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Street crime in London: Deterrence, Disruption and Displacement

Kathryn Curran, Michael Dale, Mark Edmunds,
Mike Hough, Andrew Millie and Melissa Wagstaff

A report prepared for the Crime and Drugs Division,
Government Office for London

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This research study was undertaken jointly by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research, Kings College London and the Government Office for London.¹

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² Individual's name and positions were correct when the report was completed.

Foreword

In early 2002 the Government implemented the Street Crime Initiative (SCI) in response to a rapid rise in street crime and growing public and media concern. The report examines the nature of street crime in the capital during 2001/02 and the early stages of the government initiative designed to tackle it.

The study takes an innovative approach combining offence statistics, information gathered from interviews with offenders and those involved in the Street Crime Initiative (SCI) and crime mapping techniques to assess the impact of the SCI. It pays particular attention to how these offences can displace into other forms of crime or shift across time or place. It was precisely these issues which led the Government Office for London ultimately to commission this study in order to understand the nature of street crime across the London region.

The report suggests that the rise in street crime in London in the late 1990s and early 2000s was largely driven by youth-on-youth offending, combined with the increased ownership of mobile phones. The study concludes with a series of largely positive messages concerning the successes of the initiative, including falling street crime, improved partnership working and only minor evidence of geographic and functional displacement. The report also suggests that area-based initiatives may possibly deliver some benefits to neighbouring areas and that senior Government involvement can 'energise' initiatives of this sort. Nevertheless, the report also raises a number of important issues which should be considered before initiatives of this type are deployed, such as their sustainability, replication and unintended consequences.

This report contributes usefully to knowledge about what works in crime reduction, complements other key texts on this subject and may prove relevant to a number of current initiatives such as the Drugs Intervention Programme and the prolific and other priority offender strategy.

Roger King

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January 2005

Postscript

Since this work was completed, the SCI has continued to operate and develop in each of the 10 SCI areas. A number of evaluations examining different aspects of the initiative have been conducted, some of which are summarised in a recent Home Office report and a cost-benefit analysis of the whole initiative up to April 2004 is currently in progress.

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Summary

This study has examined street crime in London, focusing on the causes of the 'epidemic' of 2000 and 2001 and its decrease from November 2001.³ It has examined the impact of the early stages of the Street Crime Initiative (SCI) and other policing initiatives in one of the ten SCI areas, testing for geographical, functional and tactical displacement. The study was commissioned in response to concerns from local authorities and police about crime displacement occurring in areas outside the SCI. It was largely conducted over a six-month period from October 2002, examining the available statistics in detail. Displacement was assessed mainly by comparing street crime trends over time and place and by examining changes in the length of 'journeys to work' made by street offenders. This analysis was supplemented by 121 interviews. Of these 73 were conducted with street offenders who were asked about their patterns of offending, and their awareness of, and responses to, the SCI. Finally, police and other professionals involved in implementing the SCI in London were interviewed.⁴

The Street Crime Initiative

In the late 1990s a number of British cities were experiencing high levels of street crime, described at one stage as a 'national emergency'. In London the figures peaked in October 2001. The first London-wide initiative to respond to the problem was the 'Safer Streets' campaign. This began in February 2002, targeting the nine boroughs in the region with the highest levels of robbery. On 17th March 2002 the operation was consolidated into the national SCI, and extended to a further six London boroughs shortly thereafter. In London, the SCI was referred to as Safer Streets Phase 2.

Unlike the first phase of Safer Streets, the SCI was a national initiative, co-ordinated at Prime Ministerial level. It involved ten police forces in total and aimed to reduce levels of street crime. The initiative as whole attracted substantial resources, with over £60 million allocated across key partner agencies in the first year and further amounts allocated in subsequent years. The initiative was overseen by the Street Crime Action Group (SCAG) and administered by the Street Crime Action Team (SCAT) in the Home Office which monitored the action being taken by police forces and partner agencies and the robbery rates, feeding

³ This study used the MPS definition of 'street crime' (robbery of personal property and snatch theft).

⁴ After this work was completed, the SCI continued to operate for a further two years in each of the ten SCI areas and a number of evaluations of different aspects of the initiative have been conducted (See Tilley et. al, 2004 and Machin and Marie forthcoming).

these into review meetings chaired by the Prime Minister. The stated immediate objective was to have street crime 'under control' by September 2002. But the longer-term target was to reduce recorded robbery to 14 per cent below 1999/2000 levels by 2004/5.

Over 2,000 police were re-deployed across the SCI areas. They were expected to adopt a 'problem-solving' approach, tailoring responses to the specific problems identified by careful analysis. There was a strong emphasis on inter-agency collaboration and information sharing between partnership agencies.

Explaining the rising trend

The increase in street crime in London appears to have been largely due to robberies involving mobile phones and youth-on-youth offending. When street crime was rising most rapidly, the average ages of street crime victims and offenders were falling. The period from 1999 to 2001 also saw a steep rise in mobile phone ownership, especially amongst young people. Mobiles became 'hot products' - desirable items to own, whether acquired legally or illegally. Other factors which may have contributed to the growth included: a rise in dependent crack cocaine use; the prioritisation by the police of other crimes, particularly burglary and vehicle crime, in the late 1990s; and the re-deployment of police officers immediately after the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks.

Explaining the reversal in the trends

After peaking in late October 2001, the upward trend in street crime in London then reversed with the decline accelerating as Operation 'Safer Streets' (Phases 1 and 2) got off the ground. Several factors seem to have contributed to this. First, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) had prioritised street crime as a serious problem before the statistics peaked, and had put remedial action in hand at borough rather than force level. Second, mobile phone users were probably becoming more alert to the risks – partly through experience and partly through advertising campaigns – and had probably changed the way they used phones.⁵ Third, it is possible that as mobile phone ownership grew, the attractiveness of mobiles as 'hot products' waned. Finally, the Safer Street Initiatives consolidated and

⁵ A range of educational measures were targeted at young people concerned with bullying and the legal status of robbery.

accelerated the fall, drawing together a range of policing initiatives which had been operational locally for some time.⁶

Was there functional and geographic displacement?

Preventive effort can result in displacement. 'Functional displacement' occurs where offenders switch to other forms of crime. 'Geographic displacement' happens when they move to areas less protected by the preventive action. In order to try to assess whether there was any functional displacement, various crime trends were examined. Only pick-pocketing and common assault showed upward trends as street crime fell. It seems implausible that street robbers changed their *modus operandi* from the use of threat and force to the use of skilled stealth in response to policing. The rise in assaults is unlikely to be a result of functional displacement; it is however likely to reflect changes in police recording practices following the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standards (NCRS) after February 2002.⁷

There was some evidence suggesting that street crime might have shifted from SCI boroughs to those not involved in the initiative. There was also some evidence of displacement from Inner London boroughs (where the SCI focussed) to Outer London. However, there was little evidence of this occurring on a large scale and both SCI and non-SCI boroughs showed remarkably similar trends. The latter lends weight to the argument that pan-London policing initiatives, prior to the SCI, were already beginning to get some purchase on the problem. There might also have been some 'diffusion of benefits' where action in SCI boroughs benefited adjacent non-SCI boroughs. Although there were sharp variations across four borough 'families' in the *levels* of street crime, the *trends* were remarkably similar. The proportion of offenders arrested outside their home borough also remained fairly stable across SCI, inner deprived and other central boroughs, although some affluent outer boroughs showed small rises in the numbers of offenders from other areas.

There was some evidence of more local displacement, however. Street offenders' average 'journey to work' increased in three of the five SCI boroughs, meaning that after the SCI they travelled further from their homes to find targets. The average journey to work for robbery of personal property increased from 2.9km to 3.2km and that for snatch theft grew from 4.4km to 4.7km⁸. The spatial distribution of street crime in the 12 months preceding the epidemic's

⁶ These included a range of traditional enforcement methods e.g. low-level policing and innovative approaches. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the types of approaches adopted.

peak and in the following year mostly showed a similar pattern. The areas with the highest density remained consistent across both periods (Westminster and Lambeth) with only minor expansions of street crime into Ealing and Croydon.

Offenders' perspectives on street crime and the SCI

Interviews were conducted with 73 street offenders, who were asked about their patterns of offending and their awareness of the SCI and other policing initiatives. Robbery was considered a quick and easy crime requiring little planning. Younger offenders described how street offending was often associated with peer group pressure. They typically offended in groups, claiming to avoid vulnerable victims, and generally targeting young men carrying mobiles or lap-top computers; and tended to operate close to home, in environments with which they were familiar. Street crime proved a means both to demonstrate toughness and to indulge teenage consumerist values. Older street robbers were more likely to be drug dependent, offending to support their habits.

Over half of interviewees described their offending as opportunistic. Little formal planning was involved, other than taking account of risks and opportunities that they encountered as they went about their daily lives. A few offenders planned their offending with more care, however, and travelled specifically to commit crime.

Most respondents claimed to be highly sensitive to police activity, and regarded high visibility policing as the greatest deterrent to street offending. However, they did not associate any change in visible police presence with force-wide initiatives of any sort. The vast majority were unaware of the very significant redeployment of uniformed patrol officers away from residential areas to central London immediately after September 11th 2002. Nor were they aware of Phases 1 and 2 of Safer Streets. This suggests offenders may have been sensitised to increased policing without them appreciating the nature or scale of these initiatives. Certainly respondents reported avoiding areas where they were well known to the local police, although they also preferred to 'work' in familiar areas. Some interviewees claimed to have tactically switched from burglary and armed robberies to snatch thefts, shoplifting and street robbery. The rationale for this was to avoid harsher sentences.

⁷ Metropolitan Police figures for violence against the person were estimated to have increased by 20 per cent as a consequence of the NCRS (Simmons et al, July 2003 32/03).

⁸ It should be noted that this analysis was based on offences where the offender was subsequently accused and as such we need to be mindful that they may not be representative of crimes committed in general.

Policing street crime: views from the Criminal Justice System

Interviews were conducted with 48 professionals who were involved to varying degrees with the SCI. Many, particularly among the police, applauded the leadership and drive shown by the Government. There was consensus among respondents that the SCI had positively impacted on agencies' efforts to tackle street crime. Many interviewees reported the initiative had 'kick-started' genuine and effective inter-agency partnership work. Respondents thought that the SCI had demonstrated that high-visibility policing and intelligence-led policing can have a significant impact in reducing crime rates when properly resourced. Most thought that some displacement following the SCI was inevitable although most considered it relatively small scale.

Some concerns were expressed about the initiatives. Some thought that highly centralised, government-led initiatives such as the SCI were insensitive to local conditions, and risked unbalancing local crime reduction strategies. Some were sceptical about the sustainability of the SCI.

Conclusions

One of the clear achievements of the SCI in London was its success in 'energising' local crime reduction partnerships and in stimulating joint working. However, at the time of writing the report, it remained to be seen whether or not this would lead to a sustained improvement in partnership working.⁹ If the SCI turns out to have achieved a step-change in the quality of partnership in crime reduction work, this will prove an achievement of some significance. If more pessimism is warranted, it will be worth examining whether the SCI model of central government support is replicable and sustainable. Arguably, it was precisely because of its exceptional, non-routine nature that it commanded involvement.

The biggest risk with initiatives such as the SCI is that they risk unbalancing local crime reduction efforts.¹⁰ There is a possibility that the surge in street crime was a consequence of the focus from the mid-1990s on burglary and vehicle crime. With the benefit of hindsight it may emerge that the more recent focus on street robbery has similarly allowed other problems to escalate.

⁹ This report was completed in late 2003.

¹⁰ Similar concerns were expressed by professionals in the Streets Ahead report (HMIC, 2003)

Single-issue initiatives of this sort also risk privileging strategies that yield short-term returns, while marginalising those that are best regarded as long-term investments. The interviews with offenders in this study have demonstrated how street crime in London is a symptom of the social exclusion experienced by teenagers and young adults at the lower-end of the socio-economic scale. The problem is particularly acute amongst some minority ethnic groups that are systematically disadvantaged (cf. Bowling and Phillips, 2002 and Clancy *et al*, 2001).¹¹ Any strategy addressing street crime runs the risk of compounding such problems if enforcement and inclusionary measures are neither similarly responsive nor effectively sequenced.¹²

In London the SCI was implemented only after street crime had been increasing rapidly for three years. The obvious question to ask is why more effective local action was not put into place earlier. Although borough partnerships were aware of a growing problem in 1999, there was little effective problem analysis to explain what lay behind the increase. More effective mechanisms for giving early warning of emergent crime problems, both at local and at national level, were needed. There also needed to be better mechanisms for collating local information at regional level, and feeding it to central government. After the experience of the SCI, local, regional and central agencies are now much better equipped to identify emerging crime problems.

¹¹ An emerging concern in the first phase HMIC inspection was the 'disproportionality of ethnic minority street crime offenders' (HMIC, 2003).

¹² Streets Ahead (HMIC, 2003) suggested that although the SCI had a broad focus and included a range of criminal justice and inclusionary measures, enforcement aspects had been the most effective in the short term, while other components were less effective e.g. drug arrest referral and prison rehabilitation and resettlement schemes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

During the late 1990s and early 2000s Britain's large cities were experiencing high levels of street crime, particularly robbery. By 2002 the Prime Minister described the problem as a '*national emergency*' (HMIC Inspection Report, 2003). The issue was first addressed in London with the introduction of the 'Safer Streets' campaign in February 2002, then a month later through the Street Crime Initiative. Through these campaigns, the police sought to address street crime by prioritising activity targeting perpetrators across the capital.

In London recorded street crime offences peaked at the end of October 2001. At this time, policing in the capital had experienced a shift in focus to maintaining security against terrorism in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks on the United States. In the weeks immediately following September 11th, large numbers of police were re-deployed into central London to boost security in the face of possible threats, leaving less coverage in the more residential boroughs. This re-deployment may have exacerbated an already growing problem (see FitzGerald *et al*, 2003).

Street crime definition

The traditional and current MPS definition of street crime combines crimes recorded as robbery of personal property and snatch theft.¹³ At first sight this definition may appear somewhat arbitrary. Firstly, the term street crime combines two distinct offences – albeit with similarities. While robbery involves the use, or threat, of physical violence, snatch theft does not.¹⁴ Secondly, the two offences are dealt with by the courts in different ways, the former attracting much tougher sentences. Lastly, the rationale for including some street offences (e.g. snatch theft) and excluding others (e.g. drug supply) is not self-evident. However, in practice the differences between snatch theft and robbery can be small; and in any case it was consecutive annual increases in recorded robbery and snatch theft that triggered the London Safer Streets Initiative (later part of the national SCI).¹⁵

¹³ Recorded crimes are allegations of crimes that have been validated to confirm that they meet Home Office counting rules. Robbery of personal property and snatch theft are subsets of the Home Office crime categories of robbery and of theft and handling respectively.

¹⁴The threshold above which a snatch theft becomes robbery involves subjective interpretation, as do judgements about the threat of physical violence. Thus there may be some variability as to whether an offence is recorded as a robbery or snatch theft.

The Street Crime Initiative (SCI)

'Operation Safer Streets' was launched by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in February 2002. It targeted nine boroughs with the highest levels of robbery (Brent, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Westminster) and ran for a period of two months. A significant element of this initiative was the redeployment of a large number of officers from the MPS traffic department to uniformed patrol duties in the nine boroughs.

On 17th March 2002 the operation Safer Streets was consolidated into the much larger SCI, which involved nine other police forces (Avon and Somerset, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, Thames Valley, West Midlands and West Yorkshire).¹⁶ From mid-April the MPS operation was extended to involve a further six London boroughs (Croydon, Ealing, Lewisham, Newham, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth).¹⁷

The aims of the SCI were to reduce the incidence of robbery through criminal justice interventions and to increase the rates of detection and charge by supporting the implementation of targeted policing strategies. Furthermore, the SCI was intended to increase the numbers of offenders convicted for robbery and to speed up the criminal justice process, by ensuring that they were dealt with efficiently at every stage (Street Crime Programme Board, April 2002). Nationally, the SCI attracted substantial resources, totalling £67 million in the first year, with further funding provided in subsequent years. This was to be spent across several agencies including the police, drug agencies, social services, the Probation and Prison Services, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and courts. In London, the money was chiefly spent on additional staffing, overtime and information technology.¹⁸

The SCI was driven from a very high level. Administered by the Street Crime Action Team (SCAT) working closely with the Policing Standards Unit (PSU), Government Offices, Police forces (in the 10 SCI) areas and Whitehall colleagues, it was overseen by a ministerial committee (including cabinet ministers, senior law officers and police) called the Street Crime Action Group (SCAG). To manage the process effectively, robbery rates across the

¹⁵ Robbery is also a current Home Office public service agreement (PSA) target crime.

¹⁶ Home Office Press Notice 074/2002 estimated that the 10 police forces involved in the SCI accounted for 80 per cent of all street crime in England and Wales.

¹⁷ This was locally termed as the 'Safer Streets Initiative - phase 2'.

¹⁸ A cost-benefit analysis of the whole SCI is currently being conducted by the London School of Economics and will be reported in 2005.

SCI areas were monitored weekly by the Street Crime Action Team (SCAT) and fed into review meetings, alongside information on the actions being taken locally and nationally. These were attended, at the local level, by senior police and agency representatives, while national meetings were chaired by the Prime Minister or Home Secretary and involved ministers from a range of key government departments.¹⁹ These agencies reported to the SCAG, whose immediate aim was to have the national street crime problem '*under control*' by September 2002. However, the longer-term target was to reduce recorded robbery to 14 per cent below 1999/2000 levels by 2004/05.

Over 2,000 police officers were re-deployed in the SCI areas (supported by Street Wardens and Police Community Support Officers)²⁰ with a greater emphasis placed on problem-solving approaches improved partnership working, increased monitoring and accountability and better information sharing between agencies.²¹ Certain components of the SCI flowed from partnership activity within education, social services, youth provision, criminal justice and policing. Some of these included:²²

- pre-trial CPS liaison with the police
- fast-tracking of offenders through the courts
- minimisation of judicial delays with cases dealt with by designated courts most suited to street crime offences²³
- CPS opposing further court bail for 12 to 16 year olds who re-offended on bail
- drug users to be targeted via arrest referral schemes and offered treatment within 24 hours of release from custody
- prison and probation services actively encouraged offenders to access drug programmes, employment and training schemes and housing advice
- Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) prioritised robbery cases alongside truancy sweeps and youth diversionary schemes

¹⁹ Representatives were drawn from the Departments for Education, Health, Transport, Work and Pensions, and Regional and Local Government. Members also included; senior police (ACPO and Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police), Her Majesties Inspectorate of Constabulary, local government, the Chair of the Youth Justice Board, Chief Secretary, Attorney General, Prime Minister Delivery Unit and officials from the court service. Subsequent additions to the SCAG included Director General of the Prison Service, National Director of the Probation Service and representatives from the Association of Police Authorities and Justices' Clerk (Home Office, 2003)

²⁰ PCSOs were launched on September 23rd 2002 with 44 officers in London (see www.met.police.uk/pcso and www.crimereduction.gov.uk/streetcrime 'Delivering the street crime initiative: partnership in operation').

²¹ See Tilley et al, 2004.

²² Home Office statement - www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hopn.htm

²³ Home Office statement - www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hopn.htm

At the same time, the Home Office, the police and mobile phone providers were developing measures to render stolen phones unusable.²⁴ Three major providers Orange, T-Mobile and Virgin Mobile already had SIM card blocking technology in place. In February 2002 the other providers (Vodafone and MMO2) announced that they would invest in the development of the same barring technology, which was actually implemented six months later. The Mobile Telephones (Reprogramming) Act (October 4th 2002) created a range of new offences imposing harsher penalties on offenders who altered the IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) numbers of any phone.²⁵ From November 2002, and after much negotiation, all the major mobile phone networks agreed to share information and introduce a system whereby any lost or stolen handsets and SIM cards were barred across all networks.

