

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Gangs and gun crime: myth and reality**

Gun crime is an increasingly alarming issue in the UK today with as many as 28 gun crimes committed every day. It is widely believed that gangs are at the root of the problem but a recent study by a Research Professor at London Metropolitan University suggests that the reality is far more complex.

The study was written by Professor Simon Hallsworth, Research Professor at London Met's Department of Applied Social Sciences and Dr Daniel Silverstone, Principal Lecturer at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies. It will be published in the August edition of *Criminology and Criminal Justice*.

In their paper, '*That's Life Innit: A British perspective on Guns, Crime and Social Order*' the researchers independently concluded that the importance of gangs is vastly exaggerated and suggest that whilst gangs certainly exist, they are not involved in most illegal shootings.

The researchers travelled to several UK cities with high levels of gun crime, visiting penal establishments, youth offending teams and the streets themselves. One of their most striking findings was the level of violence that gun users had experienced. Of the 80 interviewees, 40 had previously been threatened with guns, 29 shot at and eight had been shot.

The study also found that gun users could be split into two distinct groups. Some were experienced professional criminals who used weapons as a strategic tool to protect their 'business interests'. Other users were younger, vulnerable and disorganised and their use of guns was far less rational or predictable. Three-quarters of the interviewees came from a disrupted family background and only 15 had had any education or training beyond the age of 16.

'It's parochial social order populated by immature young men, with many striving to earn a living in the least lucrative but most violent part of the criminal economy,' explained Professor Hallsworth. 'In this claustrophobic environment, firearms represent both power and the ability to inflict lethal violence for young people who are not necessarily physically strong.'

Hallsworth believes that gearing the response to gun crime around gangs will only succeed in stigmatising this vulnerable section of society: 'We now have a veritable industry of public sector initiatives to combat gangs. In reality, however, these are chaotic and meaningless acts of violence from people on the margins of our own society, which is far more worrying. As long as the system is geared to tackle imaginary gangs rather than the real issues, guns will remain on our streets.'

*Criminology and Criminal Justice* Volume 9 Number 3 August 2009 is published 29th July 2009

**-Ends-**

---

For further information please contact:

Simon Hallsworth  
Director  
Centre for Social and Evaluation Research  
London Metropolitan University

Phone: 07828 985 521

Email: [s.hallsworth@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:s.hallsworth@londonmet.ac.uk)