



National Audit Office

THE HOME OFFICE

Reducing the risk of violent crime



SUMMARY

1 Violent crime has high physical, emotional and financial consequences for individuals, families and society. The most recent estimates, undertaken in 2003-04, found that homicide and wounding, two offences included within the Home Office's definition of violent crime, cost society approximately £13 billion a year, of which around £4 billion is borne by the National Health Service and Criminal Justice System.¹ There is no one reliable measure which gives a complete picture of levels of violent crime but the combination of the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime figures indicate that the total volume of violent crime has fallen in recent years, in line with overall crime levels, but that serious violence has fallen less and remains a significant influence on people's fear of crime.

2 The Home Office has recently shifted its priorities from focussing on reducing overall volumes of violent crime to reducing, "the most serious violence, including tackling serious sexual offences and domestic violence" as part of its revised Public Service Agreement for 2008-11.² This shift in focus is because these more serious offences in which people are killed or seriously physically and emotionally injured are the ones that cause the most harm to victims and to society more generally.

¹ *The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003-04*, Home Office, June 2005.

² *PSA Delivery Agreement 23: Making Communities Safer*, HM Government, October 2007.

3 Policy responsibility for tackling the causes of violence lies with a number of departments. Consequently the Home Office needs to work with other government departments at a national level when developing policy and then implementing it. It must also ensure that local responses to violent crime are co-ordinated between relevant local agencies. The Home Office's main vehicles for coordinating multi-agency interventions locally are Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in England and Community Safety Partnerships in Wales (Partnerships). These are statutory partnerships between the local police service, police authority, local authority, fire and rescue service, and NHS Primary Care Trust, with responsibility for tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. Staff tackling violence in the Partnerships we visited often came from the front line of crime reduction, including the police, probation services, and criminology.

4 The great majority of the work done to protect the public and reduce violent crime is carried out in local communities by frontline practitioners, including the police. This is a vital part of their core business, prioritised within their mainstream funding. The Home Office's role is to set the national direction, create and implement the appropriate

legislative framework, help co-ordinate local delivery, and, through some dedicated additional funding and the provision of other support, drive forward specific initiatives. This report focuses on this part of the Home Office's role.

5 The Home Office defines violent crime as robbery, sexual offences, and a group of Violence Against the Person offences ranging from assault without injury, through wounding, to homicide.³ This report examines the extent to which the Home Office has worked effectively with other national and local agencies to reduce the risk of wounding and homicide. We have not looked at measures to reduce the risk of robbery, because these have been covered in an earlier NAO report (*Reducing Crime: The Home Office working with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships*, HC 16 2004-05). Nor have we included consideration of sexual offences because the issues raised are sufficiently different from those relating to wounding and homicide to make it difficult to cover both topics adequately in a single report. A description of the scope of our examination is set out at paragraphs 1.2 to 1.4 and a detailed description of our methodology is set out at Appendix 1. **Figure 1** sets out some key facts about violent crime.

1 Key facts about violence in England and Wales

Violent crime has fallen by around nine per cent since 2002-03, but more serious violence has not fallen by as much as less significant types of violence.¹

In 2006-07 the risk of being a victim of violence was approximately 3.6 per cent.²

Young men are at almost four times greater risk of being a victim of violence than the rest of the adult population.³

Gun crime more than doubled between 1998-99 and 2005-06, though it fell slightly afterwards.⁴

Violence is expensive: homicide and wounding cost society around £13 billion annually, £4 billion of which is borne by the National Health Service and the Criminal Justice System.⁵

Violence impacts upon public feelings of safety: 17 per cent of adults report that they have high levels of worry about violent crime.⁶

More than 45 per cent of violent offenders are thought to be under the influence of alcohol.⁷

The homicide rate for England and Wales is 1.4 per 100,000, which is low in international comparison.⁸

Violence reduction activities are delivered by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in England and Community Safety Partnerships in Wales, statutory partnerships between the local police service, police authority, local authority, fire and rescue service, and NHS Primary Care Trust.

NOTES

1 *Crime in England and Wales 2006-07*, Table 2.01, Home Office, July 2007.

2 *Crime in England and Wales 2006-07*, Section 3.7, Home Office, July 2007.

3 *Ibid*

4 *Homicides, Firearms Offences and Intimate Violence 2005-06*, Table 2.03, Home Office, January 2007 and *Crime in England and Wales 2006-07*, Section 3.10, Home Office, July 2007.

5 *The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003-04*, Home Office, June 2005.

6 *Crime in England and Wales 2006-07*, Table 5.02, Home Office, July 2007.