The SCI approach led to major changes in the ways the CJS and other key agencies responded to street crime (Burrows *et al*, 2003 and Tilley *et al*, 2004). These measures, coupled with the personal involvement and backing of the Prime Minister, placed the SCI at the centre of the Government's crime reduction agenda.

The SCI was largely considered to have achieved its aims, with an overall 25 per cent decrease in recorded robbery between March and September 2002 (Home Office, 2003). The MPS Commissioner attributed this to '...outstanding police work, strong partnership with communities and other agencies and ...an increase in the number of officers'.²⁶ The SCI has not been without its critics, of course. As will emerge, for example, some of those who were interviewed in the course of this study saw it as a '*short-term fix*' to a complex problem, involving the redeployment of scarce resources from other operational areas of policing.

The nature of street crime

Recent studies have shown that street robbery is predominantly a male crime (Smith, 2003:15). Female offending is rare, accounting for only six per cent of all suspects. Females mostly co-offend with other males (60% of female offenders) which means that only three per cent of personal robberies involved females acting alone or with other females (Smith, 2003:16). Findings from the 2000 British Crime Survey indicated that although those

²⁴ The Metropolitan police reported that in 29 per cent of street crime offences in London, mobile phones were the single most targeted item stolen (SCAT Report, 2003).

²⁵ Prior to this time, mobile phone networks only had the capacity to render phones from their own networks unusable and there was little co-operation between networks.

²⁶ 'The Job', (August, 2002).

involved in snatch theft generally work alone, robbers tended to work in groups (Harrington and Mayhew, 2001).

The unprecedented rise in street crime since 1998 in several British cities (especially London) has been attributed at least in part to the growth in mobile phones (Harrington and Mayhew, 2001; FitzGerald *et al*, 2003;) and a concomitant rise in 'youth on youth' offending (Kershaw *et al*, 2001; 2002; Smith, 2003). Other explanations have focused on contracting opportunities for other forms of property crime, triggered for example by improved home security and in reduced opportunities for acquiring legitimate incomes through a squeeze in the casual labour market (*The Economist*, 23/03/02 cited in Loveday and Reid, 2003).

To explain these findings it is important to understand street culture, youth culture and the motivations and driving forces in young people's lives. FitzGerald and colleagues identified three interrelated influences on the recent increase in young people's involvement in street crime. These were *cultural*, *environmental* and *personal* factors. In their research, the importance that young people placed on image, coupled with economic and personal factors, was thought to be a key trigger for young people's involvement in street crime. Alienation from mainstream education coupled with a lack of appropriate role models in young men's lives equally contributed. In terms of location, street crime was thought to be more likely to occur in areas where children of the 'have-nots' come in close contact with those who 'have', and in neighbourhoods where social ties are weakest. In the absence of appropriate male role models, young males are easily attracted to street cultures, worlds characterised by consumerism and 'lawless masculinity' (Hallsworth, 2002).

Without doubt, one of the most contentious issues within the debate on street crime is the issue of ethnicity. In London, the majority of robbery suspects are black (Stockdale and Gresham, 1998; Bowling and Phillips, 2002; FitzGerald *et al*, 2003).²⁷ Bowling and Phillips discuss the origin of this association in terms of Afro-Caribbean resistance to racism in the 1970s, which gradually became associated with crime, reinforced by the 'mugging panic' of the time (Phillips and Bowling, 2000).

Displacement

Displacement has been described as the 'Achilles heel' of crime prevention and can be defined as 'the unintended increase in crimes following the introduction of a crime reducing scheme' (Welsh and Farrington, 1999:347). Reppetto (1976) identified five main forms of

²⁷ Just over half (55%) of offenders interviewed for this study were from BME backgrounds.

displacement: *geographical* (change in location), *temporal* (change in time), *tactical* (change in method), *target* (change in victim), and *functional* (change in the type of crime). Displacement is not always undesirable, however, since the possibility exists that it might produce a net benefit for the whole community. Clarke points out that a potentially positive consequence is that crime is more evenly shared in a community ('*benign displacement*').²⁸ Equally, when offenders switch between crime types (*functional displacement*), this may disrupt their usual behaviour and possibly lead to less serious offences than previously.

The occurrence of geographical displacement depends upon the willingness of offenders to travel. Past studies reveal that most offenders commit crimes close to home. This applies to different offender types including traffic offenders (Rose, 2000) and burglars (Hesseling, 1994; Wiles and Costello, 2000; Town, 2002 cited in Ratcliffe, 2002). How far these findings apply to robbery is unclear especially given the concentration of robberies that occur in and around bus and train stations.²⁹ It has also been established that travelling distances to offend increase with the age of offender (Baldwin and Bottoms, 1976; Reppetto, 1976). To date, there are no clear findings on how gender is associated with distance travelled.

Exploring the reasons for offender travel, Wiles and Costello (2000:43) concluded that 'much travel associated with crime is not primarily driven by plans to offend' and noted that when offenders travel longer ranges to offend, they mainly travel to places that have strong traditional connections with the offender's home location. Offending was more dependent upon opportunities presenting themselves during normal routines, than as a result of instrumental, long-range search patterns.

The perception of crime displacement is common, but it has little evidential basis (Eck, 1998 cited in Ratcliffe, 2002). While some studies have measured a modest degree of displacement in some types of crime, they are rarely significant in terms of the benefits accrued from a successful crime reduction campaign (Ratcliffe, 2002). In an extensive review of 55 research studies into displacement, Hesseling (1994), found that, instead of crimes being displaced, in some studies there was evidence of a 'diffusion of benefits' where the initiative positively influenced places or agencies not directly involved in the initiative.

Such diffusion of benefit was also noted by Sherman (1990) who reviewed several evaluations of police crackdowns (intensive, focused policing tactics) and identified that some crime reductions were sustained beyond the life-span of the crackdown. Sherman

²⁸ See Clarke and Weisburd (1994:167).

attributed this lasting impact partly to residual deterrent effects, explained by the fact that offenders were still wary of increased police activity or had failed to notice that a police operation had ceased and partly to incapacitation effects.

The current study

This study was commissioned by the Government Office for London in response to complaints from local authorities and police about crime displacement occurring in areas outside the remit of the SCI. The report explores the displacement of street crime and drug supply activity³⁰ that may have taken place as a consequence of the Street Crime Initiative in its early stages.³¹ Questions that the study sought to answer were:

- What can recorded crime statistics tell us about the patterns and trends of London street crime, the impact of the SCI and any consequential functional and geographic displacement?
- What levels of awareness did offenders possess about police operational tactics designed to combat street crime?
- To what extent did offenders instrumentally travel out of SCI boroughs into areas not governed by the initiative to offend?
- To what degree (if any) did the fear of arrest, threat of custody and/or prospect of harsher sentences deter offenders from 'normal' offending patterns?
- Is there any evidence to suggest that offenders switched crime categories as a direct response to the government's street crime initiatives?

Displacement is difficult to prove and predict (Jacobson, 1999). However it is an important issue for those involved in crime prevention and as such requires careful attention. Displacement is usually studied in two ways: through ethnographic study of offenders' motives and decision-making processes and through evaluating programmes to reduce crime (Hesseling, 1994:199). The current study attempts to explore displacement with a range of methods that are described below.

²⁹ See www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits

³⁰ Drugs issues were explored more in the qualitative sections of the report. This was due to recorded drug offence statistics largely representing policing activity rather than actual offence trends.

³¹ Since this research was conducted a number of other reports related to the SCI have been undertaken (see Tilley et al, 2004 and Machin and Marie forthcoming).

Research methods

The research was largely conducted over a six-month period (from October 2002 to April 2003) and used a multi-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Qualitative methods

The qualitative data were collected via a range of sources and included a literature review, 121 in-depth interviews and four focus groups. In-depth interviews were conducted with street offenders and professionals working in the Criminal Justice System and related agencies.

Interviews with offenders

A total of 73 interviews were conducted with street offenders. Of these, more than three-quarters were imprisoned at the time of research, nine were under the supervision of YOT's and the remainder were dependent drug users interviewed in the community.

The interview sample was selected to represent a range of views of those either previously involved or currently involved in street crime and drug supply activities. Prison respondents were randomly recruited from five establishments (HMP Belmarsh, Feltham, Holloway Pentonville and Wormwood Scrubs) with potential interviewees identified from internal records. The views of young offenders were canvassed via two focus groups conducted at YOT premises located within SCI boroughs while a small number of interviews were carried out with dependent drug users attending community based treatment agencies. All offender interviewees were asked about their experiences (and those of others) concerning:

- motivation for street offending
- nature of street offending
- awareness of the SCI (and police activity more generally)
- changes in offending behaviour (tactical, functional and/or geographical)

Professional interviews

In total, 48 in-depth interviews were conducted with professionals from criminal justice and community agencies including: police officers and civilian personnel (16); YOT managers and workers (8); community youth and church groups (6); probation officers (3); and drug workers (2). In addition, two focus groups were conducted with arrest referral workers (8) and Community Safety managers and officers (5). Interviewees were recruited on the basis

of their experience of the SCI, street crime and knowledge of displacement. All respondents were asked their views on:

- Geographical, functional and tactical displacement
- The effects of the SCI on other types of crime
- The impact of the SCI and its sustainability
- The nature of street crime in London
- Policing practices before and after the introduction of SCI
- The links between drug use and street crime

Quantitative methods

The MPS Performance Information Bureau (PIB) provided recorded crime figures and relevant data sets covering five financial years.³² These included case information concerning the type of offence, those who were suspected, those accused and proceeded against and victim profiles. The data also specified the offence location identifying the borough and a grid-reference (250m²), major and minor crime categories, month, day and time of offence. Details of stolen property were also available. The accused, suspect and victim data included age, sex and ethnicity. All of the data sets were related using a unique identifier and then analysed using SPSS.³³

Additional data sets were gathered to calculate travel distances between offender's home and offence site. This analysis was conducted using information extracted from the CRIS (Crime Reporting Information System) and accused data for five boroughs (Westminster, Islington, Hackney, Southwark and Lambeth) for two calendar years (2001 and 2002). Of 3,551 individual recorded crimes, we were able to match address-point data for half (1,788) of the offenders. From this figure we disregarded all cases where the period between the date of offence and arrest was greater than three months. This was to achieve a greater accuracy rate for residential addresses among a highly transient population. Furthermore, we restricted the average travel distances to less than 20km to remove spurious outliers, which accounted for a further reduction of six per cent.³⁴

³² MPS data included all major crime categories (e.g. robbery) and their constituent minor crime categories (e.g. robbery of business property).

³³ Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

³⁴ MPS database geo-codes are meant to be accurate to 250m, however the data entries made by officers are frequently spurious and crime records are allocated to inaccurate locations.

Outline of the report

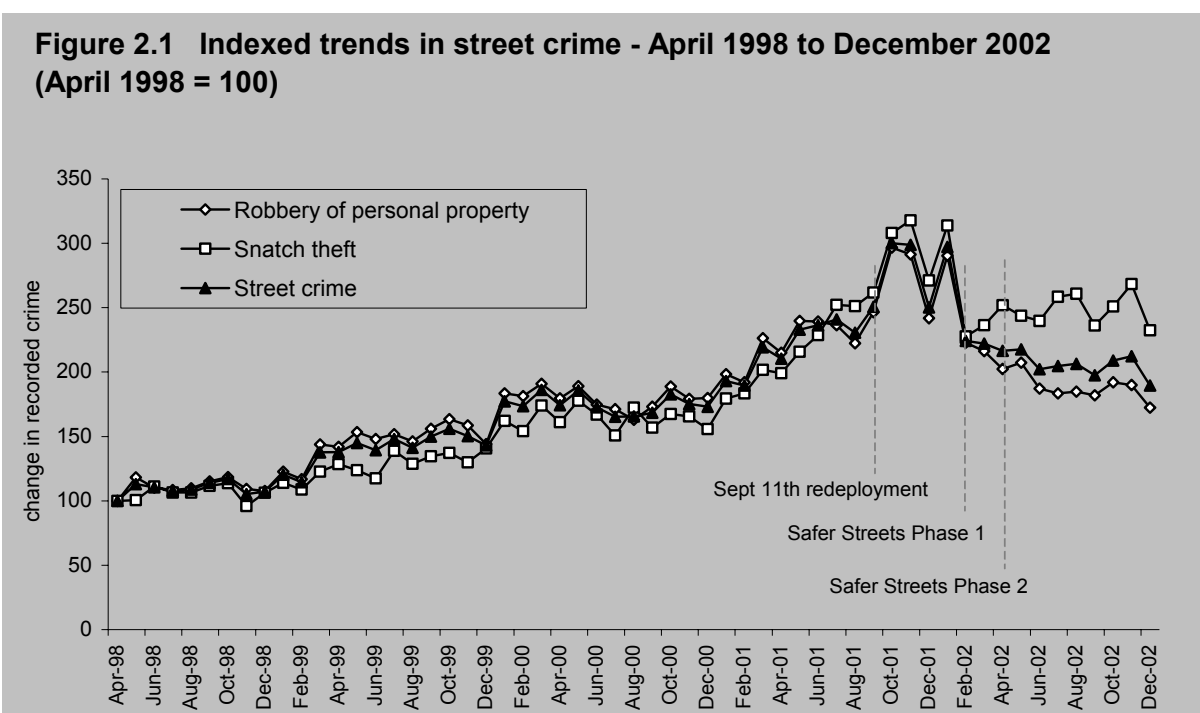
Chapter 2 considers the statistics in relation to patterns of street crime and any displacement across London. This analysis looks at the nature of street crime and its long-term trends examining in detail trends since Jan 1st 2001. Chapters 3 and 4 present findings from interviews with offenders and professionals. Chapter 5 concludes the report, describes lessons drawn from the empirical work and quantitative analyses, and discusses policy implications.

Chapter 2: Street crime in London: the statistics

This chapter examines MPS recorded street crime statistics (robbery of personal property and snatch theft) between April 1998 and December 2002.³⁵ First, an analysis of trends in London street crime is presented. Then factors that can explain these trends are considered. Thereafter the chapter evaluates the evidence for functional displacement to other types of crime and geographic displacement from one area to another.

Trends in street crime

Figure 2.1 shows London trends in recorded street crime by month from April 1998. It shows street crime trends (indexed at 100 in April 1998) and for the two offence categories that comprise street crime – robbery of personal property and snatch theft. Figures were stable throughout 1998. Then street crime started to rise, steadily at first and then steeply, until it



³⁵ The figures in the tables and charts are based on recorded crime. These are allegations of offences that have been validated to confirm that they meet HO counting rules.

peaked in October 2001.³⁶ After February 2002 the overall trend was clearly downwards, although, after this point a bifurcation occurred between the trend for robbery of personal property and for snatch theft. This divergence can be explained partially by the MPS focusing mainly on reducing the more prevalent and serious crime of robbery. Robbery was and remains a Home Office PSA (Public Service Agreement) target crime and as such a national priority.

Figure 2.1 highlights three dates that could have affected levels of street crime in London. The first is mid September 2001. After the destruction of the World Trade Center uniformed patrol officers were reallocated on a large scale from residential boroughs to 'symbolic' locations in the centre of London that were thought to be at particular risk – in Whitehall, the City of London and elsewhere. It is possible, if not likely, that this would have left residential boroughs, and especially the ring of inner London high-crime boroughs, more vulnerable to crime.³⁷ It is certainly a view expressed by senior managers within the MPS.³⁸ The second and third dates are the start-dates of Safer Streets Phase 1 (February 2002) and the expansion of the initiative to fifteen boroughs (Safer Streets Phase 2 - April 2002).³⁹

Figure 2.2 focuses in on the period from September 2001 until July 2002.⁴⁰ It presents absolute numbers of offences per day, rather than indexed trends, with figures for SCI and non-SCI boroughs shown separately.

It shows that the rise in street crime began to accelerate in mid-September, reaching its peak at the end of October. A substantial increase in recorded street crime began mid-September 2001. The absolute peak, in daily offending in SCI boroughs occurred on 31st October 2001 (with 255 offences). From this date there was an overall downward trend in street crime. This was interrupted by a characteristic Christmas dip in offending (reaching a seasonal low of 53 offences on Christmas Day). Immediately after Christmas the figures

³⁶ There was an overall 121% increase in street crime between 1998/99 to December 2001/02 (from 31,706 to 69,987) whereas other major crime types remained comparatively stable. See Appendix figure A2.2. Street crime recorded an average of 2,640 offences per month during 1998/99 compared to 5,830 during 2001/02.

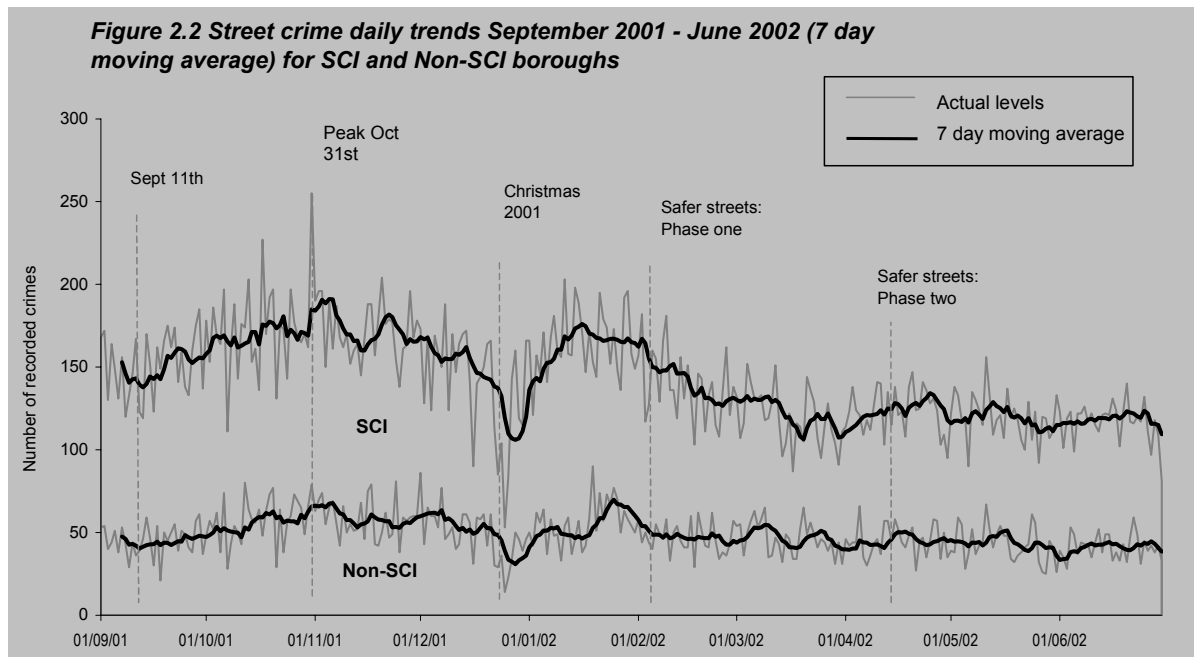
³⁷ Simmons et al 2002 indicate that the redeployment may have contributed to lower levels of burglary in Westminster but suggest that there was no impact on robbery in the borough. However, there is no information provided as to what effect the reduced police numbers had in those boroughs from which officers were seconded.

³⁸ See, for example, a speech by Deputy Commission Ian Blair (www.met.police.uk/campaign/policingworks.htm)

³⁹ While the SCI started in March 2002, further changes in the policing of London did not occur until April 2002 when the Safer Streets Initiative was expanded to cover fifteen boroughs.

⁴⁰ It was in this ten-month period the steepest increase, highest levels, initiative implementation and sustained low levels all occurred.

rose back to previous levels, but thereafter continued falling until mid April 2002, when they appeared to level off. The non-SCI boroughs show a proportionately similar but less marked trend, with a peak in mid-January 2002.



In interpreting Figures 2.1 and 2.2 it is important to take account of regular seasonal variations⁴¹ as the identified October 2001 street crime peak may be a consequence of a typically 'high offending' month. For example recorded street crime levels typically increase in the run-up to Christmas, then fall steeply over the festive period; the upshot is that December figures are predictably lower overall than those for November or January. There are other less marked but nevertheless regular seasonal changes. In understanding recent trends in street crime one must distinguish between patterns that reflect seasonal variation and those that are unique to the year in question.

