



The  
**Crime and Deviance Channel**  
**Updates: Street Crime**

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Online Classroom Ltd  
PO Box 104  
Hinckley  
Leicester  
LE10 2WW  
Registered in England Number 5896648

tel / fax: 0845-505-0664  
[www.onlineclassroom.tv](http://www.onlineclassroom.tv)  
[enquiries@onlineclassroom.tv](mailto:enquiries@onlineclassroom.tv)

**Bennett, Trevor; Brookman, Fiona and Wright Richard (2006): “A Qualitative Study of the Role of Violence in Street Crime”: ESRC**

**Background**

There have been a number of reports suggesting that in various ways street crime in the United Kingdom is becoming more violent. Little is known about street violence in the United Kingdom, especially of the social and gratuitous kind. **Bennett et al's** research aimed to investigate the nature of current forms of street violence. In particular, it aimed to investigate areas in which there are notable gaps in our knowledge, including the role played by:



**1. Street culture**, such as group or gang membership.

**2. Situational factors**, such as the role of drug misuse, drug markets, and gun carrying, and:

**3. Individual factors**, such as gender and ethnicity, in explaining:

a. Specific aspects of violence in relation to violent offences, such as car-jacking, street robbery, snatch thefts, and certain kinds of aggravated burglaries, and:

b. General aspects of violence, such as retaliatory violence, dispute-related violence, gang violence, and disrespect violence.

**Methods**

The research method involved conducting 120 semi-structured interviews with offenders (89 males and 31 females) currently serving sentences for violent offences in prisons and young offenders institutions in South Wales and South West England, particularly Bristol. One-third of the sample estimated that they had been

arrested 50 times or more and the estimated mean number of convictions was 23.



All respondents were asked to describe their life context in the period shortly before incarceration, including lifestyles, relationships, group associations, gang membership, drug misuse, gun carrying, and criminal behaviour. They were also asked to provide in-depth descriptions of selected violent offences. The aim of these descriptions was to provide narratives of particular offence scenarios.

### Findings

The research results show that the character of violent street offences, such as robbery, is changing. "Our findings concerning the motives for street robbery indicate a number of offence types," explains researcher Professor Trevor Bennett. "Some offenders went out alone with the intention to rob an easy target to secure funds to purchase drugs. But some robbed in groups or gangs for 'buzz' and excitement, some were just looking for a fight, while others robbed individuals who had wronged them in some way as a form of retaliation."



Over 92 per cent of the sample had used illegal drugs while over half (59 per cent) reported using heroin or crack cocaine. Over a quarter (28 per cent) said they had carried a firearm and one third said they were involved in gangs or criminal groups. And, in-depth interviews with 60 offenders indicate a drugs related motive in 60 per cent of the robberies reported.



"Our study indicates that the immediate decision to commit street robbery can be explained in part by the particular characteristics of the street culture," Professor Bennett points out. "In many ways, street robberies in Britain resemble their American counterparts. This finding is important because British research has tended to explain robbery in terms of rational choice and to focus instead on the role of cost-reward calculations in the decision to offend". But Bennett's research suggests that robbery can in part be explained by cultural factors associated with life on the street.

### Steve Chapman

A copy of the report "A Qualitative Study of the Role of Violence in Street Crime" can be downloaded from the [ERSC web site](#).