7 *Crime in England and Wales 2006-07*, Table 3.06, Home Office, July 2007.

8 *Home Office Statistical Bulletin*, January 2007.

3 <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/violent-crime/>

Value for money conclusion

6 The Home Office has been effective at raising the profile of domestic violence and alcohol related crime and encouraging local action to address these issues. Such action is likely to have made some contribution to the overall fall in levels of violent crime. However, it has not yet managed to address successfully barriers which are reducing the effectiveness of crime prevention activities at a local level and which have been raised in previous reports by the National Audit Office and the Committee of Public Accounts. Examples of these barriers include poor data-sharing within local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, insufficient analytical capacity to analyse the risks of violent crime, a lack of engagement with other partners at the local level, and inconsistent delivery of funding. However, the Home Office has made some progress in addressing these barriers, including bringing in regulations to make the sharing of certain data between partners mandatory and encouraging the sharing of good practice through a dedicated programme to tackle violent crime. Although the Home Office has moved to a three year flexible funding arrangement in respect of policing, this regime has not yet been extended to funding of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. The persistence of these barriers means that good practice has not been extended from small initiatives, and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have not been able to take a long-term, strategic approach to tackling violent crime. The Home Office's Tackling Violence Action Plan (published in early 2008) has been designed to address these barriers.

Detailed findings

7 **Violent crime is both highly detrimental to society and very expensive.** In 2006-07 17 per cent of people reported that they were very worried about violent crime.⁴ Some groups are much more at risk of violent crime than others. For example, young men aged between 16 and 24 are nearly four times more likely to be a victim of violent crime than the general population.⁵ According to Home Office analysis, wounding and homicide cost society in England and Wales approximately £13 billion a year.⁶

8 **The volume of violent crime overall has fallen in line with the general trend in crime levels but levels of serious violence have fallen by less.** Overall violent crime levels have fallen by 9.0 per cent over the period 2002-03 to 2006-07, slightly more than the general trend in crime, which has fallen by 8.5 per cent over the same period.⁷ However, more serious violence has fallen by only 5.9 per cent since 2002-03 and within this trends include an increase in both recorded crimes involving a firearm and the number of convictions for unlawfully having a blade or point in a public place.⁸

9 **Local agencies have worked together to address those issues, primarily domestic violence and alcohol related crime, promoted by the Home Office as important.** The Home Office has been successful at raising the profile of both domestic violence and alcohol-related crime and encouraging local Partnerships to take action against them. When asked about the changes that have brought most improvement over the last 5 years, more than 25 per cent of Partnerships gave responses about domestic violence measures. Furthermore the majority of Partnerships which were recipients of specific Home Office funding streams aimed at tackling domestic violence and alcohol-related crime viewed them as effective.

10 **The Licensing Act 2003 enables local areas to tackle violence related to pubs, bars, and clubs, but there is variation in the extent to which it is being used effectively by local Partnerships.** The Licensing Act has given the Responsible Authorities designated under the Act, and in particular local authorities, the chance to assert more control over problematic licensed premises by placing tailored sets of conditions on licences to reduce crime and disorder. However, some areas have taken a more systematic approach than others to collecting data on incidents of violent crime in and around licensed premises and using this information to review the conditions of licences. This variation is likely to account for the mixed views amongst Partnerships about the Licensing Act. More extensive and rigorous use of the conditions of the Act could help to reduce the risk of violent crime related to alcohol.

⁴ *Crime in England and Wales 2006-07*, Table 5.02, Home Office, July 2007.

⁵ *Crime in England and Wales 2006-07*, Section 3.7, Home Office, July 2007.

⁶ *The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003-04*, Home Office, June 2005.

⁷ *Crime in England and Wales*, Table 2.01, Home Office, July 2007

⁸ *Crime in England and Wales*, Table 2.04, Home Office, July 2007

11 The majority of Home Office funding for tackling violent crime is contained within police funding to tackle all types of crime and disorder. In 2007-08 the Home Office provided funding of around £9 billion to police forces in England and Wales for all of their activities. The Home Office also provides direct funding to Partnerships. In 2007-08 it provided funding of £64 million to Partnerships to tackle all types of crime and disorder through the Safer and Stronger Communities arm of Local Area Agreements and, over the period 2005 to 2008, has provided a further £30 million of funding on programmes specifically to tackle violent crime (see Figure 8 on page 14).

12 The majority of Partnerships who received funding through Home Office programmes designed to reduce the risk of violent crime viewed the programmes as effective but their value was diminished by the Home Office's poor administration of funding streams.