⁴¹ Monthly fluctuations were positively correlated year on year and particularly the three years of steady increase before 2001/02 (on average 0.7 at the 0.05 level, Pearson's).

Figure 2.3 charts the average recurrent monthly fluctuations that have occurred over the last five years; it can be assumed that these are caused by factors unrelated to the SCI. It shows that the largest average seasonal increase in London street crime occurs in January (+6%) and that the main decrease, after the Christmas low, is February (-8.5%).

Figure 2.3 Typical seasonal fluctuations in levels of street crime

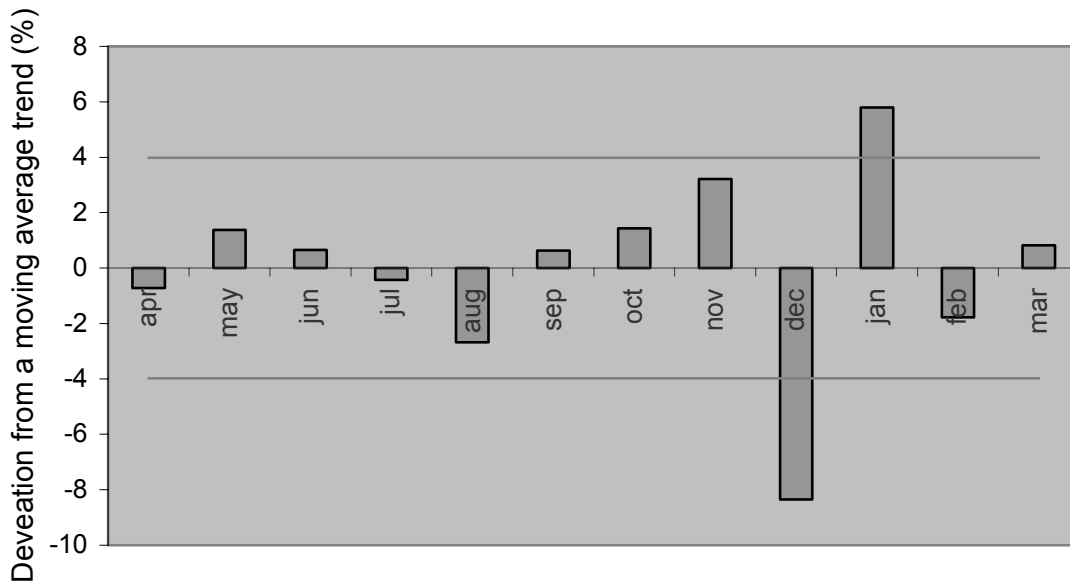
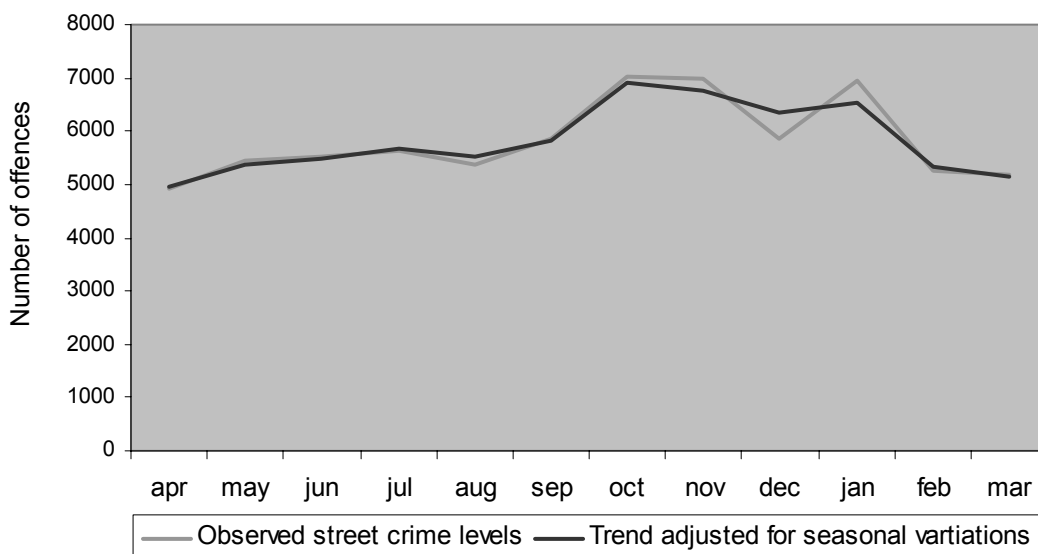


Figure 2.4 compares the observed monthly street crime trend for 2001/02 with the *seasonally adjusted* trend for the same period. It shows that even after seasonal adjustment

Figure 2.4 Observed and seasonally adjusted street crime trends (2001/02)



the London street crime problem still appeared to peak around October 2001. This is congruent with the earlier observed daily trend analysis that indicated street crime peaked on 31st October.

The absolute levels of London's street crime were highest during the October/November 2001 period. Indeed, this high period over these months certainly produced the greatest volume of the year's offending. The sustained fall of street crime levels appeared to occur immediately after this period with an accelerated decrease from January 2002. Thus the fall in street crime appeared to begin before either Phase 1 of the Safer Streets Initiative or the Street Crime Initiative (Safer Streets Phase 2). However, the rapid decline in levels of robbery of personal property after January 2002 is most likely a consequence of the initiative and changes in mobile phone security (see 'Explaining the reversal of the trends' below).

It should be clear from this that the London street crime figures are not at all straightforward to interpret. They pose two main sets of questions. What drove the figures up so steeply before the end of October 2001? And what reversed the trend in the latter part of 2001? Inevitably some of the explanations that we offer are speculative.

Explaining the rising trend

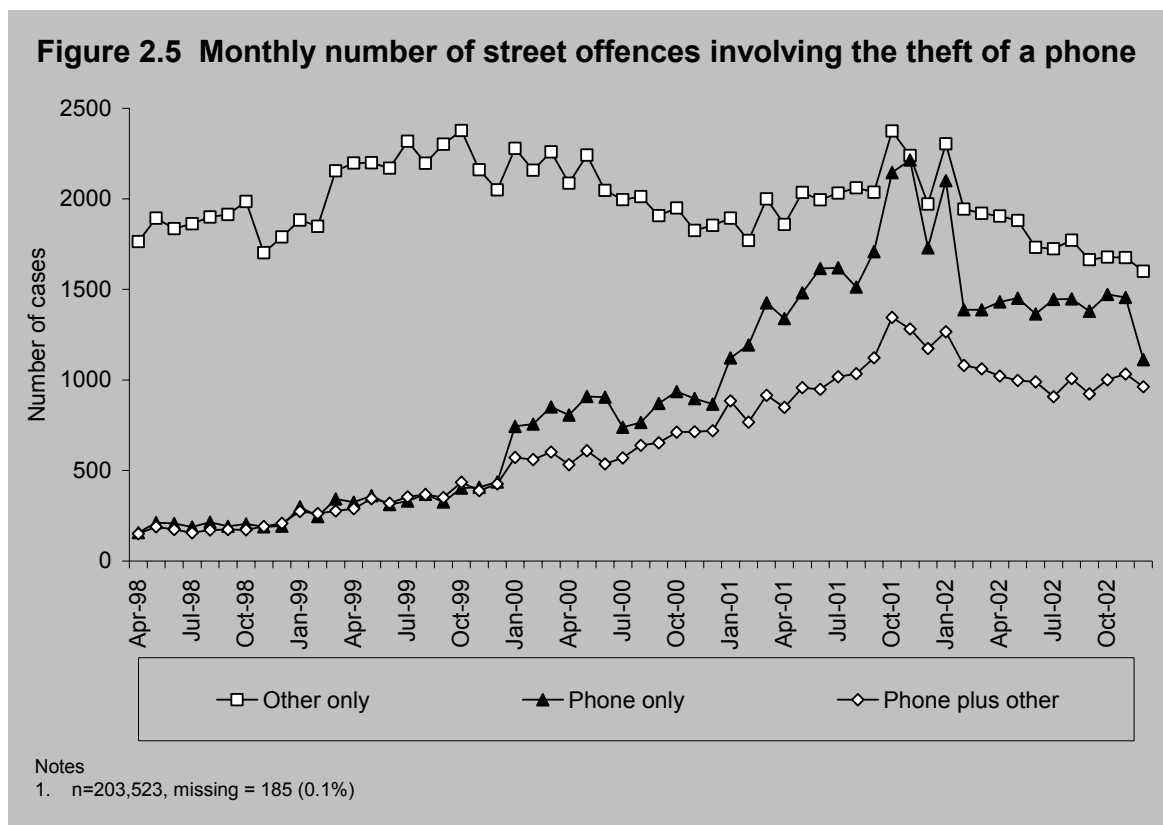
In addressing questions about the rise in street crime figures until October 2001, we have tested for changes both in the nature of the offences and changes in characteristics of the offenders and victims.

Changes in the nature of the offences

The most marked change in patterns of offending over this period was the growth in robberies involving mobile phones (cf. Harrington and Mayhew, 2001). Figure 2.5 breaks down the trend in street crime according to the property stolen. Trends are presented for offences involving the *theft of a phone*, for those involving theft of *other property* and those involving *both* phone theft and loss of other property. The third category includes offences such as 'bag snatches' where a phone was stolen along with numerous other items. Monthly totals are shown for the period April 1998 to December 2002.⁴²

The rate of increase in mobile phone ownership was particularly rapid from 1999 until 2001. In 1999 less than a third of the population aged 15 or over owned a mobile. By the end of

2001 this had risen to 75 per cent. Amongst 15-17 year-olds the figure was already 70 per cent by mid 2000. Thus the period in question was marked by intense demand for mobiles, especially on the part of young people. It should not necessarily be assumed that by mid-2000 this demand had been sated, through market saturation. There were – and are – continuing pressures to upgrade one’s phone to the latest model with the latest facilities.

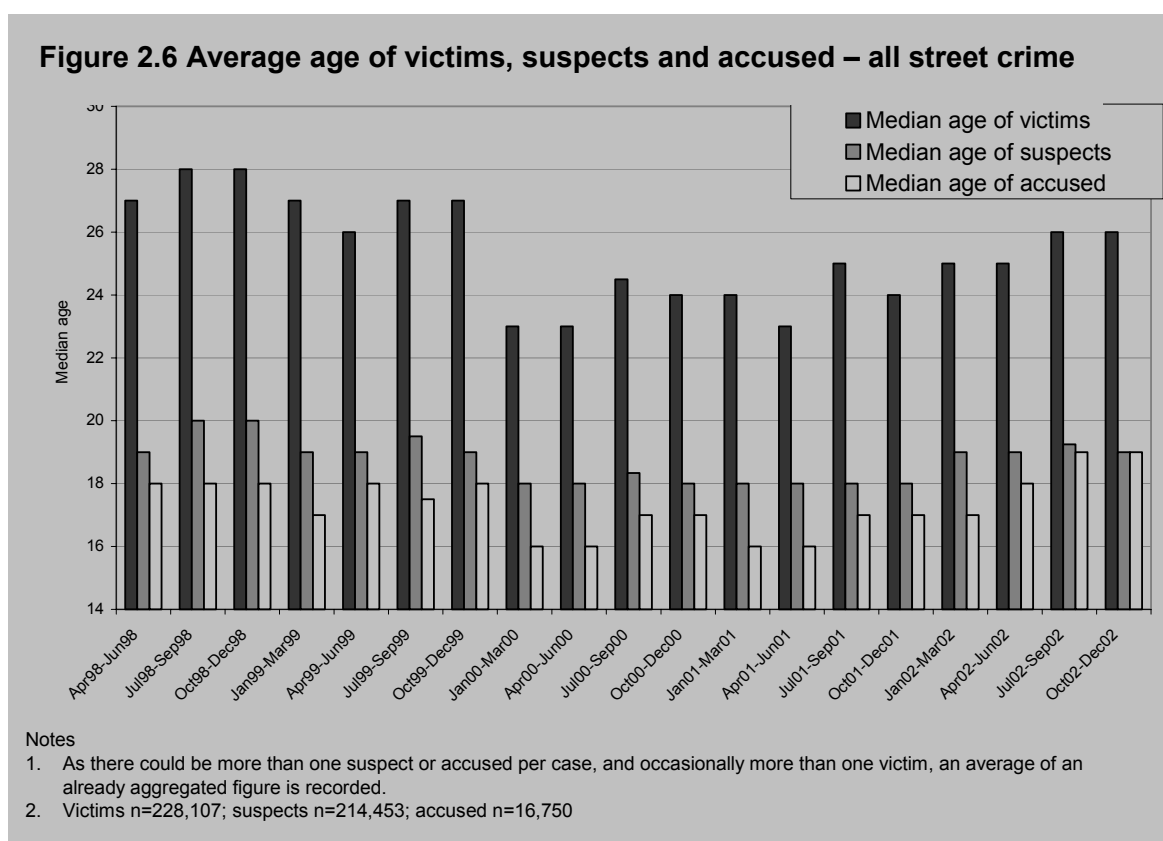


The increase in phone theft is clearly important in explaining the rise in street crime, especially during 2000 and 2001. Obviously it is impossible to state categorically that the growing ownership of mobile phones fuelled the rise in robbery; some of the offences involving thefts of phones and other property would doubtless have occurred even if the victim had no phone. But Figure 2.5 provides good evidence that the street crime epidemic in London was driven significantly by the emergence of this new and attractive ‘hot product’ (cf. Clarke 1999).

Changes in the ages of victims and offenders

Figure 2.6 shows the average (median)⁴³ ages of victims, suspects and accused. Between April 1998 and December 1999 the average age of victims ranged from 26 to 28 years. However, in the first quarter of 2000/01 there was a sharp drop. From January 2000 to June 2001 the average age was between 23 and 24. After this period there was a gradual increase in the age of victims reaching a maximum of 26 years by the second quarter of 2002/03.

The average age of suspects ranged from 18 to 20 for the whole period from April 1998 to December 2002.



However, as with victims, Figure 2.6 shows a noticeable dip during 2000 and 2001. The age of those accused followed a similar trend, although the average age was lower than for suspects, ranging between 16 and 19 years.

⁴³ A median figure is used so as to remove distorting extreme values that are either inaccurate or highly atypical – e.g. suspect age 90 or victim aged 4.

The phenomenon of 'young-on-young' offending was further explored by looking at the proportion of offences where victims were aged sixteen or under. Even before the London street crime problem peaked, these teenage victims were heavily over-represented, accounting for a fifth of street crime victims, but only seven per cent of the overall population.⁴⁴ In the first half of 2000 the proportion of victims aged 16 or under rose to over 30 per cent - representing a 50 per cent increase in risk. This proportion only fell back to its 1999 level in late 2001 (see Appendix A.2.5). In two-thirds of cases involving victims aged 16 or under, the offenders were also in this age group.

These findings emphasise that the emergence of the street crime epidemic was, in London at least, a phenomenon that needs to be understood in the context of youth culture. In conjunction with Figure 2.5, Figure 2.6 adds weight to the hypothesis that the street crime epidemic was triggered in part by the surge in mobile phone ownership – and patterns of mobile phone use – amongst young people in the period around 2000 and 2001. Not only did phone ownership rise but phone use was characteristically visible and arguably ostentatious; and given the value attached to mobiles by youth culture, they became a desirable crime target at a time when violence and bullying amongst teenagers might in any case have been on the increase.

Other factors

There were undoubtedly other factors additionally contributing to the growth in street crime. Drug dependent offenders may have been implicated. Until the late 1990s, street robbery was not a favoured means of raising money to buy drugs (cf Edmunds et al., 1998, 1999). However, with the emergence of a growing number of crack users in London, it seems likely that drug dependence amongst an older group of offenders may have been a subsidiary cause of the rise in street crime.⁴⁵ As will emerge in Chapter 4, this was certainly a view held by some professionals within the criminal justice system.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the destruction of the World Trade Center may be implicated in the very rapid rise in street crime in the ensuing six weeks. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 are consistent with the idea that the changes in deployment following 9/11 had some negative impact, in particular, on the poorer inner and outer London boroughs, which were already facing rapidly rising street crime.

⁴⁴ Assuming that the vast majority of victims under 17 years were 12 or older.

Finally, it is possible that the rise in street crime can be explained in part by the priorities set by central government in the mid- and late-1990s. Forces were encouraged to prioritise burglary and vehicle crime. The MPS did so with some success. It is possible that the focus on these crimes was at the expense of others including street crime and other forms of less serious anti-social behaviour which can act as precursors for street crime. There are two sorts of argument here. One is that police action against burglary and vehicle crime displaced offenders to other sorts of crime including street robbery. This is not especially plausible, given that much of the growth in robbery can be attributed to sub-groups of offenders whose involvement in burglary at least was limited. The other – more plausible – argument is that reduced police attention targeted at street crime and related offending encouraged those offenders who were already involved to become more active.

Explaining the reversal in the trends

What triggered the fall in street crime in late 2001? Clearly neither the first phase of the Safer Streets Initiative nor the second – the Street Crime Initiative – were responsible, as the peak at the end of October 2001 preceded both. Just as a number of factors were responsible for driving street crime up, so it is likely that several factors interacted to trigger the fall.

In the first place, it is very likely that policing strategies introduced *before* both phases of the Safer Streets Initiative had started to achieve some purchase on the problem. BCU commanders across London had been aware of, and concerned about, the rise in street crime throughout 2000 and 2001, and were taking action to respond to the problem. Secondly, it seems probable that mobile phone users, and young users in particular, became better alerted to the risks of robbery at this time, and became more cautious about showing off or using their phones in risky places (cf. Harrington and Mayhew, 2001:62). Thirdly – a related point – it also seems plausible, at least, that mobile phones' status as 'hot products' waned, as they became a commonplace and unremarkable commodity, rather than an indicator of status.

This is not to suggest that either phase of the Safer Streets Initiative was without impact. Rather, they seem likely to have consolidated or accelerated the fall. They gave shape and

⁴⁵ Between 1998/99 and 2002/03, recorded offences for the possession of crack and cocaine showed

coherence to a range of individual policing initiatives to tackle street crime that had been well under way at borough level for some time. It also seems highly likely that the SCI enabled these initiatives to continue on a scale that would otherwise have been impossible, and to draw in a range of local CDRP partners to supplement the police effort.

Perhaps one of the more significant factors shaping levels of street crime came into effect in full only *after* November 2002, when all the main mobile providers agreed to share information on IMEI numbers, collectively barring the use of any handset that had been lost or stolen.⁴⁶ Mobile phones certainly began to be much less desirable crime targets than hitherto, and an advertising campaign which started in March 2003 will have reinforced this. It will shortly become clear whether this initiative has consolidated the decline in street crime.

Assuming that the Safer Streets initiative and its precursors achieved some impact on street crime, it is worth examining what mechanisms were at work in achieving this. The impact of policing could have made itself felt in two ways. First, if the police were successful in increasing their arrest rate, there may have been an ‘incapacitation’ effect, whereby offenders were simply taken out of circulation for the duration of the prison sentences that would usually ensue. Secondly, it is possible that increased patrol strength had a deterrent effect, in increasing the risk of arrest and thus depressing offending rates. Figure 2.7 shows trends in the number of people accused of street offences over the period of the street crime epidemic.

a 29 per cent increase across the MPS area.

⁴⁶ See www.immobilise.com for details of the scheme. 440,000 stolen sets had been rendered useless by the scheme (*The Guardian* Tuesday March 4, 2003).

