
© Trident

resistance to becoming engaged in gun violence by providing space for groups to discuss and participate in alternative, non-violent kinds of masculine behaviour. The second strategy aims to convince young women that violent men (and men who carry or use guns) are not attractive, and to spread that message, for young women and men alike to assimilate.

In some cases, prominent personalities have been engaged to raise awareness and serve as role models—i.e. men who are seen as successful, admirable, and attractive to women, but who repudiate gun violence. These figures are chosen in a deliberate strategy to combat the 'big men' symbolism of firearms. In Chicago, for example, the Project for Violence Prevention's mentoring programmes have specifically targeted individuals at risk by using neighbourhood role models. Workers in such 'outreach' initiatives may seek to involve young men in sport, or help them with education as alternatives to gang life. Crucially, these initiatives employ workers who are 'from the street'—role models who already enjoy credibility and respect among the young (Diehl, 2005, pp. 9–11).

Nonetheless, it is important to stress that initiatives that are designed to encourage young men's resistance to becoming involved in armed violence are still very much in their infancy. Measuring their impact on youth violence levels will require patience and a reliance on an evidence-based model of violence prevention, at both the problem identification and programme evaluation stages. It can be said, however, that in recent years international agencies involved in traditional small arms control measures have increasingly supported such approaches.[22]

CONCLUSION

A large body of research links young male violence and small arms, though it has not focused specifically on the weapons themselves. By distilling the small arms-specific findings of this research, the chapter has drawn some initial conclusions about the role of small arms in young male violence.

The fact that the majority of young men do not become involved in armed violence suggests that the problem is probably social in nature, rather than biological or demographic. Violence and attitudes towards small arms violence are, in other words, learned. Young men take their lessons from the world around them. If unable to fulfil socially defined masculine roles, they may adopt violent alternatives as a means of asserting their place in society.

Functionally or symbolically, small arms resonate with young men who are tempted by violence. They are powerful tools with which young men can assert their masculinity, whether by acquiring the objects and status they are conditioned to seek, or by overturning the societies from which they are excluded. In many parts of the world, small arms hold out the power to change one's lot in life.

Measures to curtail armed violence need to recognize the serious threat some young men pose to society—and to each other. Measures that target at-risk youth—both victims and perpetrators—can successfully decrease violence levels in the short run through a careful mix of carrots and sticks. Targeting illicit gun ownership among young men is often an important component of such strategies as it tends to reduce young men's access to small arms and consequently prevents their misuse. Initiatives that tackle the many reasons that lead young men to become involved in armed violence need, in particular, to counter perceived associations between firearms and social status, ensuring that guns are no longer seen as a viable means of affirming one's masculinity.

In the long run, violence prevention efforts must focus on the various protective factors that seem to prevent the majority of young men from becoming involved in armed violence. Stable home environments, decent economic options, and alternative sources of respect within the community make young men—even those living in high-risk areas—more resistant to becoming involved in armed groups and armed violence. The 'angry young man' of popular lore is not an inevitable feature of modern life.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GNP	gross national product	WHO	World Health Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme		

ENDNOTES

1 See discussion below and endnote 3.

2 Ellis and Shaw, 2000 (pp. 107–10), as quoted in UNODC (2005, p. 6).

3 Statistics Canada (2000; 2001, as quoted in Shaw, 2001, p. 1).

4 Minors are classified as being under 18 years of age.

5 Based on the estimate of 140,000–200,000 annual firearm homicide victims worldwide (Small Arms Survey, 2004, p. 200). This figure does not include deaths in armed conflict situations. In this sample, men aged 30–44 are the second largest demographic group most affected by armed violence (12.6 gun homicides per 100,000). Women of all ages, in contrast, represent less than nine per cent of victims.

6 Tolan and Gorman-Smith (1998, cited in Shaw, 2001, p. 2).

7 Men aged 15–29 are more at risk of dying of firearm homicide than the average population, however. In the vast majority of these countries or territories (24 out of 33), the demographic group most at risk was men aged 30–44 (Belize, Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, French Guiana, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Peru, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Singapore, Spain, and Thailand). In nine other settings, groups most at risk included men aged 45–59 (Austria, Guadeloupe, Malta, Republic of Korea, Réunion, and Saint Lucia), men over 60 (Costa Rica and Iceland), and women aged 15–29 (Luxembourg). The 37 countries where men aged 15–29 were the group most at risk were Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Brazil, Canada,

Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Ireland, Israel, Kuwait, Martinique, Mauritius, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Small Arms Survey calculations based on WHO (2005) and UN Population Division (2002).

8 Huff (1998, quoted in Wilkinson, 2003, p. 19).

9 The abortion argument is not purely demographic as it includes a social dimension. Levitt argues that the legalization of abortion has led to a reduction in the number of unwanted births. Such unwanted children are at greater risk of engaging in criminal activity (Levitt, 2004, p. 182).

10 This section is based on Barker (2005b).

11 The countries included in the study were: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, and the United States.

12 Interviews with young women aged 14–21, Complexo de Maré, Rio de Janeiro, January 2004. Conducted by Jessica Galeria, Viva Rio.

13 See Majors and Billson (1993), Anderson (1990), Archer (1994), and Schwartz (1987).

14 Buchman and Funk (1996, cited in Anderson and Bushman, 2001, p. 354).

15 Berkowitz and LePage (1967, cited in Anderson et al., 1998, p. 1).

16 Bartholow et al. (2005, p. 49) describe this process in the following terms: 'When a weapon concept is activated (e.g., through the identification of a gun in the environment), closely linked concepts (e.g., ideas related to aggression and hostility) also become activated via spreading activation . . . and are thus more accessible than they would be otherwise. Once these aggressive concepts become accessible, they can facilitate subsequent aggressive behavior in several ways. For example, highly accessible aggressive thoughts may color interpretations of ongoing social interactions, or they may make aggressive resolutions of a dispute seem more appropriate.'

17 This section is based on Shaw (2005). Most 'youth violence prevention initiatives' implicitly target young men as the group that is most at risk.

18 In both cases, this is largely restricted to one or two major cities, and levels of homicide are far lower overall than in the United States. In England and Wales less than half of one per cent of all reported crime is gun-related, and there were 68 such homicides in 2003–04. In Toronto, there were 64 gun-related homicides in 2004, compared with 450 in Chicago, a US city of a comparable size.

19 See, for example, Dowdney (2003); Barker (2005a); Lessing (2005).

20 Translation by Jessica Galeria. Lyrics and more about MV Bill on http://www.realhiphop.com.br/mvbill/

21 Research-action project by Viva Rio (Brazil) and the University of Coimbra (Portugal), *Women and girls in contexts of armed violence: a case study on Rio de Janeiro,* results forthcoming in 2006.

22 See, for example, UNDP and WHO's armed violence reduction programme (UNDP and WHO, 2003).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Principal authors

James Bevan and Nicolas Florquin

Contributors

Gary Barker, Jessica Galeria, Glenn McDonald, and Margaret Shaw