Partnerships generally view the programmes through which violent crime funding is provided as effective, but they could be significantly more so. The current unreliable nature of funding streams provided directly to Partnerships has meant that Partnerships are largely using additional funding for measures geared towards managing the consequences of violent crime, rather than tackling its root causes. The unreliability of these funding streams particularly endangers contributions from the community and voluntary sectors, which have a vital role in undertaking preventive work to minimise the risk of violent crime. Partly as a result of a Public Accounts Committee recommendation in 2005 the Home Office has, from 2008-09 onwards, changed its provision of general policing grants from an annual to a three yearly basis. This should allow the police to take a more strategic approach to the use of their funds. The arrangement also gives greater flexibility regarding how funds are used. However, it has not yet taken the same approach in relation to its direct funding of Partnerships, who report that they often receive funding allocations part way through the financial year and for one year at a time.

13 The Home Office's performance at spreading good practice has been mixed. Half of Partnerships viewed the Home Office as effective at spreading good practice and half had neutral or negative views. The Home Office has been effective at rolling out Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences designed to protect high risk victims of domestic violence and has used its Tackling Violent Crime Programme to identify and spread good practice in relation to violent crime more generally. However, Partnerships reported a wide range of short term and small scale interventions across the country and noted a lack of evaluation and support to enable them to scale up these programmes, such as information about their comparative cost-effectiveness. In particular, whilst the Home Office views Safer School Partnerships as integral to intervening with young people at risk of violent crime it has not collected reliable data on the number of these partnerships which exist, nor has it investigated the different models in existence or undertaken any evaluation of which are the most effective.

14 Further engagement and data sharing between partners in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships could help to reduce significantly the risk of violent crime in local areas. New regulations came into force from October 2007 which made sharing of certain data sets amongst members of Partnerships mandatory (see Appendix 2).⁹ However, in July 2007, when we undertook our case study visits police recorded crime remained the only data set that was shared routinely. Although members of Partnerships were increasingly sharing other data sets, such as data on violence-related wounding recorded in Accident and Emergency departments, this was not done on a routine or universal basis. However, even if data was to be shared routinely, Partnerships do not currently have sufficient analytical capacity or expertise to make good use of it. Anonymised data on violence-related woundings from Accident and Emergency departments and on children excluded from school for violence would be particularly helpful, but this data had been used in 45 per cent and 26 per cent of Partnerships respectively within the last 12 months. This reflects the fact that Partnerships said that Primary Care Trust and schools representatives in local authorities were the partners most difficult to engage in crime prevention work, primarily due to their competing priorities. Where these relationships are well developed, this is frequently due to the efforts of individuals rather than established protocols.

9 Crime and Disorder (Prescribed Information) Regulations 2007.

Recommendations

15 To improve the effectiveness of violence reduction at a local level the Home Office should:

- In line with the changes that it has made to the provision of general policing grants, set funding plans for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships at least three years in advance, so Partnerships can plan strategically for the use of these funds rather than simply use money on measures which have only a short term impact on the risk of violent crime. It should also use the new Local Area Agreements to encourage Partnerships to undertake long term interventions aimed at tackling the root causes of violent crime.
- Support better data sharing within Partnerships in line with Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act to enable them to focus their activities on the factors most likely to increase the risk of violent crime in their local area. In particular, the Home Office should work with the Department of Health and the Department for Children, Schools and Families to help them communicate to Primary Care Trusts and schools representatives in Local Authorities the benefits of collecting and providing anonymised data sets on victims of violent crime who present at Accident and Emergency Departments, and on children excluded from school. This should include explaining how such data sharing can be achieved without breaching data protection legislation. For example, the Home Office could design and roll out a tool which local areas could use to predict the costs that could be avoided by different partners by reducing violent crime, and run regional workshops to bring partners together to discuss how to resolve data protection issues.
- Help Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to make effective use of the additional data which they should receive as a result of the introduction of the Crime and Disorder (Prescribed Information) Regulations 2007. The most cost effective solution should be considered. This could include encouraging the police to dedicate more of their analytical resource to analysing information on violent crime from all organisations within the Partnership to inform local strategy and operations, encouraging Partnerships to share existing analysts at a regional level to be dedicated to analysing violent crime, and providing additional training to equip analysts to identify the primary risks relating to violent crime in their local area.
- Arrange with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to collect national data from the police and schools on the number of Safer School Partnerships in existence, their location, the different models in operation, and their effectiveness.
- Raise awareness amongst Partnerships and the police about how the Licensing Act has been used successfully in some areas to reduce alcohol related violence and ensure that all areas are using the Act to its maximum potential to reduce the risk of violent crime by, for example, extending the good practice that has been put in place in some cities to the surrounding towns.