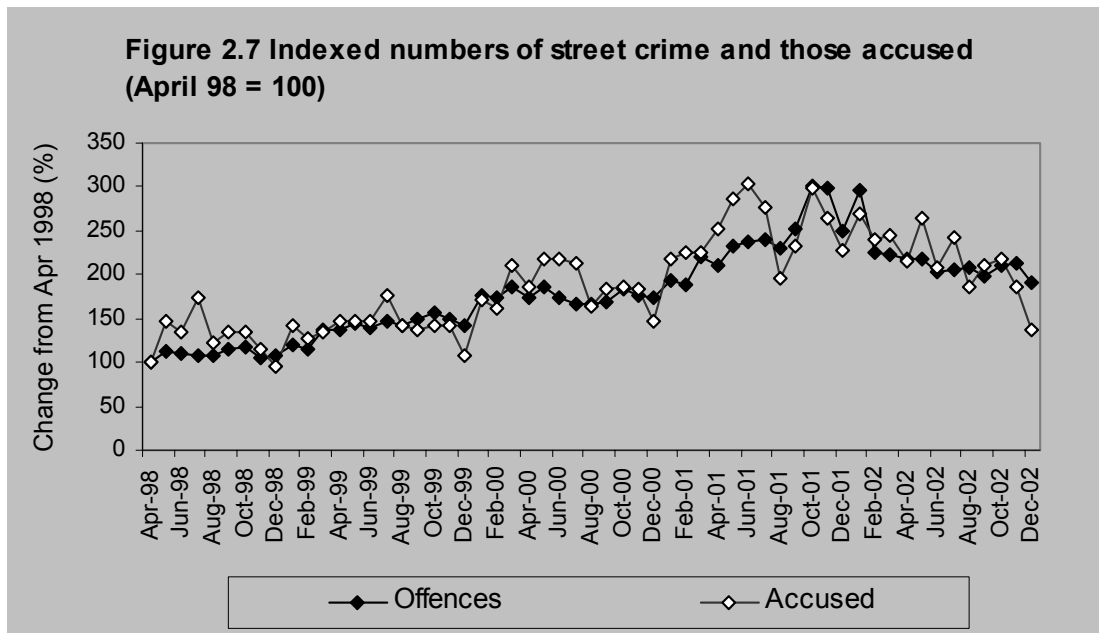


Figure 2.7 does not tell a straightforward story. It is clear that there was no surge in the number of people accused of street crime after the start of the Safer Streets Initiative. On the other hand, one of the months in 2001 with the highest number of arrests was October. It will be remembered that street offences peaked at the end of this month, after which they started to decline. This suggests more of a deterrence effect than an incapacitation effect: the latter would achieve an instantaneous effect – assuming that arrestees are remanded in custody – whilst the former might have a more lagged effect. The risk run by street offenders, as measured by the ratio of the number of accused to the number of recorded offences was at its highest in the first six months of 2001 – until the very steep ‘spike’ in numbers in October and November 2002. Whether this suggests a lagged deterrent effect of several months is hard to say. All that we can safely conclude is that further analysis of the arrest data is needed; in particular, it is important to differentiate between the overall arrest rate and the arrest rate for highly persistent offenders.

Was there functional displacement?

Assuming that the fall in street crime from late 2001 was at least in part a response to policing and linked initiatives, it is important to assess whether and to what extent any displacement occurred. This section considers the issue of functional displacement – that is, offenders shifting from street offences such as robbery to other crimes such as burglary or shoplifting as a response to the SCI and linked initiatives.

Figure 2.8 presents changes in crime levels for street crime and eight other offence categories into which street robbery might conceivably be displaced. It shows changes between the twelve months when street robbery was rising to its peak (November 2000 – October 2001) and the following twelve months. The ‘displacement offence categories’ were: residential and commercial burglary; commercial robbery; auto-crimes (theft of and from motor vehicles); shoplifting; pick-pocketing; common assault⁴⁷ and drug supply offences.⁴⁸

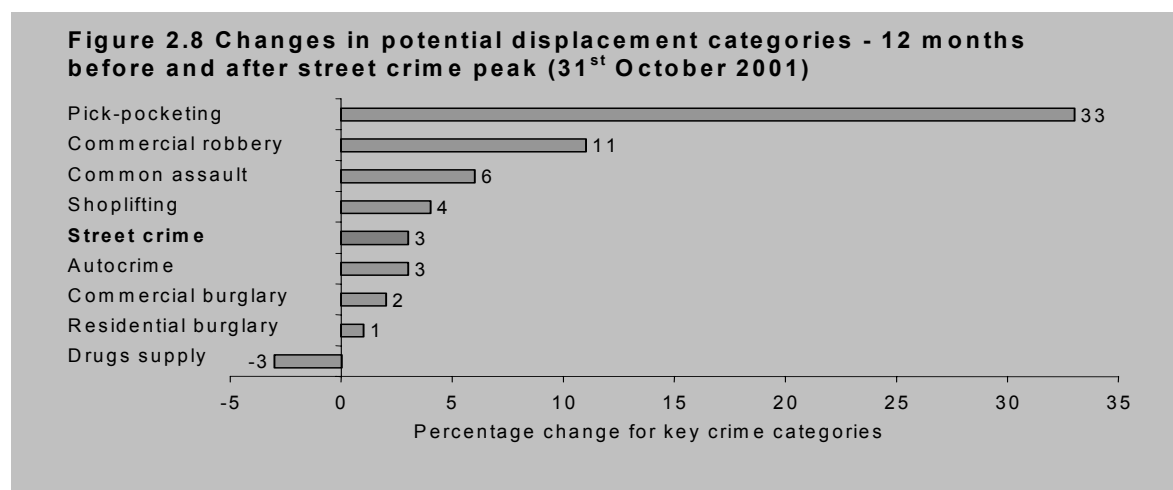


Figure 2.8 includes street crime, which shows a small increase of 3%. Within street crime, robbery of personal property fell by four per cent (from 44,855 to 43,180) while snatch thefts increased by 19 per cent (from 17,389 to 20,637). The assumption behind Figure 2.8 is that without the SCI, street crime would have continued in the twelve months from late 2001 at the levels which it had reached at that time. It is thus reasonable to look at trends in related offence categories, to check for functional displacement of the 25,000 to 35,000 street crimes which appear to have been prevented in the 5 months after February 2002.⁴⁹

Shoplifting, autocrime, commercial and residential burglary all showed small rises on the previous twelve month period (up 4%, 3%, 2% and 1% respectively). There was little in these trends to suggest functional displacement. Drug supply offences showed a small overall fall (-3%).

The largest percentage increases were for pick-pocketing (+33% from 24,294 to 32,310 offences, commercial robbery (+11% from 3,767 to 4,176 offences) and common assault

⁴⁷ Common assault was included as we had been informed by a senior police officer that crime reclassification by the police from attempted robberies to common assault was possible.

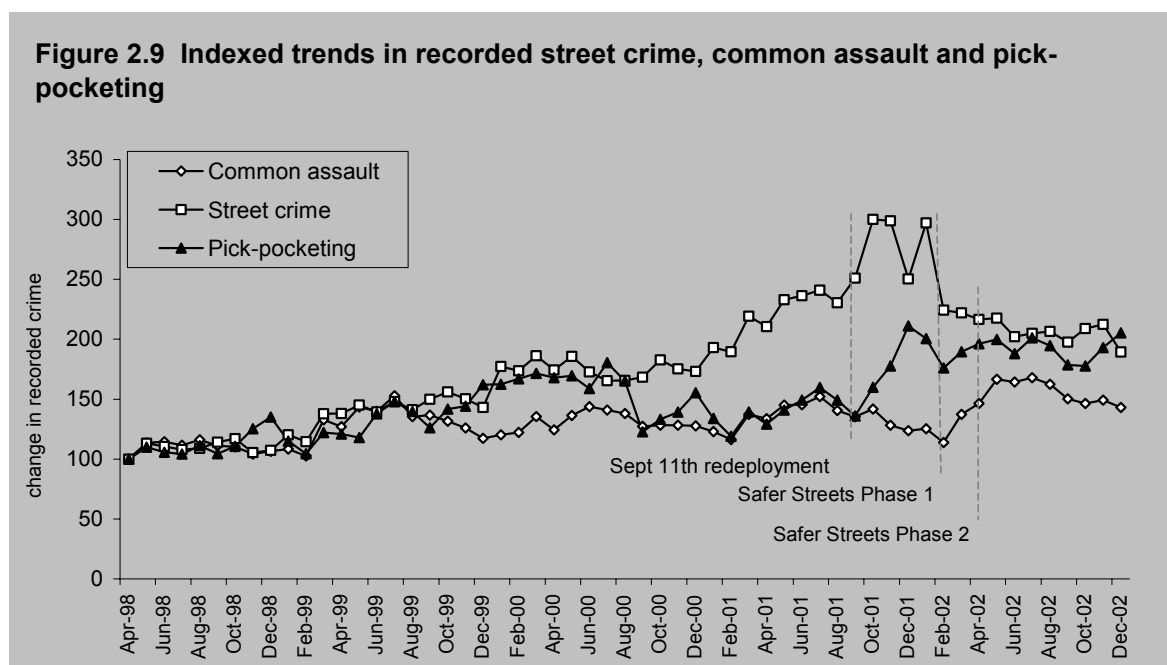
⁴⁸ Drug supply offences were included as these are an integral part of street offending.

⁴⁹ This estimate multiplied the average monthly number of offences during the peak street crime year (2001/02) by the number of months this study analysed after February 2002 (i.e. 5,830 x 5).

(+6%, from 77,219 to 81,901 offences). It is plausible that some of those previously involved in street crime may have been displaced to commercial robbery, but if this happened, it clearly did so on a very small scale.

Judging simply from the trends, pick-pocketing is a better candidate for functional displacement, as Figure 2.9 shows. It compares trends for street crime, common assault and pick-pocketing in the period before and immediately after the start of the Safer Streets Initiative. There was a discontinuity in the pick-pocketing that is the converse of trends for street crime in the period following the implementation of the SCI (February 2002).

Whether this reflects displacement is unclear. It is possible – though not very plausible – that those who had been committing robbery and snatch theft in 2000 and 2001 shifted their *modus operandi* to pick-pocketing in response to the SCI. It is equally possible – but not provable – that offences which would have been recorded as street crimes prior to November 2001 were being recorded as pick-pocketing thereafter.⁵⁰ Some support for this idea can be drawn from the fact that snatch thefts increased over this period by 19 per cent whilst personal robberies fell by four per cent. In other words, there may have been some changes in recording practice, with revisions both to the threshold between robbery and snatch theft and to the one between snatch theft and pick-pocketing.



⁵⁰ During field work several police inspectors, arrest referral workers and officials from the court service all reported heightened police sensitivity around the interpretation and recording of street crimes.

Common assault offences were characterised by pronounced seasonal trends peaking in the summer and declining during the winter months. The offence showed an exaggerated seasonal high for 2002.⁵¹ It seems likely that changes in police recording practices following the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standards (NCRS) from April 2002 provide an explanation.⁵² However, the steep rise coincided with the implementation of Safer Streets. We received some anecdotal evidence that this could have arisen as a result of variability in recording practice by officers keen to meet their street crime targets. Whilst it is implausible that a high-value robbery involving adult victims would be recorded as a common assault, it is quite possible that a low-value robbery – or an attempted robbery – committed by a teenager against a schoolmate would be recorded in this way.

In summary, therefore, we have found some evidence suggestive of ‘crime switching’ both within street crime categories and between street crime and pick-pocketing. However, as will be seen in Chapter 3, we found no support for functional displacement in our interviews with street offenders.

Was there geographic displacement?

Two sorts of complaint were made about the impact of the SCI in moving crime around London. The first was that street crime was driven from SCI boroughs to non-SCI ones. The other is that street crime was driven from the central and inner London boroughs to outer London. We have also tested for more local displacement, by examining changes in the proportions of ‘imported’ street offenders to each borough and by measuring changes in distances travelled to offend.

SCI and non-SCI boroughs

We have tested the first hypothesis by examining trends for the two groups of SCI and non-SCI boroughs. If the Street Crime Initiative displaced crime as suggested, trends should be broadly parallel up to early 2002 – or late 2001, if it is accepted that boroughs with high

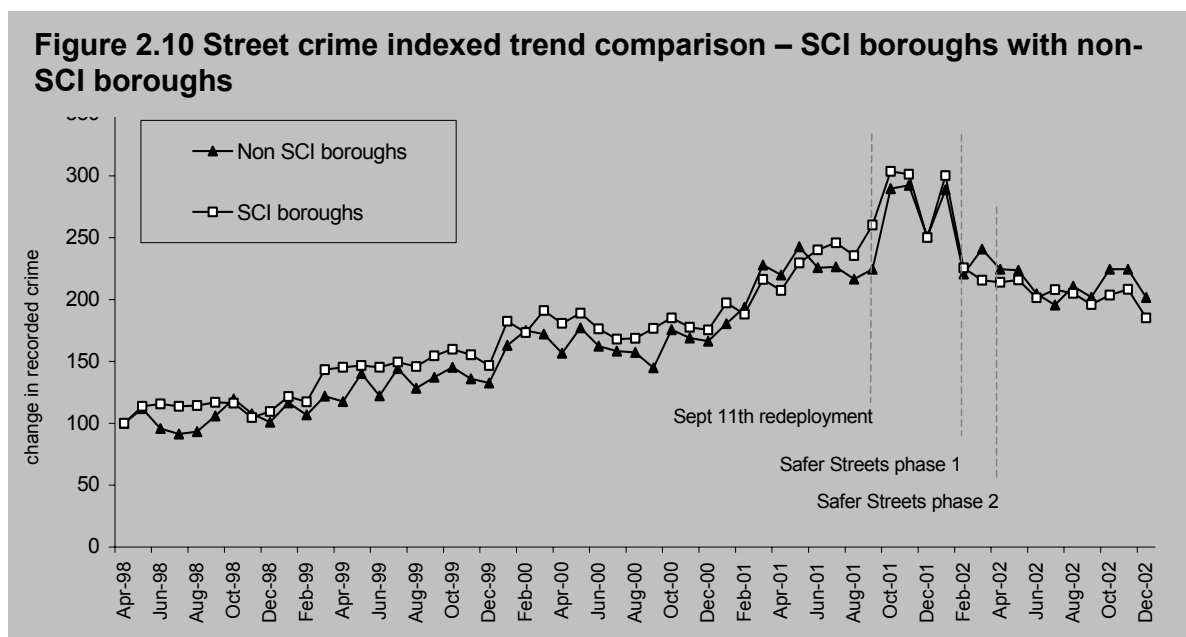
⁵¹ This was statistically significant at the 5% level with roughly 1,000 recorded per month compared to the previous year’s average. See appendix figure A 2.4.

⁵² Home Office analysis suggested the Metropolitan Police Service were likely to have experienced a 20% increase in ‘violence against the person’ as a consequence of NCRS (Simmons *et al*, 2003 HORS 32/03)

levels of street crime anticipated the SCI. Thereafter they should fall in the SCI boroughs, and rise elsewhere.

As Figure 2.10 shows, trends for street crime in both SCI and non-SCI boroughs were remarkably similar, although the SCI boroughs showed marginally higher rates of increase in 2001, and marginally steeper falls following the SCI implementation. However the differences are very small – no larger than the fluctuations between 1998 and 2000 – and it is hard to sustain a case that the SCI displaced street crime into non-SCI boroughs.

The similarity in trends between SCI and non-SCI boroughs can be attributed to a number of factors including a possible diffusion of SCI benefits, parallel enforcement action in non-SCI boroughs, and changes in the opportunities for street crime. The agreement by the five major mobile phone providers to introduce a system in November 2002 that would bar lost or stolen handsets would obviously have affected non-SCI boroughs as much as SCI ones.

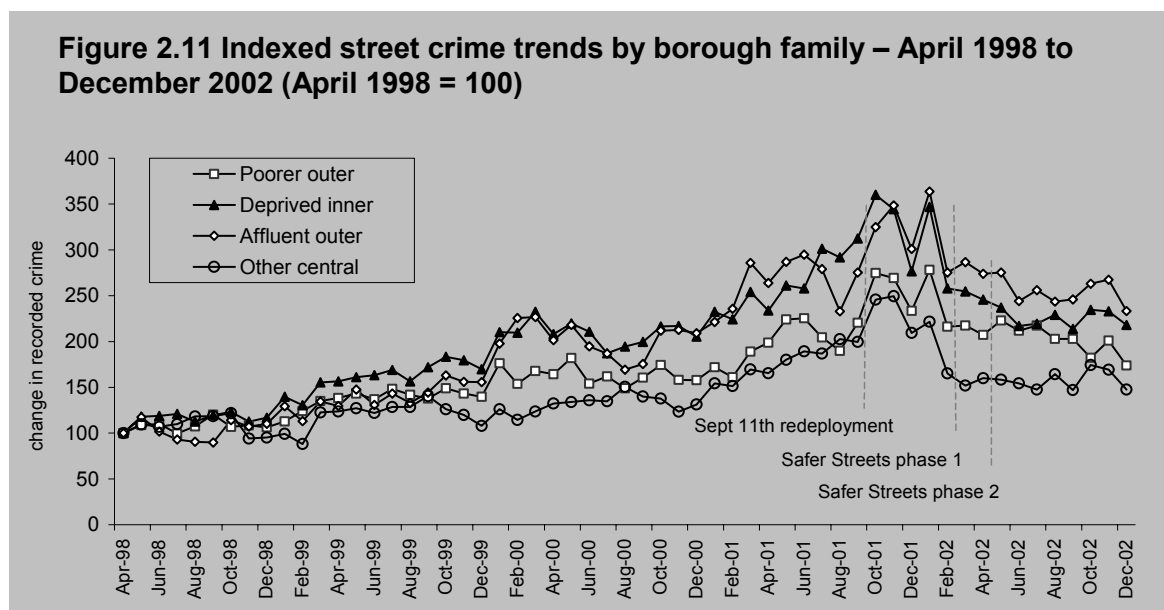


Displacement from inner to outer London

Did the SCI have the effect of pushing crime from inner to outer London? We have studied this by examining trends in four ‘family groupings’ of boroughs derived from Office of National Statistics (ONS).⁵³ deprived inner; poorer outer; affluent outer and central boroughs.

⁵³ Deprived inner boroughs consisted; Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Newham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets. Other central boroughs consisted; Camden, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Wandsworth and Westminster. Poorer outer boroughs consisted; Brent, Ealing, Greenwich, Haringey, Lewisham, Waltham Forest and Barking & Dagenham. Affluent outer boroughs were; Bexley, Barnet, Bromley, Croydon, Enfield, Hillingdon, Havering, Harrow, Hounslow, Kingston, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond and Sutton.

Figure 2.11 shows trends for these four area types for the period April 1998 to December 2002.



In terms of *levels* of street crimes, there were sharp variations between boroughs. For example, street crimes rates in 2001/02 were 17 per 1,000 population in deprived inner boroughs, 11 per 1,000 in central boroughs, 10 per 1,000 in poorer outer boroughs and 4 per 1,000 in affluent outer boroughs. In terms of *trends*, however, the similarities were greater than the differences, especially in the period from September 2001. Nevertheless from 2001 to 2002 the affluent outer boroughs showed a shallower decline than other families, and the central boroughs showed the steepest decline.

Examination of weekly crime trends by borough family classification showed that there was an increase in street crime for each family group around mid September 2001. There were variations in the week that the general sustained increases (to October) started - as summarised in Table 2.1.

Borough family	No. of SCI boroughs	Start of sustained rise in street crime	Peak in street crime	Date street crime levels off
Deprived inner	6 of 6	2 nd week July 01	4 th week Oct	3 rd week Feb 02
Outer central	3 of 5	2 nd week Sep 01	4 th week Oct	2 nd week Mar 02
Outer poorer	5 of 8	4 th week July 01	4 th week Oct	3 rd week Feb 02
Affluent outer	1 of 14	1 st week Aug 01	4 th week Oct	4 th week Mar 02

In all the areas, street crime had started to decrease roughly three months before the introduction of Safer Streets in February 2002. The four borough families seemingly had street crime levels consistently suppressed (approximately 15% drop in volume) at different dates ranging between late February to late March 2002. The October 31st peak for street crime in London can be largely attributed to all families peaking in the same week but especially to the higher volume deprived inner and other central boroughs having four-year high levels of offending during that specific month.

Table 2.2 examines changes in the proportion of offenders from the 32 boroughs that offended outside their borough of residence using data from two financial years (2000/01 and 2001/02). Non-resident offenders from SCI boroughs remained consistent across both years at eight per cent (280 out of the 3,718 accused).

Borough family	2000/01		2001/02	
	% of non-resident offenders	No. of non-resident offenders	% of non-resident offenders	No. of non-resident offenders
Deprived inner	12	164	12	196
Other central	37	314	37	333
Poorer outer	18	282	19	266
Affluent outer	33	445	38	577

Table 2.2 demonstrates that both the deprived inner and other central families have similar proportions of non-resident offenders for both years while the poorer and affluent outer boroughs experienced an increase (1% and 5% respectively). Although the proportion of non-resident offenders increased slightly in poorer outer boroughs, numerically they actually fell. Although the percentage increase in resident offenders for affluent outer boroughs was

fairly small the actual increase in numbers was significant (30%). This may have been the result of some offenders relocating to seemingly 'less hot' areas during the SCI implementation period (see Chapter 3).

Local displacement

Whilst we have found little evidence for systematic geographic displacement across boroughs, there is a distinct possibility that the SCI might have displaced offenders within their local areas. This would not necessarily be evident in an analysis of displacement between types of boroughs, whether defined by family or by participation in the SCI. To test for this, we examined the length of 'journeys to work' made by offenders, on the assumption that other things being equal, they would always minimise journey time. The journey to work is defined as the distance between offenders' homes and the location of the offence.

To determine whether local displacement occurred, travel distances between an offender's home location and place of offence were compared for two calendar years (2001 and 2002). Information was examined on 1,687 individuals who had been accused and proceeded against in five SCI boroughs: Westminster (20% of cases); Islington (6%); Hackney (25%); Southwark (27%) and Lambeth (23%). Table 2.3 shows average distances travelled 'to work' and respective changes between the two years.

Borough	Average distance travelled 2001 (km)	Average distance travelled 2002 (km)	Change in distance travelled (km)
Westminster	5.4	6.4	1.0
Islington	2.8	3.1	0.3
Southwark	2.6	2.7	0.1
Lambeth	2.3	2.3	0.0
Hackney	2.7	2.3	-0.4

Taking the five boroughs together there was a small increase in the average distance travelled to work from 3km to 3.4km between 2001 and 2002. However, there was also some variation across the sites⁵⁴. Offenders resident in Westminster showed the largest average increase from 5.4 to 6.4km. Islington and Southwark showed marginal increases

⁵⁴ Only Westminster showed significant difference where 'distance to work' averages were compared between 2001 and 2002 (T Test).

while Lambeth remained static and Hackney showed a minor contraction. The fact that these two boroughs showed little change could be a function of the limited public transport facilities there, especially in Hackney⁵⁵.

The distance travelled for both component offences of street crime extended during the period. Robbery of personal property increased from 2.9 to 3.2km and snatch theft grew from 4.4 to 4.7km. Those accused of robbery of personal property were more likely to offend closer to home when compared to offenders undertaking snatch theft. In 2002, 39 per cent (225) of robbery personal property was under 1km from home, compared to 24 per cent (22) for snatch theft. The proportion of those offending over 3km increased for both offence categories largely shifting from the 1-3km distance range. The evidence for geographic displacement in this analysis is consistent with the results of our interviews with offenders, discussed in the next chapter.

Finally, we compared the spatial distribution of street crime in the twelve months preceding the epidemic's peak, in October 2001 (Figure 2.12) with the distribution over the following twelve months (Figure 2.13). The displacement hypothesis would be consistent with a reduction in the intensity of hotspots, and a diffusion of street crime into the outer London boroughs⁵⁶. The two locations with the highest density remain the same for each period - Westminster (West End) and Lambeth (Brixton).⁵⁷

After 31st October 2001 the levels of street crime started to fall, but the overall volume of street crime in the two twelve-month periods was comparable. It can be seen that there is remarkably little difference in the distribution of crime over the two periods. There are signs of expansion of street crime into Ealing and Croydon, but otherwise, the pattern is similar.

⁵⁵ Hackney is not connected to the London underground network.

⁵⁶ The darker shading represents those areas with a relatively high density of offending over the period concerned. They do not indicate the actual numbers of offences that have occurred to generate the hotspots.

⁵⁷ However, robbery hotspots changed when examining youths accused e.g. Croydon and Hackney.

Figure 2.12 Street crime hotspots in 12 months before 31st October 2001



Figure 2.13 Street crime hotspots 12 months after 31st October 2001



Chapter summary

There was a large and progressive increase in street crime between April 1998 and late 2001. This increase was substantially accounted for by robberies involving mobile phones. In a large minority of these offences, both the victim and the offender were aged sixteen or less. The increase in street crime became more rapid in the period immediately following 9/11, when uniformed police were re-deployed to locations in Westminster and the City of London that offered 'symbolic' targets to terrorists.

The rise in street robbery peaked in late October 2001, and started to fall three months before the implementation of Safer Streets in February 2002. This may be due to a combination of factors:

- the police had already taken action to respond to rising street crime throughout 2001
- mobile phone users may have taken more care when using their phones in public
- the attractiveness of mobile phones as a hot product may have waned

Although the SCI could not have *triggered* the reversal of the trend in street robbery, it might well have accelerated it. It also seems likely that mobile phones began to lose their status as 'hot products' throughout 2002, not least because providers began to bar calls on their networks that involved handsets that were recorded as lost or stolen.⁵⁸

There is little persuasive evidence of functional displacement, with street offenders switching to other categories of crime; however it is possible that some changes occurred to police recording practice in response to the initiative. There was a pronounced increase in levels of common assault from February 2002 across London. While this coincided with Safer Streets, the change was more likely explained by revised NCRS in April 2002. Pick-pocketing demonstrated uncharacteristic steep increases from late summer 2001 that persisted after the SCI phase one. This could possibly indicate a small degree of functional displacement from street crime, though again, it is possible that some shift occurred in the way in which crimes were recorded. Domestic and other burglary, auto-crime, drug crime and shop theft all demonstrated stable trends.

There was no evidence of large-scale displacement from SCI boroughs to non SCI boroughs, or from inner to outer boroughs. However there is evidence to suggest more local displacement, as offenders' average 'journey to work' increased in three of the five SCI boroughs where this was examined.

⁵⁸ There is a strong possibility that such action had the greatest impact on young offenders.

Chapter 3: Explaining the trends – offenders’ perspectives

This chapter discusses street criminals’ offending motivation, their *operating methods* and *levels of awareness* of police procedures. It also outlines *their practical responses to policing*, including geographical and functional displacement. The chapter draws on interviews with 73 offenders who had been involved in street crime.⁵⁹ Respondents included 43 imprisoned street offenders and 10 imprisoned drug sellers, 12 young offenders and 8 dependent drug users in the community. The average age of those in custody was 22 for males (age range 15-46) and 27 for females (age range 20-31). Of the 6,497 accused of street crime offences in London (2001-2002), 13% (831) were female. Females were therefore proportionally represented in the current study.⁶⁰ Despite there being an over-representation of Black street offenders in prison, our sample was ethnically diverse.⁶¹

Motivational factors: offenders’ perspectives

Most interviewees had a casual approach to their offending and many were often unable to pinpoint reasons for committing offences when asked (28/73). Of those who offered explanations, the need for money and/or material goods was a common explanation (36/73). Among offenders of all ages, robbery was considered as a ‘quick and easy’ crime involving little planning.⁶² Drug sellers reported that they earned more money compared to those involved in robbery and as such found it more difficult to stop offending.

Within the youngest age group (15-17 years), apart from financial gain, street crime tended to be associated with peer-group status and pressure. Committing robberies was explicitly described by a number in this group (5 of 12) as a ‘survival’ strategy, which possibly compensated for their limited legitimate access to material wealth.⁶³ Street crime was also about fitting in with street culture. As one teenage offender explained, *[it is] all about*

⁵⁹ See methodology.

⁶⁰ The interview sample included 11 female street offenders which accounted for 15 per cent of the total.

⁶¹ Overall, 45% of the sample were white, 26% described themselves as Black British, 18% as Black Caribbean and 11% as mixed race.

⁶² Respondents’ motivations for robbery concurred largely with other studies. Their ‘rational decision’ to commit street robbery as opposed to other offences such as burglary has been explained in terms of the rapidity and ease with which robbery can be committed and lack of planning required (Hallsworth, 2002). For the most part, violence used during robberies was instrumental – to ensure the victim passes goods over quickly and to deter resistance.

⁶³ Several young respondents reported feeling materially deprived as they were unable to purchase desirable ‘lifestyle’ goods.

ego...you are walking around with a couple of guys, you see someone not as strong as you, your boys are egging you on, it is just to build yourself'.

The low status that older offenders attached to street offences became evident. They considered it an activity characteristic of their early teenage years, and among drug dependent robbers, it was considered something that they had 'resorted to' as a result of the sense of desperation that drugs provoked.

The oldest member of the sample, who was 46, had been an armed robber for most of his criminal career but had become addicted to heroin whilst serving a long prison sentence and upon release had become dependent on crack cocaine. At the time of interview, he had been convicted of a violent street robbery, committed outside a crack house. This respondent described street robbery as a '*despicable crime*' and said he felt deeply ashamed that he had been convicted for this particular offence. Street robbery, as he explained, was considered by prisoners to be a low-level, cowardly offence committed by juveniles and/or '*crack-heads*'.

Offenders' lifestyles

The most striking aspect in the lives of young offenders, was a lack of stability in home life, and poor parental supervision, often provided by a single parent⁶⁴. Through street offending, young offenders appeared to seek ways in which they could accentuate an image of toughness. This inevitably affected the choice of clothes that they wore and engendered an aggressive demeanour and attitude. Within the social circles that the offenders moved in, it was considered 'macho' to rob from others in order to buy 'cool' accoutrements. These symbols of belonging within the youth culture appear to be designer clothes, watches and the latest technology (mobile phones, and personal music players). For teenage males, the desire to impress adolescent girls was strong; many young prisoners expressed the desire to 'keep their woman happy' by providing them with money gained from robberies and other expensive items.

Behind the male bravado, and 'street talk', it was plausible that some offenders simply wanted to provide desirable goods for their home and families. Consider the following comment, where a young street offender discusses the items that he was able to buy following several robberies: '*I bought a computer, a big screen TV, I looked after my family, my mum, I was just trying my best, my mum told me to be careful*'. This teenager's remark

sheds light on how parents may perceive themselves to be in situations of financial hardship and tacitly condone their children's illicit activities.

The findings of this study confirmed those of others: that many young offenders, perhaps unsurprisingly, give a rational, instrumental account of their offending (Burney, 1990; Barker *et al*, 1993; Hallsworth, 2002; FitzGerald *et al*, 2003).

Female interviewees were more likely than males to offend in order to fund a drug dependency.⁶⁵ Drug dependency was much lower among male offenders (8/11 females interviewed compared to 15/62 males).

Previous research has shown that little formal planning takes place among robbers especially when choosing offence locations, victim selection, offending methods and escape routes (see Gill, 2000).⁶⁶ However, respondents did appear to take account of the risks and opportunities presented by their environments. For example, some of the younger offenders mentioned the top deck of the 'old style' double-decker bus as a popular offence location for snatch theft. The explanation given was that they often lacked any effective supervisory presence from conductors, the driver is concealed from bus users and crucially the door-less design of the buses allowed a quick exit.

As other studies have found, most street offenders (drug dependent or otherwise) do not plan their offences to any large degree. They are *opportunists* who act on the spur of the moment and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves in the course of daily 'routine activities' (Burney, 1990; Barker *et al*, 1993; Wiles and Costello, 2000; FitzGerald *et al*, 2003). Within the current study, it was possible to identify that robbery was committed spontaneously by more than half the total sample (39/73). Offenders frequently made comments such as '*if I see something I like, I take it*', a comment which indicates an opportunistic approach to theft.

There are of course differing levels of opportunism. Snatch theft is opportunistic almost by definition as clearly visible goods are targeted by the offender. Personal robbery requires

⁶⁴ Of the 12 young offenders interviewed, only two lived with both parents with the remainder residing in single parent households with their mothers.

⁶⁵ When street offenders were drug dependent, they appeared to be dual drug users, addicted to crack and heroin.

⁶⁶ Gill (2000) asked commercial robbers about the level of planning that had been conducted prior to their offences. He asked offenders among other things whether they had visited the target area earlier, kept the target under surveillance, worn a disguise, chosen the specific time of day and time,

more judgement about the potential yield that a target represents and about the levels of resistance that might be offered. Table 3.1 sets out a typology of offenders in our sample, sketching lifestyles and operating methods.

Operating Methods

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their operating methods. We specifically focused on whether they offended individually or in groups, how they targeted victims, how weapons were used and locations of offending.

Individual vs. group offending

The majority of respondents tended to offend in groups. Young respondents (in the their early and late teens) were more likely to offend with others, rather than by themselves. Reasons given for sole offending were, not having to watch someone else's back and no chance of being 'grassed up' by co-offenders to the police. None of the interview sample were members of any formal, structured criminal gang. It could be inferred from interviews with drug using offenders in the community that they often worked alone for street crime out of necessity, because of the social isolation that a drug dependent lifestyle could involve.

location, paid attention to its security measures. Most commercial robbers had taken a few steps but that was all.

Table 3.1. Offender typologies

Offender Typology	Lifestyle characteristics	Planning involved with offences			Profile of offending	Offending mobility
		No/little planning	Short-term tactical planning	Long-term planning		
Youths (15-17 years old, mostly male)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly recreational drug users School children/truants Unemployed 	✓			'Petty' opportunist group offending	Highly localised
Female sex workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly drug dependent 		✓	✓	On street sexual services and "clipping" involving soliciting men for sex, demanding money "up front" and stealing it.	Highly mobile - Occasionally shifting street sex markets
Persistent male offenders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hedonist consumers, desiring credible accessories and clothes More inclined to violence than other street robbers Likely to be involved in other types of acquisitive crime 	✓	✓		Irregular offending and fatalistic outlook Viewed personal robbery as 'easy money'.	Highly mobile – uses all forms of transport, will also steal cars to increase mobility.
Male and female dependent drug users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generalist – would also commit shoplifting, thefts, fraud, robbery and "clipping" Both male and female likely to be dependent on crack cocaine and/or heroin 	✓		✓	Desperate and opportunistic regarding immediate method of offending but lifestyle orientated around funding any dependency.	Variable – may possibly travel further afield for reasons such as the availability of cheaper drugs in certain boroughs or in search of crack houses.
Male drug sellers (mostly over 20 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful street dealers attempt to exhibit relatively expensive lifestyle User/sellers may live in abject poverty 		✓	✓	Long-term and tactical in trying to operate around illicit markets.	High degree of both macro and micro mobility – typically in possession of a vehicle and mobile phone and thus able to travel if required.

Victim selection

Typically, offenders claimed that they targeted young men, particularly those with a smaller physique than the offender, those who seem to be 'well-off' or 'suited up', equipped with laptops and 'decent' mobiles and individuals who appear drunk at the time (hence more vulnerable). Several young offenders mentioned that they often target those from the Indian and Pakistani communities in the belief that they were more likely to wear gold jewellery. It seemed that anyone who 'flashed things about' was an attractive target.

The majority of street offenders (66/73) stated that they would never target vulnerable victims such as the elderly, pregnant women or young children.⁶⁷ Several black offenders said that they would never commit robbery against other black people. The vast majority (56/62) of male respondents said they would 'never touch a woman' and female robbers were as adamant as male robbers about not targeting the vulnerable. One argued that it was unprincipled to use a weapon in a way that would potentially 'scar' anyone.⁶⁸ It is unlikely that, when motivated to offend, offenders are as principled as they claimed. On the whole, offenders exhibited a confused view of what it meant to possess a personal value system.

Use of weapons

Possession of a weapon suggests prior motivation and planning, though weapons could also be carried for self-protection. In a recent study on robbery, Smith (2003) reported that a third (33%) of his sample used weapons or had them displayed during the offence. Knives were the most frequently used weapons, accounting for 21 per cent of robberies. For the most part, both actual and threatened violence used during robberies was considered to be instrumental – to ensure quick victim compliance and deter any resistance (Hallsworth, 2002).

A common view held by interviewees of all ages, was that weapons would only actually be used against *victims* in 'worse case' scenarios, which they defined as situations where victims refuse to hand over property and/or an offender needs to deter the interference of 'heroes'.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Robbing from these vulnerable groups was viewed as a 'cowardly' thing to do.

⁶⁸ Drug dependent offenders admitted that, despite being aware that there were certain moral boundaries that they would normally adhere to when selecting a victim, while withdrawing from drugs they often 'did not care about anything' and committed violent and reckless crimes. Drug dependent robbers interviewed in the community generally felt that crack cocaine users in particular would not 'waste time' targeting particular victims.

⁶⁹ This is a term used by offenders to describe members of the public who intervene in a robbery in progress in an attempt to come to the aid of a victim.

When asked about the nature of the street offence that they were currently incarcerated for, 12/53 interviewees admitted to having a weapon with them at the time of the current offence. Offenders were generally reluctant to discuss the extent to which they 'used' these weapons on victims, and were more likely to admit that weapons were used as a threat, to frighten victims into relinquishing their belongings. For example, one 22-year-old offender, describing the offence for which he had been imprisoned, commented that he was driving with friends when he spotted a young man, at which point he, *'got out, pointed at his neck with my knife and asked him for his pin number'*.

Some of the younger sample (3/12) stated they had carried a knife, although, they insisted it was for their own protection. Older offenders were more likely to say they owned replica firearms; only one offender admitted to possessing a genuine firearm. In general respondents held the view that violence was more likely to occur when offences were conducted by dependent drug users – especially those using crack cocaine, a view echoed in interviews with professionals (see Chapter 4).

Offence location

Rather than choose specific locations in which to offend, most interviewees described themselves as roaming in an unplanned, opportunistic fashion, in the hope that 'something comes along'. It became clear, however, that as a group, these offenders tended to offend in their own areas and *did* make assessments regarding travelling elsewhere on the basis of the perceived wealth of victims and the prospect of more lucrative gains.

Awareness of police tactics

To gauge how offenders perceived the SCI we asked offenders about their knowledge of the SCI and whether it had affected their behaviour.

The vast majority of had never heard of any national initiatives to tackle street crime. Only three of the interviewees said they had heard of the SCI, from mentions on television. Nevertheless, there was some awareness that risks of arrest and imprisonment had increased. A small number said that their friends had been arrested, remanded or convicted to custody. The perception that 'everyone is banged up' convinced some offenders that the police were becoming 'stronger' and were more effective. As one respondent stated *'they {police} are getting there... two years ago, they could not do shit to us'* (21 year old male). A small number of respondents (9/73) developed a sense that the police were attempting to

combat street crime via the media, *'I see it on the news, people are getting sent down, people who got previous'*.

Some older offenders, particularly, those in their late twenties and thirties, appeared to be aware of the nature of police activity within their own immediate areas. Their knowledge extended to the shift times of the local robbery squad, the location of the local police station, the number of traffic warden and/or community safety officers and the positioning of CCTV cameras in local stores. However, this knowledge was certainly not borough-wide, and only a small number of prolific offenders knew enough to be able to plan around specific police operations targeting street crime in their home boroughs.. The police tactic that respondents said had the greatest impact on offender behaviour was *high visibility policing* – although most drug sellers claimed to be undeterred by police activities. They felt that at worst, high visibility policing could slow their drug selling activity for a short period.

The vast majority of offenders (67/73) were not aware of an increase in police activity in the aftermath of September 11th 2001 in the *centre* of London. Equally, they were not aware of any decrease in police presence elsewhere in London. Only a small number (6/73) referred to this. Three of the six were persistent female street offenders who operated in central London. As one commented, *'you couldn't go earning anywhere'* and made observations such as, *'security as gone sky high, cameras have gone sky high, you ain't getting away with it after September 11th'*.

A majority of street offenders (41/73) claimed that situational crime prevention measures such as CCTV cameras had little or no deterrent effect. Apart from a small number of female offenders, most interviewees held the view that CCTV did not work properly.⁷⁰ Even when they did, the pictures that they produced were of such a poor quality as to be ineffective for the purposes of police identification, especially since it was commonplace for offenders to disguise their appearance. This view applied to both street and transport CCTV cameras.

Responding to policing: geographic displacement

Although, the sample showed little awareness of the consequences of September 11th on policing and of the subsequent SCI, they were nevertheless sensitive to, and preoccupied about, local police activity, and did as much as they could to avoid detection.

⁷⁰ A small number of offenders cited the Stephen Lawrence trial when discussing the effectiveness of CCTV cameras. In the Stephen Lawrence case, the CCTV camera, located at the spot where Stephen was murdered was not functioning at the time (Macpherson, 1999)

Street crime offenders

In total 53 respondents reported involvement in robbery of personal property and snatch theft offences. Two-thirds (37) of these committed the offence for which they had been imprisoned within their home borough. The majority (42/53) said they had committed offences more than two boroughs away from their home and one fifth (11/53) stated they had offended in neighbouring areas.

The modes of transport that offenders used determined the distances they travelled to offend around London. When asked about which form of transport offenders used, (18/53) claimed to travel by (stolen) car. Of these offenders, some described the scenario of travelling to a neighbouring area, committing a robbery and then returning home in stolen car that was subsequently used again to travel around in with friends.⁷¹ Just over half of the offenders (28/53) claimed to use *all modes* of transport to move around London, including public transport, bicycles, motorcycles, or on foot.

Drug sellers

In general, both drug sellers and street crime offenders considered the SCI, to have had little impact on their activities.⁷² As in the case of street robbery, the police tactic that caused most disruption (albeit short-lived) to drug markets was high visibility policing. This finding confirmed that of previous studies on drug markets and enforcement activity (Edmunds *et al*, 1996; May *et al*, 2000:31; Lupton *et al*, 2002).

More than half of the drug sellers interviewed possessed only a scant knowledge of police initiatives to target their activities and remained largely unperturbed by the threat. This finding correlates with that of Best *et al*, (2001) who found that despite the large scale nature of one police operation into drug dealing, more than two-thirds of drug users living in the target areas for Operation Crackdown had not noticed changes in the price of drugs.⁷³ Also, there were no significant differences in awareness of increased police activity between the areas affected by the operation and those from sites not included in the operation. Their findings did not support the idea that heroin, cannabis or crack markets are sensitive to

⁷¹ Offenders refer to stolen cars that have been disguised through number plate changes as 'clones'.

⁷² Both drug sellers and police agreed that drug selling would never be eradicated and all the police could do was to disrupt a market for short periods of time. Police views, are presented in Chapter 4.

⁷³ Operation Crackdown targeted dealers and users of Class "A" drugs across Haringey. Crackdown was a partnership operation and involved colleagues in Health, Haringey Local Authority and Education as well as the voluntary sector.

increased police activity (ibid: 744). Although the operation was reckoned to be a success by the MPS, it seems to have had little impact on the drug markets across the drug using population in London, over and above the normal policing pressures to which drug sellers were exposed.

When the activities of drug sellers were displaced into other areas, it was mostly into streets a short distance away. Three drug dependent interviewees in the community commented upon a highly publicised drugs operation (through posters and media coverage) 'to get the smack and crack out of Brixton'. This group claimed that as a result, Brixton drugs markets were largely displaced to neighbouring community, *'Brixton was dead and it had just been shifted down the road to Camberwell'*. Mobile phone technology had clearly facilitated the ease with which drug sellers were able to adapt to increased police presence on the streets.

Displacement and offender lifestyles

The strongest picture that emerged from focus groups with young offenders (aged 14-16) in the community and interviews with those in prison was that of their daily lives and routines. A typical day for a street offender appeared to involve little or no routine staying at different friends or family members' houses and playing truant from school. Social activities were dominated by smoking cannabis, listening to music, watching videos and spending time with friends. Street offending was a consequence of unstable lifestyles, containing few positive influences and characterised by general levels of poverty and deprivation. Travelling on public transport during the day with friends became for many 'something to do' to relieve boredom. One offender expressed the sense of drift in these offenders' lives, *'every day is different, I get on the train, the tube, the bus and then maybe back on the train'*.

Respondents mostly travelled to nearby boroughs to offend on their own, such as Lambeth into Croydon and Bromley and Camden and Brent into Westminster. For those who travelled, the most frequently cited destinations included the West End and major train stations such as Waterloo.⁷⁴ Respondents stated that the advantages of travelling further afield were that police were considered to be fewer in number and their ability to react would be much slower than in the centre of London.

Interviewees who reported travelling longer distances to offend were among the oldest offenders in the sample. Among the younger age group, these offenders had often

constituted those who had been excluded from school and/or expelled from the family home. Among older offenders, those who travelled could be characterised as the most persistent, determined offenders who thought of their offending in terms of a 'career'. Older offenders were more likely to travel out of their local boroughs but still to specific places with reputations for 'rich pickings' such as the West End of London.⁷⁵

One finding related to how (teenage) offenders decided on the locations to travel to showed nearly all offenders had lived in the borough to which they travelled at some point in the past. However, offenders reported avoiding areas where they were 'well-known' or in trouble with other criminal associates. This reiterated Wiles and Costello (2002) who also noted that most offending is localised and commented upon the popularity of (stolen) cars as a mode of transport if offenders wanted to be more mobile.

Another factor facilitating offender movement, was hearing from other offenders that a particular place was 'easy' (i.e. lacking in police presence) Conversely respondents' decisions to move around the city appeared to be inhibited by factors linked with territoriality (for example, one offender from Hackney claimed that he '*would not been seen dead*' in the adjacent area of Islington on the basis of neighbourhood rivalries between groups of young men).

Among offenders who had been arrested outside their own areas, explanations for travelling-to-offend were *unrelated* to displacement. Instead, some offending had taken place in the course of other 'routine activities' such as visiting friends or places. As Wiles and Costello (2000) suggested, offender patterns can be largely driven by such activities and do not have lives 'in which offending and non-offending routines are straightforwardly dichotomised' (ibid: 40). Offending therefore, fits in with other routines as opportunities, needs or temptations present themselves and routines themselves can include both deviant and non-deviant behaviour.

On the whole, offenders appeared to have a *limited awareness* regarding police operations against street crime. The vast majority of street offenders were only deterred from working in

⁷⁴ In general, offenders travelled in search of 'wealthy' victims such as businessmen. Waterloo station was popular for example because of the *Eurostar* service that departs from that station and the affluent passengers that it supposedly attracts.

⁷⁵ London's 'West End' was the most frequently cited destination among offenders that they would travel to in order to carry out street robberies, when unable to do so in their own areas. This area is noted for its entertainment areas, bars and restaurants. Given the area's popularity with tourists and bustling nightlife, it is highly conceivable that this area will always be a magnet for offenders who are prepared to travel-to-offend.

an area if the police presence was particularly visible. Then, as one offender remarked, *'you have to think harder about where to offend'*. In direct response to high visibility policing in London, the small number of more prolific offenders in the sample admitted to travelling significant distances. One offender had travelled from London to Reading, *'where there are plenty of shopping centres and it is quiet'*, from inner London to East Anglia where *'no-one knows me'* and from Lambeth to more affluent areas such as Hastings in Sussex, where it was expected that *'people have more money'*.

The most persistent 'dedicated' offenders in the sample attributed any lack of geographical displacement to sheer 'laziness' on the part of other offenders, claiming that *'[in general], they could not be bothered to make the effort'*.

Responding to policing: functional displacement

The only evidence from the interviews for functional displacement related, ironically, to offenders – some of them women – who claimed to have switched from burglary and armed robberies to committing snatch thefts, shoplifting and street robbery. Their rationale was the avoidance of tougher sentences currently imposed for burglary following implementation of the 1996 Crime (Sentences) Act in 1999.⁷⁶

A minority of offenders, predominantly women, described how difficult offending had become in the aftermath of September 11th 2001 in London. One offender describing how the increased security affected her choice of offence locations, *'we had to lower our crime and go into silly little shops that we were not used to or pubs or things like that where there is not so much security'*. Another female remarked that, *'you had to avoid certain areas, no-go areas'* such as large train stations and airports.

Given the increased police presence in the West End following September 11th 2001, one persistent male offender felt that he was *'running out of options'*. There was some evidence that street robbers had alternated between burglaries, armed robberies and street offences, depending on the availability of opportunities that presented themselves at the time.

⁷⁶ Their decision to switch was probably a poor one, as the mandatory three-year burglary sentence that they faced was probably little different from the sentence that they would face if convicted of street robbery.

Chapter summary

The key findings that can be drawn from the interviews we conducted are as follows:

Street offenders

- Most respondents stated they were prepared to offend at any time of day, evening or night.
- Most offenders said they used a wide range of modes of transport to travel around London with stolen cars frequently cited.
- In contrast to younger offenders, their older counterparts reported a preference for offending alone.
- Younger offenders appeared to be largely motivated to commit robberies for material gain.

Drug sellers

- Drug sellers claimed to be largely unperturbed by police operations targeted against them.
- Most drug sellers had at best limited knowledge of the SCI but had some awareness of police operations targeting selling in their own areas.
- The redeployment of police post September 11th 2001 appears to have had very little effect on the activities of sellers that we interviewed.

Displacement

- Most street offending was committed within locations familiar to the offenders
- Persistent offenders said they were flexible in terms of their offending behaviour and more likely to travel greater distances specifically to offend.
- The police tactic which respondents said had the greatest impact on offender behaviour was *high visibility policing* – although most drug sellers claimed to be undeterred by police activities.
- Geographical displacement, when it occurred, was a result of: (a) offender being too well-known to police in offender's local area; (b) the perceived lower risks in other areas, especially those out of London; (c) an offender believing that he/she has 'exhausted' a local area in terms of crime opportunities
- Possible factors *inhibiting geographical displacement* included young people's sense of local kudos (offending to impress), and rivalries in other boroughs and also individuals lacking the required personal motivation to travel outside a known area.

- Functional displacement occurred only to a small degree in the interview sample⁷⁷. The reasons for crime switching were unrelated to the implementation of the SCI, but arose instead from the perceived threat of longer custodial penalties for burglaries.

Awareness of policing changes

- On the whole, street offenders appeared unaware of the SCI and were largely undeterred by anything other than increased police visibility on the streets. Nevertheless, there was some awareness that risks of arrest and imprisonment had increased.
- Only the most prolific offenders stated they had noticed increased police activity post September 11th 2001 and generally the redeployment appeared to have had little effect on offenders' decisions on where to commit offences.

⁷⁷ Interviews with convicted street and drug using offenders only provided limited information about functional displacement. Greater insight may have been gleaned from respondents involved in other acquisitive crimes. Research design and cost prohibited such investigation.

Chapter 4: Policing street crime: views from the Criminal Justice System

This chapter presents findings from interviews with key professionals working in criminal justice agencies associated with the SCI. In total, 48 interviews were conducted with representatives from the MPS, Probation Service, YOTs, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) and community groups.⁷⁸

The implementation of the SCI

Respondents expressed a range of opinions about the origin of the SCI. ‘Sceptics’ (mostly non-police respondents) tended to believe that the SCI was a product of political ‘spin-doctoring’ and government over-sensitivity to media coverage. ‘Enthusiasts’ (for the most part, senior police officers) welcomed the initiative and applauded the leadership and drive shown by the Government especially during early stages of the ‘Safer Streets’ campaign.

Respondents referred in particular to the initial development stages of the SCI. Senior police officers considered the personal involvement of the Prime Minister chairing the multi-agency forums as crucial to the whole process and consequently felt politically well supported in their efforts to tackle street crime.⁷⁹ They reported that it was during the consultative process that *‘the penny finally dropped’* with government officials, as they recognised the broad range of responses that the street crime problem required. In particular, respondents recalled how the government recognised the need for intensive policing *alongside* co-ordinated multi-agency working.

During the year when street crime peaked (2000-2001), respondents recalled that street offenders appeared to feel invulnerable to policing. Police also suggested that the Government had *‘no choice but to act’* in the face of soaring levels of street crime and contended that the intense media attention at the SCI launch had a dual effect of enhancing public awareness whilst reassuring an anxious public that *‘something was being done’*.

⁷⁸ ‘Community safety partnerships’ have been established for over a decade in some local authority areas. However, the statutory obligation on local authorities, the police and other local agencies to establish Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) was only imposed after the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

⁷⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, the Metropolitan Police area had been highlighted as one of the areas that accounted for the highest proportion of street crimes. As such, in the early stages of the

Although most police officers considered the SCI favourably, there were some criticisms. While welcoming additional resources targeted at SCI boroughs, five police interviewees expressed concern about injecting large resources categorically into street offending at the expense of other crime problems. One superintendent pointed out the varying seriousness of incidents recorded as street crime:

'A lot of these robberies are no more than the robbery of 20p between schoolchildren who are known to each other and we tie ourselves up in knots about it' (Superintendent of operations in a SCI borough).

Other officers explained that they had *always* prioritised street robberies in their borough and as such SCI funding served to boost already robust strategies. These police considered the SCI an *'over-reaction'* with disproportionate targeting of resources used to tackle the problem.⁸⁰ Other respondents who were critical of the SCI also believed funds had been allocated *'recklessly'* and simply given to those agencies that made *'the biggest stink about levels of [street] crime'*.

These respondents also repeatedly drew attention to the Prime Minister's pledge to have street crime *'under control'* by September 2002. Some viewed his remark as *'ill-judged'*, *'totally unrealistic'* and illustrative of *'political short-termism'*.

Impact of the SCI

There was general consensus among respondents that the SCI had positively impacted on agencies' efforts to tackle street crime during the year. All agreed that the SCI had affected the police the most.

Operational tactics employed under the SCI included high visibility policing⁸¹, pulse patrols, unmarked cars and robbery response cars. Every officer considered that these tactics had successfully demonstrated to offenders and communities alike that the police had actively

'Safer Streets' initiative, the Government invited key figures from the MPS to hold round table discussions about levels of street crime in the capital.

⁸⁰ Even then, some police argued, the substantial financial resources invested in street crime were still not sophisticated enough to tackle the problem.

⁸¹ High visibility policing was considered by police to be the most cost-effective way of dealing with street crime. As one officer explained: *'you can follow a robber and he may not do a robbery for three days, it costs thousands of pounds in surveillance to do that, so putting the troops out in high visibility jackets to disrupt and displace is the preferred option'*.

targeted and prioritised street crime.⁸² Police officers considered the SCI to have raised police morale considerably. Some senior officers observed how prior to the SCI street crime policing was carried out in a perfunctory manner, with little investment from officers on the ground. Officers also believed that increased public confidence in the police had stimulated reporting of street crime; this further supported their view that the SCI was responsible for reductions in crime.

Several respondents from agencies other than the police, were less optimistic and felt that street crime had not been greatly affected by high visibility policing. They supported the displacement hypothesis, arguing that offenders had responded to police tactics simply by finding less conspicuous means of offending.

A number of non-police respondents were also critical of the manner in which police targeted street offenders and criticised what they considered to be the police preoccupation with performance targets to the exclusion of all other considerations.⁸³ For example, they also commented on increasing numbers of first-time offenders that had received custodial sentences. *As one YOT manager explained, 'before for robbery, a young person got a supervision order, now he gets custody'.*

A majority of non-police respondents (arrest referral workers and community safety managers) also believed that the initiative's aim to engage street offenders in drug treatment within 24 hours of arrest was unrealistic. Respondents believed that the high numbers of offenders 'fast-tracked' to treatment *appeared* positive but considered the quality of treatment offered as 'poor'.⁸⁴

While admitting that the process requires improvement, police supported the SCI's fast-tracking of offenders through the criminal justice system. They felt that the SCI gave them the ability to focus on 'service delivery'.

⁸² Most police officers held the view that the public arrests of street offenders had a deterrent effect on other offenders (this was confirmed to a small degree in offender interviews).

⁸³ Some non-police respondents suggested during focus groups that some police officers had reclassified offences so as to attain performance indicators.

⁸⁴ One arrest referral worker commented that the service offered was more akin to a basic 'assessment' rather than constituting 'treatment'.

Putting things in place: partnership and the SCI

The majority of interviewees reported that the SCI had an '*energising*' effect on partnership development and agency activity. Some described the re-emphasis on inter-agency working as representing an important '*sea-change*' especially across CDRPs. As one police officer stated, '*everyone started talking the same language and had the same priorities*'.⁸⁵ Some officers though raised concern about the accountability of other partners and the need for statutory direction on leadership within partnership meetings. In general, most respondents felt that, in spite of teething problems, the SCI illustrated how partnership can deliver effectively.

Sustainability of the SCI

Amongst interviewees' broad support for the SCI a number of concerns were raised about sustainability. Some enthusiasts expressed the hope that the momentum that kick-started the SCI would be sustained and were optimistic that it would endure. However, more sceptical respondents argued that since the SCI constituted a '*knee-jerk*' response to the problem of street crime, it only temporarily *contained* levels of street crime rather than had any long-term impact on the problem. They attributed its impact largely to the incapacitation of prolific offenders.

Police felt that there was an obvious 'see-saw' effect between street crime and levels of police on the ground. They expressed the view that if the SCI funding was not sustained over time, then street crime levels would simply rise. They felt that it was important to sustain financial investment in the SCI given the hard work that had gone into originally implementing the initiative and into reducing levels of street crime. Most respondents feared that the challenge was in sustaining the personal motivational levels among officers

The experience of implementing the SCI reinforced ideas that high visibility policing and intelligence-led policing can have a significant impact in reducing crime rates. These approaches were highly labour intensive and underlined the need for police to be '*properly resourced*' for such activity.

⁸⁵ However, several non-police respondents argued for the need for better information technology structures to support partnership work.

Street offenders

Several police respondents contended that a rise in street crimes was indicative of general lawlessness and held the view that street offences were '*gateway crimes*' to more serious offences.⁸⁶ This group of officers tended to feel that the SCI was the '*right*' response to the problem.

Police officers tended to hold street offenders in a negative light, sometimes describing them in very negative terms. However at the same time they possessed an appreciation of the difficult cultural, economic and social circumstances that characterise many offenders' early lives.⁸⁷ The majority of officers described the typical street offender as an '*opportunistic young man*' who will do '*anything to get the money*'. A minority of respondents associated street robbery, and especially robberies involving guns, with a violent black youth subculture.⁸⁸

In discussing how young people get involved in street robberies, many police described how the offence often constitutes a '*rite of passage*'.⁸⁹ Some respondents felt that the use of weapons during robberies reflected the perpetrator's requirement to control the victim rather than a need to use physical force. However, they regarded the apparent rise in violent street 'muggings' as a possible concomitant of increased crack use⁹⁰ and/or gang activity.⁹¹

Most officers thought that only a minority of street offenders were drug-dependent, although they thought that most were recreational cannabis users. Police representatives from boroughs with a reputation for well-established drugs markets (such as Camden and

⁸⁶ The experience of being excluded from school, having little or no educational qualifications, appropriate role models, job prospects or opportunities was believed to initiate many criminal careers, *beginning* with low-level street crime.

⁸⁷ Police agreed that the root causes of street crime lay in socio-economic inequalities, compounded by low educational attainment and poor parental supervision. Many explained that in their experience, young men become disaffected within society early in life and often ended up subject to schools' policies of exclusion in their early teens.

⁸⁸ Despite the association between black youth crime and street robbery having a justifiable basis if one considers the data on the subject, the factors explaining the relationship between race and street crime are '*complex and difficult*' and require much more careful consideration (Bowling and Phillips, 2002).

⁸⁹ This view was supported by examples where victims had overheard perpetrators being instructed to commit the robbery, moments before the offence took place.

⁹⁰ Drug workers from the sample argued that offenders who were dependent on crack cocaine might exhibit greater extraversion (in the form of more aggression or violence) in their offending, given the particular disinhibiting effects of the drug.

⁹¹ Although increased crack cocaine prevalence was likely to have contributed to high levels of street crime, the current study provided no evidence that this was a main driver behind the surge in recorded cases during 2001/02

Islington) were more inclined to associate street crime with drug dependency than those working elsewhere.

Displacement

The majority of respondents thought that some displacement *was* inevitable, following targeted police operations under the SCI, but contended that it was almost impossible to assess its extent. Most believed that when it did occur, it happened on a relatively small scale. Several police dismissed the subject matter of crime displacement outright, claiming that the whole concept was '*rubbish*'. Those who held this view felt that offenders were not strategic enough in their thinking to alter their criminal activities and movements as a result of increased police activity in one area. These police also believed that colleagues might use the concept of displacement to justify when '*things were not going well*' in their particular boroughs. With regard to functional displacement, some officers and youth offending managers contended that reductions in street crime had been achieved since the SCI at the expense of traffic management and offences such as vehicle crime⁹² and burglary. However, our analysis showed no significant change in vehicle crime and burglary figures during the relevant period (see Figure A2.2). The explanation given was that drug-driven street crime occurs because there are few offences that can reward an offender so rapidly. It was also felt that crack dependent street robbers were unlikely to do much offence planning or indeed be *capable* of planning, given the chaotic psychological state to which prolonged crack use had reduced them - a view supported by interviews with drug dependent offenders. A further argument against *geographical displacement* was that these offenders are generally thought to dislike change, preferring to adhere to known localities and routines.⁹³

Drug supply activity was considered to continue whatever the extent of a police operation, due to the highly lucrative nature of the offence and the increased flexibility and mobility afforded to sellers through technological advances. Several officers observed that police were generally very '*figures driven*' and not as concerned as they should be about actually getting to grips with drug markets; as one officer put it, '*it is easy to sit back and arrest {low level drug sellers}; you will always achieve the targets*'.

⁹² A consequence of police shifting their immediate focus to street crime led one borough commander (SCI borough) to warn the interviewer not to park her car in his borough, since, as he explained, 'we don't do car crime anymore'.

⁹³ It was thought that possessing local knowledge would deter most offenders from travelling out of the area to offend. Users were thought to prefer to stay close to a known drug source.

Sellers were considered to be unlikely to travel significant distances following increased police activity. This reflected their reluctance to leave an existing customer base to set up elsewhere. While police operations clearly could successfully *disrupt* drug supply activity, most of the sample believed that enforcement was only able to '*displace the market a few hundred yards and keep a lid on it*'. In terms of tactical displacement, some respondents thought that high visibility police operations might have caused some 'open' drug markets to become 'closed'.

According to police respondents, within local areas, offenders *did* exhibit some degree of innovation so as to avoid police detection, such as changing their clothes immediately after committing a robbery or watching police shifts closely. Most officers believed offenders to be '*forensically aware*', informed about the positioning of CCTV cameras and their level of functioning, the location of local police stations and working hours of the robbery squad.⁹⁴ It was generally thought that offenders preferred to take advantage of this local knowledge (for example, choosing to commit crimes locally when building work obscures a CCTV camera) than travel any significant distance for less risky opportunities.⁹⁵ Persistent burglars and armed robbers were considered more likely to plan for offences strategically and to travel to offend.

Several respondents put forward the view that displacement was not necessarily a negative phenomenon, given that it could: (a) lead to an offender's offending pattern being successfully disrupted and (b) push offenders into unfamiliar areas, potentially rendering them less confident. No-one advanced the argument that levelling out the distribution of robbery across an area might in itself be a good thing.

Explaining displacement

Respondents explained that measuring cross-border crime patterns across London and assessing the extent of other forms of displacement within offending behaviour is difficult and requires an understanding the unique and complex '*push and pull*' characteristics of each borough that can affect offender movement. Factors that can promote or hinder

⁹⁴ One officer reported that offenders would see him coming off his shift and often remark, '*cheerio, officer, are you off now?*'

⁹⁵ One group of offenders that appeared to be particularly prone to geographical displacement were sex workers in Camden, who were known to have moved northwards up to the Finsbury Park area, away from Kings Cross because of increased police operations. Police in Holborn (London Borough of Camden) equally noticed that sex workers had moved into the neighbouring borough of Lambeth, in some cases to avoid arrest in their 'normal' offending area as a result of high visibility police activity.

geographical crime displacement include: the presence or otherwise of transport links and tourist attractions, prevalence of situational crime prevention measures such as CCTV and the reputation of a borough for its historic links to sex or drug markets and/or availability of cheaper drugs.

Combating displacement

Borough commanders whose BCUs were allocated funding under 'Safer Streets' had some discretion over the way the money was spent; and it was hard for us to be certain about what was actually bought with the extra resources. BCUs also experienced varying degrees of support from other agencies and from local communities, and this can affect the outcome of police operations.

A point of contention among non-SCI boroughs was that they lacked the financial resources to respond to crime imported from other areas and also they felt unable to prove that it occurred.⁹⁶ SCI and non-SCI boroughs concurred that some sort of credible strategy to measure and deal with displacement was required. However, many boroughs already took extensive measures to anticipate and combat displacement with money that the SCI had allocated to them.⁹⁷ Police in SCI boroughs explained how initiative money funded certain activities that helped curb displacement. These features were extended patrols, neighbourhood street wardens and increased overtime for officers (affording borough commanders greater flexibility). Although non-police respondents generally thought that borough commands were quite competitive with each other as a product of performance management, this was generally *not* borne out in interviews with police. SCI boroughs were generally sympathetic to the concerns about displacement held by police in non-SCI boroughs.

Non-SCI boroughs felt that they lacked the financial and time resources to deal with the problem of displacement effectively. As one commander put it, '*we don't talk to each other because we have our day jobs to do*'. Even if this commander did have contingency plans to

⁹⁶ Police in outer boroughs of London such as Barking and Dagenham (Non-SCI) did observe drug sellers travelling into their areas. However, officers mostly felt that sellers' movements could be explained simply by the attraction of a good customer base and general market expansion rather than because of intensification of police activity in central boroughs.

⁹⁷ Police were innovative about implementing anti-displacement measures. Officers in Kings Cross made attempts to disrupt knowledge that offenders had about their working shifts. They also tried to keep partners (other police stations and the British Transport Police) informed of forthcoming operations that might displace offenders, in the hope that these partners might be able to put in some

deal with crime displacement, as he pointed out, without the financial means, *'it might take me three weeks to respond'*. Non-SCI borough commanders repeatedly expressed concerns about the equity of the MPS resource allocation formula, insisting that it required urgent re-assessment.

Chapter summary

- Overall, the study found positive responses to the SCI within criminal justice agencies. Interviewees largely supported the initiative, and what it had achieved, despite feeling that it had initially evolved as a politically driven and somewhat 'knee-jerk' response to a growing problem with street crime nationally.
- Across the professional sample, it was believed that the SCI had developed focused multi-agency work and encouraged partnership development.
- Criticism levelled at the SCI highlighted concerns with funding allocation, crime displacement, poor quality of drug treatment for street offenders and access to services, concerns about the management and accountability of partnerships working under the initiative and the possible short life span that the SCI might have.
- Reductions in levels of street crime were attributed to the SCI and the incapacitation of prolific offenders particularly.
- Geographic crime displacement was considered by professionals to occur, but normally to a small degree and involved short distances. Police working in non-SCI boroughs were more likely to complain about displacement into their boroughs but were generally unsure to what extent it could be proved.
- Functional displacement was considered to be less likely among drug dependent robbers and geographical displacement to feature largely among the most persistent offenders.

contingency plans to combat it. There was evidence of cross-border partnership occurring across London e.g. in Westminster and Camden with the implementation of community partnership groups.

Chapter 5 Discussion and conclusions

This report has provided an analysis of street crime in London. It has examined the possible factors that caused the street crime 'epidemic' in 2000 and 2001, and has looked at the reasons for the fall in street crime that started in November 2001. It has tried to assess whether policing initiatives displaced street crime geographically, and whether they prompted offenders to change their modus operandi. Since this work was conducted other reports have examined various aspects of the SCI (see Tilley et al, 2004) and a full cost-benefit analysis of the SCI is currently in progress.

The rise in street crime

The epidemic can be largely, but not entirely, explained by the emergence of the mobile phone as a 'hot product' that held particular attractions for teenagers and young adults. Ownership soared amongst young people at the end of the 1990s, creating new targets for street robbery.⁹⁸ In the late 1990s street offences involving thefts of mobiles were averaging no more than 500 per month across London. By late 2001 this figure had risen to over 3,000 per month. From 1998 onwards, street offences *not* involving phones had remained steady at around 2000 per month.

The epidemic involved a large proportion of 'youth on youth' offences. The average age of street offenders fell at the start of 2000, and only began to rise to previous levels once street crime started to fall two years later. Similarly the average age of *victims* of street crime began to fall in early 2000, only rising again halfway through 2002.

Other factors also played a part. The growth of problematic crack cocaine use is likely to have fuelled robbery rates. The September 11th redeployment of uniformed officers from inner London boroughs to sites in central London thought to be at risk of terrorist attack probably contributed largely to the very rapid increase in street crime in the following six weeks. There has recently been more evidence of such occurrences, with a senior Metropolitan officer stating that there was a 25 per cent increase in robbery on the 20th November (2003) when London police were re-deployed for security reasons during

⁹⁸ In 1999 less than a third of the population aged 15 or over owned a mobile. By the end of 2001 this had risen to 75%. Amongst 15-17 year-olds the figure was already 70% by mid 2000 (<http://www.mori.com/emori/tracker.shtml>).

President Bush's visit to the capital.⁹⁹ Only a small minority of central persistent offenders noticed that policing had increased in Westminster post September the 11th. However, it is probable that reduced numbers of police in central boroughs increased opportunities for offending regardless as to whether offenders remembered there visibly being less police at that time.

The fall in street crime

Street crime in London peaked at the end of October 2001, falling thereafter. The reductions seen in the New Year of 2002 cannot be attributed to the street crime initiative. Safer Streets Phase 1 began in February 2002, and the second phase – the London component of the street crime initiative itself – began in April 2002. The most likely explanation for the early falls is that measures put into place by the MPS well in advance of the Safer Street initiative began to 'bite' towards the end of 2001.

The street crime initiative may not have triggered the fall in street crime, but it is likely to have consolidated the impact of earlier policing initiatives, ensuring that they were able to continue for longer, and with greater intensity, than would have happened otherwise. The impact of the Safer Streets phases 1 and 2 and preceding initiatives could have been deterrent, incapacitative or both. The statistics only shed a little light on this question: numbers of arrests peaked in October 2001, when numbers of offences also peaked. They were lower in both phases of Safer Streets.

It is also probable that the agreements made between mobile phone providers to bar handsets recorded as lost or stolen began to achieve some impact from mid or late 2002 onwards. Initially only three of the major providers did this in February 2002, but agreement across all providers was finally achieved in November 2002. Although, there remains some scope for illegally reprogramming phones' IMEI numbers, the attractiveness of mobiles as crime targets will have been sharply reduced.

There may have been changes in the way that young people use mobile phones, and changes in the status of mobiles as fashion accessories. Certainly people will have become aware of the risks of theft and robbery, and will probably have become more careful and less conspicuous in the way they use them. More speculatively, the significance of mobiles within

⁹⁹ Commander John Yates interviewed for BBC London Regional News (26.11.2003)

youth culture may have changed. Before use amongst teenagers was widespread, mobiles were ideal ways of signifying style, individuality, independence and adult aspirations – whilst having only limited utility for the minority of teenagers who actually had one. Now ownership has become sufficiently widespread amongst young people that mobiles serve as a primary means of organising their social lives. This may serve to turn them from style accessories into essential, but rather more mundane, commodities. In other words, the fun may be going out of owning mobiles, as they become a genuinely essential part of young people's lives. If so, their desirability, and thus their attractiveness to thieves, may also be waning.

Displacement

The study found little evidence of functional displacement, either from the statistics or from the interview data. Some offenders suggested that they had switched from burglary to street robbery as a result of the mandatory sentences imposed for the third burglary conviction, but no one reported a shift *from* street crime as a response to policing initiatives.

The statistics show that snatch theft and pick-pocketing rose as street robbery fell. This could reflect subtle changes in offenders' modus operandi, but it could also be that a proportion of offences that previously would have been recorded as robberies were being recorded as snatch thefts or pick-pocketing after October 2001, although there is little persuasive evidence to support this. There is also the possibility that attempted robberies were more likely to be recorded as common assaults after October 2001.

The study found some evidence of geographic displacement. Both the statistical analysis and the interview data suggested that offenders respond to visible policing primarily by moving to less risky areas; however this displacement tends to take place at a local level. There was evidence that offenders made longer 'journeys to work' in response to police activity, but with the exception of a small number of experienced, persistent offenders, the offending remained quite local.

Reflecting this, we found no persuasive evidence of systematic displacement of street crime from boroughs selected for the Street Crime Initiative to other boroughs. Trends in street crime were remarkably similar in SCI and non-SCI boroughs. Both showed a progressive increase in street crime, peaking in late 2001, followed by a fall. It is not surprising that those involved in the policing of non-SCI boroughs should suspect displacement from their high-crime neighbours – especially when the latter were enjoying extra resources for a high-visibility initiative. Nevertheless the trends moved in parallel.

Lessons about 'early warning' mechanisms

What lessons are to be drawn from the SCI? Perhaps the first point to make is that a Prime Ministerial initiative to tackle a problem of this sort is of its nature a last resort, rather than a routine intervention. It was put into place because of the perception that street crime was running out of control. As we have seen in London at least the SCI started *after* local measures appeared to have begun to get some purchase on the problem. Nevertheless the obvious question to ask is why more effective local action was not put into place earlier (See appendix figure A 5.1).

Part of the answer is to be found in the crime analysis capacity that existed at borough level in the period when the street crime epidemic was emerging. Borough partnerships were aware of a growing problem in 1999, but at that stage there was little effective problem analysis to explain what lay behind the increase.¹⁰⁰ At the time, the sorts of analyses presented in this report were not available to London CDRPs. This was largely a consequence of the cumbersome nature of recorded crime databases in London, which proved very hard to analyse.

By 2001 BCU commanders and CDRPs had a much clearer idea of the nature of the problem, and in particular of the role played by mobile phones in the epidemic. Some CDRPs had developed strategies to respond to the problem, including:

- enforcement tactics
- prevention campaigns aimed at potential victims
- action to limit the market for stolen phones

However, two sorts of problem were encountered. Some local agencies such as schools were reluctant to engage with such strategies.¹⁰¹ Secondly, and more important, it emerged that there were technical solutions to the problem; if mobile phone providers co-operated in

¹⁰⁰ One of the authors was a member of a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership throughout this period. It was clear to the CDRP at the time that robbery was rising very rapidly, but there was no adequate explanation for the rise until some time later.

¹⁰¹ Some secondary schools were still trying to 'hold the line' in forbidding mobiles at school. Participating in preventive campaigns aimed at more sensible use of phones would undermine this.

exchanging the IMEI numbers of stolen handsets, these could be barred and rendered much less valuable to thieves. However, it was equally clear that nothing could be done at borough level to encourage cooperation on the part of providers. This sense that the real solution to the problem lay at national rather than local level may have done a lot to undermine local determination to address street crime. It should be noted, however, that the turn-round in the trend actually occurred before the mobile phone providers started to co-operate in barring stolen handsets.

What is needed, clearly, is more effective mechanisms for giving early warning of emergent crime problems, both at local and at national level. At local level there needs to be the capacity for much more sophisticated crime analysis than existed in 2000 in London, which allow local police and CDRPs to understand the dynamics of developing crime epidemics. There also need to be better mechanisms for collating this information at regional level, and feeding it to central government. The Regional Government Offices obviously have a part to play here.

If central government researchers had the tools available to them in 2000 that they now have, it is possible that they too could have identified the reasons behind the street crime epidemic earlier. The British Crime Survey is now conducted continuously rather than biennially, and with an enlarged sample which permits the detection of robbery trends, and trends in thefts of mobile phones. After the experience of the SCI, central government researchers are also much better equipped to call for, and analyse, timely recorded crime data from local hotspots. Whether they manage to give better early warning of the next crime epidemic depends on the nature of this problem, of course.

The Street Crime Initiative and priority setting

At the time the SCI was set up, there was a broad consensus – with some dissent, as we have seen in Chapter 4 – that there was a problem that properly demanded urgent attention. There remains the possibility that, as discussed in Chapter 2, part of the reason for the surge in street crime was that central government had diverted resources and energy away from this group of offences from the mid-1990s onwards, by prioritising burglary and vehicle crime.

It is understandable that central government should wish to see rapid reaction to pressing crime problems, and rapid turn-rounds in indicators of these problems. However target

setting, and quantitative performance management more generally, risks privileging strategies that yield short-term returns, and marginalising those that are best regarded as long-term investments. The Street Crime Initiative was a necessary response to a pressing problem – but this problem may have been exacerbated by earlier central governmental decisions to focus on other forms of crime that at the time appeared more deserving of priority.

The suggestion is implausible that central government priorities led the police to ignore street robbery. However it seems very likely that the priority setting process *did* discourage the police from attending to the less serious offences that can serve as precursors for young people's involvement in street crime. Young people do not simply embark on a career of street robbery. They graduate through forms of less criminal or non-criminal bullying and harassment. If this sort of behaviour is ignored by the police and other authorities, it may in time become embedded in local youth sub-cultures, and lead to more serious offending. If so, there is an important implication for criminal policy: apparently trivial or low-level offending can only be ignored at some risk.

Nor is it simply a question of getting a better balance in *enforcement* priorities. Our findings, especially those presented in Chapter 3, show the extent to which street crime in London is a symptom of the social exclusion experienced by teenagers and young adults at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. The problem is particularly acute amongst some minority ethnic groups that are systematically disadvantaged. At present all the evidence suggests that socially marginalised African Caribbean young men are very significantly over-represented amongst street offenders in London. Any strategy to address street crime that does not strike an appropriate balance between enforcement and inclusionary measures targeting such groups runs the risk of compounding the problem.

The Street Crime Initiative and partnership: a pump-priming process?

One of the clear achievements of the early stages of the SCI was its success in energising local crime reduction partnerships and in stimulating joint working. The findings in Chapter 4 provide ample evidence of this. The urgency that Prime Ministerial involvement injected into the process created an atmosphere of collaboration and co-operation between different criminal justice agencies and between the police and their local authority partners.

It remains to be seen whether or not the SCI will have served a one-off pump-priming function, leading to sustained improvement in partnership. Optimists would predict that once the flow of local collaboration has been established, the need for central government involvement will disappear. Pessimists would argue that without the interest and pressure from central government, local partners will retreat to old forms of working practice. It remains to be seen who is proved right.

If the SCI turns out to have achieved a step-change in the quality of partnership in crime reduction work, this will prove an achievement of some significance. If more pessimism is warranted, it will be worth examining whether the SCI model of central government support is replicable and sustainable. The enthusiasm and commitment that it generated derived quite largely from the fact that even the most senior managers in criminal justice agencies are rarely exposed to Prime Ministerial attention. It was precisely because of its exceptional, non-routine nature that it commanded involvement. There could be diminishing returns in the strategy of establishing high-level action teams focussing on the problem of the day – if a succession of such initiatives has the effect of turning them into routine events in the lives of senior managers within the criminal justice system.

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Appendix A: Additional figures and tables

Figure A.2.1. Street crime rates by borough and financial year

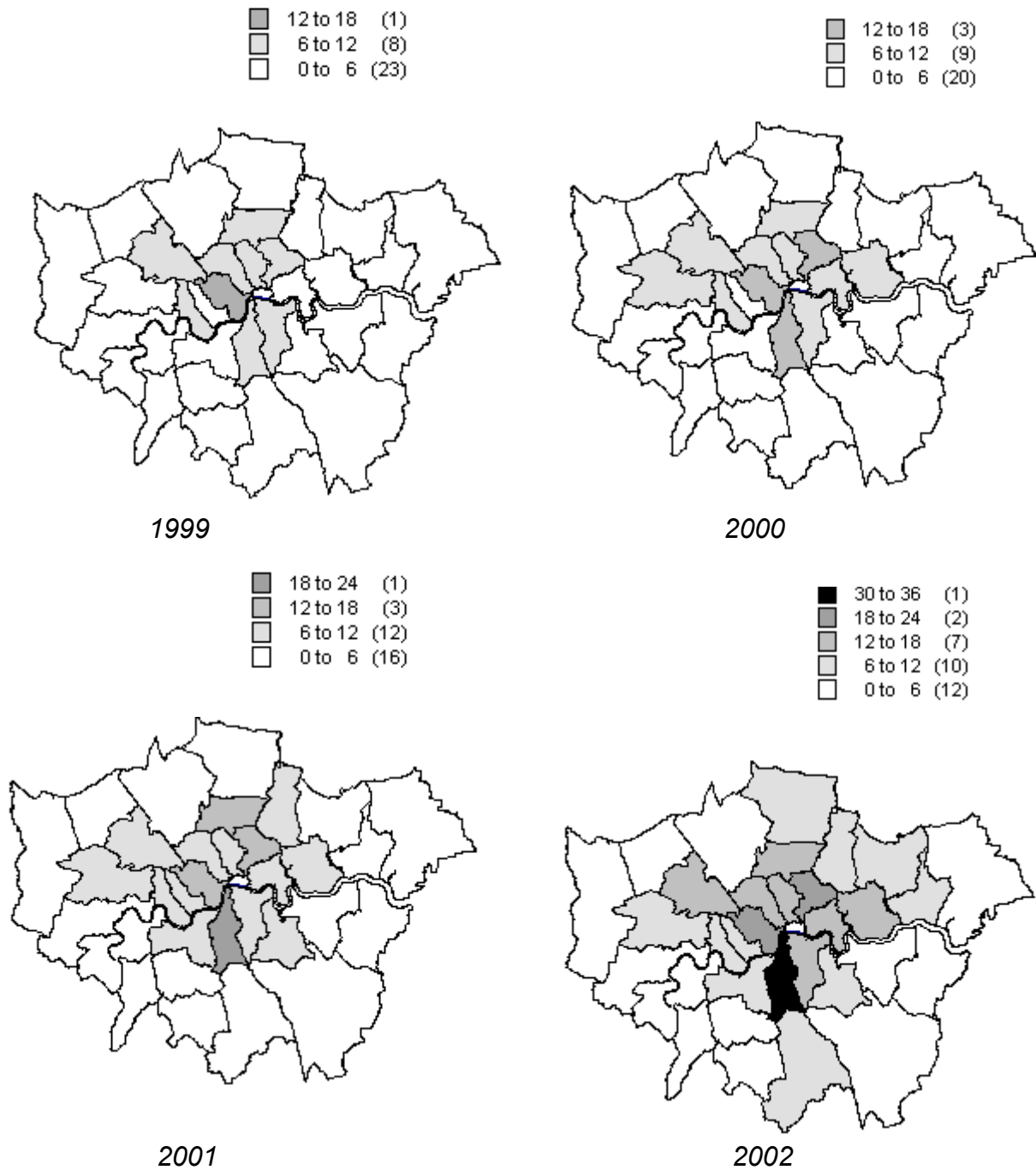


Figure A.2.2. Street crime and other acquisitive crime percentage change (April 1998 = 100)

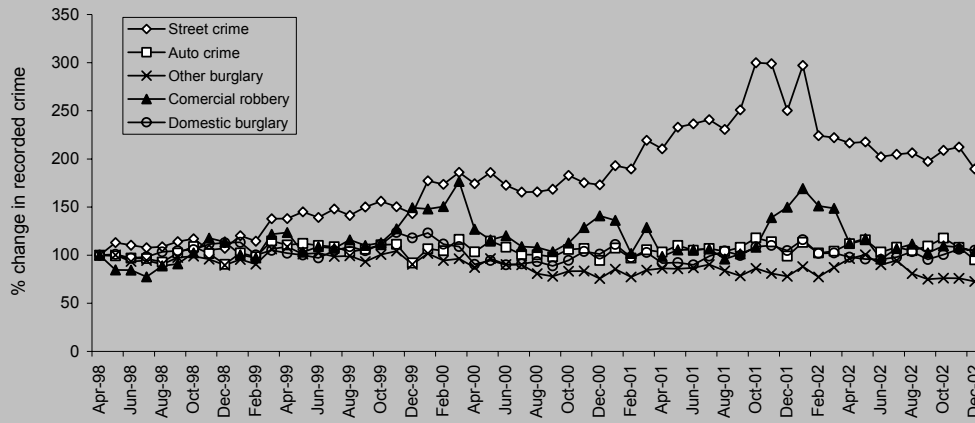


Figure A.2.3. Common assault levels by calendar years

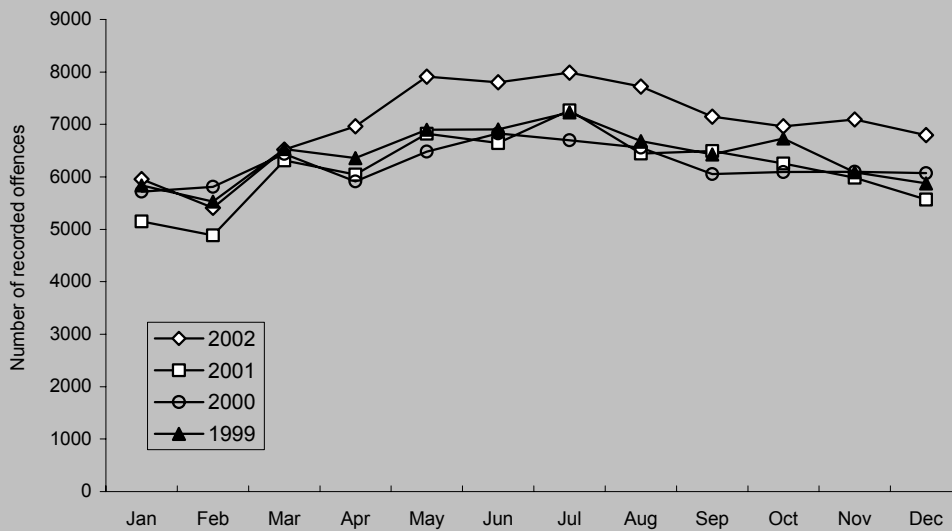
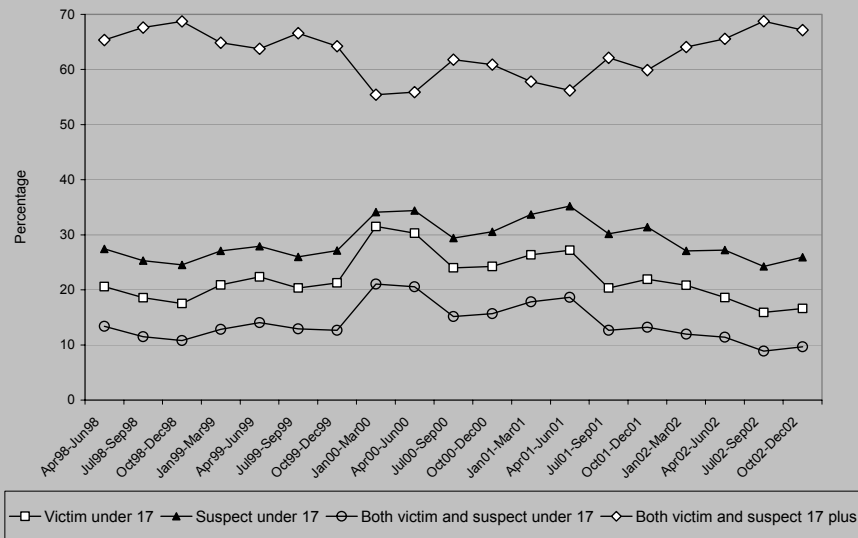


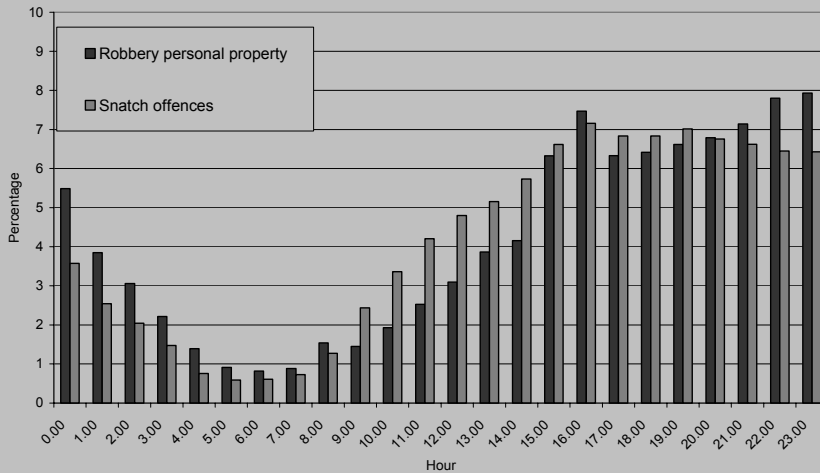
Figure A.2.5. Proportion of victims and suspects aged under 17 - all street crime



Notes

1. n=186,368, missing = 26,927 (12.6%)
2. Categories are not mutually exclusive
3. The proportion of cases involving victims and suspects aged under 17 peaked between 2000 and 2001.

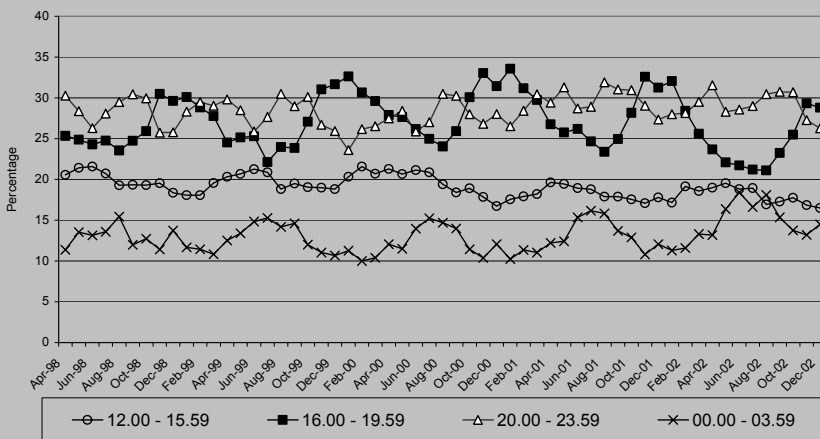
Figure A.2.6 Hour of offence - All street crime April 1998 to December 2002



Notes

1. n=229,831 (robbery = 161,252, snatch offences = 68,579) missing = 0
2. Figures are grouped per hour period - i.e. 10pm represents all cases between 10 and 10.59.
3. Street crime peaked in the late afternoon (around 4pm) and in the late evening (10pm to 11.59).

Figure A.2.7. Street crime offences by month and time of day



Notes

1. n=229,575, missing = 256 (0.1%)
2. Offences occurring from 04.00 till 11.59 are not shown due to the low proportion of street crime at these times.
3. Offences in the early evening (16.00 till 19.59) peaked in the winter months indicating that street crime is more likely with the cover of darkness.

Figure A2.8. Total number of street crimes (robbery and snatch thefts) in London by financial year (1998/99 - 2001/02).

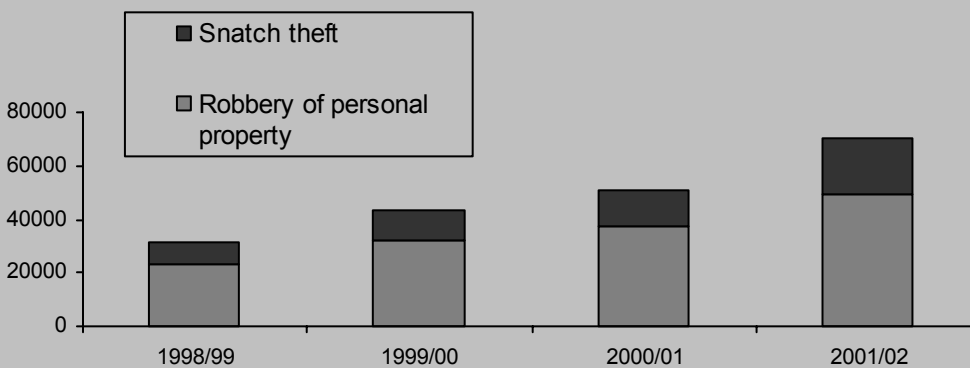


Table A.2.9. Street crime levels and rates per 1,000 population by borough family, specific offence and financial year

Family & population	Offence	98/99 total	Rate per 1,000 pop	99/00 total	98/99 - 99/00 % change	Rate per 1,000 pop	00/01 total	99/00 00/01 % change	Rate per 1,000 pop	01/02 total	00/01 01/02 % change	Rate per 1,000 pop
Deprived inner 1321.8	Personal robbery	7605	5.8	11510	51.35	8.7	13325	15.77	10.1	16092	20.77	12.2
	Snatches	2846	2.2	3891	36.72	2.9	4965	27.6	3.8	6960	40.18	5.3
	Street crime	10451	7.9	15401	47.36	11.7	18290	18.76	13.8	23052	26.04	17.4
	Total	227677	172.2	262826	15.44	198.8	255646	-2.73	193.4	Jun-85	-2.07	189.4
Other central 1075	Personal robbery	4710	4.4	5628	19.49	5.2	6201	10.18	5.8	7249	16.9	6.7
	Snatches	2215	2.1	2508	13.23	2.3	3049	21.57	2.8	4542	48.97	4.2
	Street crime	6925	6.4	8136	17.49	7.6	9250	13.69	8.6	11791	27.47	11
	Total	227677	211.8	262826	15.44	244.5	255646	-2.73	237.8	250366	-2.07	232.9
Poorer outer 1630	Personal robbery	6706	4.1	8767	30.73	5.4	9685	10.47	5.9	12031	24.22	7.4
	Snatches	2063	1.3	2578	24.96	1.6	3021	17.18	1.9	4330	43.33	2.7
	Street crime	8769	5.4	11345	29.38	7	12706	12	7.8	16361	28.77	10
	Total	233468	143.2	259869	11.31	159.4	253175	-2.58	155.3	242733	-4.12	148.9
Affluent outer 3341	Personal robbery	3882	1.2	5955	53.4	1.8	7806	31.08	2.3	10053	28.79	3
	Snatches	1449	0.4	2050	41.48	0.6	2533	23.56	0.8	3254	28.46	1
	Street crime	5331	1.6	8005	50.16	2.4	10339	29.16	3.1	13307	28.71	4
	Total	307551	92.1	347332	12.93	104	343645	-1.06	102.9	331779	-3.45	99.3
London 7363.8		31476	4.3	42887		5.8	50585		6.8	64511		8.7

Table A.2.10. Street crime levels and percentage change by borough family, financial year and specific offence

Family	Offence	98/99	99/00	98/99 - 99/00 % change	00/01	99/00 00/01 % change	01/02 total	00/01 01/02 % change	overall % change
Deprived inner	Robbery (pp)	7605	11510	51.35	13325	15.77	16092	20.77	112
	Snatches	2846	3891	36.72	4965	27.6	6960	40.18	145
	Street crime	10451	15401	47.36	18290	18.76	23052	26.04	121
	Total	227677	262826	15.44	255646	-2.73	250366	-2.07	10
Other central	Robbery (pp)	4710	5628	19.49	6201	10.18	7249	16.9	54
	Snatches	2215	2508	13.23	3049	21.57	4542	48.97	105
	Street crime	6925	8136	17.49	9250	13.69	11791	27.47	70
	Total	227677	262826	15.44	255646	-2.73	250366	-2.07	10
Poorer outer	Robbery (pp)	6706	8767	30.73	9685	10.47	12031	24.22	79
	Snatches	2063	2578	24.96	3021	17.18	4330	43.33	110
	Street crime	8769	11345	29.38	12706	12	16361	28.77	87
	Total	233468	259869	11.31	253175	-2.58	242733	-4.12	4
Affluent outer	Robbery (pp)	3882	5955	53.4	7806	31.08	10053	28.79	159
	Snatches	1449	2050	41.48	2533	23.56	3254	28.46	125
	Street crime	5331	8005	50.16	10339	29.16	13307	28.71	150
	Total	307551	347332	12.93	343645	-1.06	331779	-3.45	8

Table A.2.11. Number and percentage of accused resident in borough of offence by borough, borough family, SCI boroughs and financial year

Borough	2001/01			2001/02		
	% of accused resident in area of offence	No. of accused resident in area of offence	Total	% of accused not resident in area of offence	No. of accused not resident in area of offence	Total
Westminster	72	188	262	67	191	284
Camden	38	89	237	38	82	215
Islington	31	50	159	43	35	82
Hackney	20	55	277	16	54	346
Tower Hamlets	21	34	160	33	68	204
Greenwich	24	19	79	27	40	149
Lewisham	20	84	413	19	36	337
Southwark	25	71	284	25	120	488
Lambeth	16	45	276	16	57	366
Wandsworth	39	57	147	36	73	205
Hammersmith & Fullham	18	18	99	32	30	93
Kensington & Chelsea	51	53	105	36	39	109
Waltham Forest	27	58	212	35	57	162
Redbridge	43	49	115	57	38	67
Hackney	60	33	55	57	35	62
Barking & Dagenham	30	30	100	18	18	98
Newham	18	50	273	17	27	163
Bexley	43	21	49	53	43	81
Bromely	48	44	91	45	57	128
Croydon	27	75	280	29	77	267
Sutton	33	25	76	41	30	73
Merton	55	26	47	54	54	100
Kingston	56	33	59	74	45	61
Richmond	59	33	56	53	24	45
Hownslow	19	23	122	34	42	124
Hillingdon	28	11	39	39	18	46
Ealing	17	31	184	19	36	190
Brent	21	33	159	17	25	144
Harrow	52	55	106	47	46	99
Barnet	38	47	125	57	100	177
Haringey	24	95	395	29	102	348
Enfield	44	68	153	45	80	178
Deprived inner	12	164	1429	12	196	1649
Other central	37	314	850	37	333	906
Poorer outer	18	282	1542	19	266	1428
Affluent outer	33	445	1373	38	577	1508
SCI boroughs	8	280	3718	8	301	3801

Appendix B Glossary

BCS - British Crime Survey

BTP - British Transport Police

CPS- Crown Prosecution Service

DAT- drug action team

Drug market – location at which illicit drugs (of one or more kinds) are bought and sold

HVP- High visibility policing

Mugging - This is a popular rather than a legal term, comprising robbery, attempted robbery and snatch theft.

MPS – Metropolitan police service

Poly drug user - someone who uses different types of drugs

PSU - Policing Standards Unit

Runner –individuals who deliver drugs to drug users for sellers

SCAT – Street Crime Action Team

SCI - Street crime initiative

SCP – situational crime prevention refers to measures taken by the police and other agencies to modify the social and physical features of drug market sites in order to make them less attractive to sellers and users.

Snatch theft - an offence where ‘property is stolen from the physical possession of the victim and some degree of force is directed to the property but not to the victim’.

Temporal displacement - A shift in offending from one time to a different time, such as from day to night.

Tactical displacement – Changing the methods used in the commission of a crime, e.g. the installation of deadbolt locks on doors results in burglars forcing windows to gain entry.

Target displacement – Choosing a different victim within the same area. Example, a neighbourhood watch programme is started but only one half of the homes participate, thereby leading offenders to target non-participating homes.

Functional displacement – The offender stops committing one offence and shifts to another. Example, when burglary becomes more difficult due to target hardening devices, the offender decides to commit robbery instead.

Geographical displacement – Movement of crime from one area to another. Example, a neighbourhood watch programme is started and the burglars move to another neighbourhood.



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