ROBBERY IN ILLICIT DRUG MARKETS:
INSIGHTS FROM QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN SCOTLAND

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ABSTRACT

While robbery is a consistent and highly featured activity of the criminal underworld, bar a small number of notable studies it is surprising to find there is not more written on the topic than one would perceive in recent academic literature: more so when considering those more nuanced aspects such as the organisation of robbery, comparative studies on the evolving nature of robbery, and robbery in illicit drug markets. This article focuses on the latter of these areas, exploring robbery within illicit drug markets. Drawing upon three studies carried out in Scotland between 2012 and 2020, the findings shed crucial light on those all too often overlooked aspects of robbery. Findings suggest robbery is most common at lower disorganised levels of the drugs trade, and is not restricted to ideal perceptions of victims. Recommendations are made for policing in Scotland and potentially further afield, whereby the nuanced nature of robbery within the context of organised crime suggests that more bespoke diversionary strategies are needed than the universal harm reduction approaches currently suggested by Scottish Government.

Keywords: Robbery, Drugs, Policing, Crime, Gangs

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Introduction

While being a long-standing, and stable, component of interpersonal violence and gang behaviours, robbery, in all its guises, remains a relatively under-researched aspect of criminal activity in Britain. Scholarly analysis of robbery primarily focuses on victim profiles, offender motivation, or types of violence employed (Harding et al, 2019). Such specifics have obscured closer examination of how both victims and offenders are ordered in social space, and how methods of robbery are variably employed.

This gap in research is further evident when considering the impact that an ever-growing and evolving illicit drugs market has had upon robbery and the perpetration of the crime. The role that robbery plays in the illicit drugs market is arguably significant, yet little has been written on the topic. Most perceptions on robbery tend to arise as a result of media stereotypes, and particularly when considering specific drugs market products, specifically crack cocaine or heroin.

The apparent gap in the literature is problematic, as the implication could be that the current policy and practical intervention approaches might be inadequate or not based upon an entirely relevant evidence base. This paper aims then to construct a more focused evidence base that outlines the realities of street-level robbery linked with the illicit drugs market in Scotland, and to make initial suggestions for how policy and practice in this area might be further refined to build upon existing strategies.

Defining the offence

The law in England and Wales relating to robbery states under section eight subsection one of the Theft Act 1968 that 'A person is guilty of robbery if he steals, and immediately before or at the time of doing so, and in order to do so, he uses force on any person or puts or seeks to put any person in fear of being then and there subjected to force'. For Northern Ireland, the law is identically defined in its wording, and is contained within section eight of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969. In Scotland on the other hand, Robbery has not yet been put on a statutory footing and its definition must still be read by referring to the common law, and the joint requirements of *mens rea* and *actus reus*. In this case the *actus reus* requires that there is theft brough about by violence or the threat of violence (McDiarmid, 2018). McDiarmid explains further that assault or violence after taking a person's property where there was not violence beforehand, is not classed as robbery under Scots law. Referring back to the laws of

England and Wales, and Northern Ireland, both of the Acts in question are silent as to violence after taking property, however it appears to be implicit that violence after theft would not be regarded as robbery, since the provision only explicitly refers to violence before or at the time of stealing property, ensuring that the laws appear to be aligned for the whole of the United Kingdom in this regard.

In terms of the *mens rea*, in Scotland, the prosecution must establish that there was *intention* by the accused to use violence in order to acquire the money or property in question (McDiarmid, 2018). Although intention is not specifically mentioned in the statutory definition of the offence in England and Wales, nor in Northern Ireland, when looking to section eight subsection two of the Theft Act 1968, and the 1969 Northern Irish counterpart, it does refer to the circumstances where the theft is not achieved, but there is an assault 'with intent to rob', which infers that intention would indeed be a key component of the full offence of robbery. The necessity for intention is an important one, as with some other serious crimes in Scotland, the presence of weapons, whether or not there is an intention to use them, can replace the usual necessity to establish objective intention. This is explained by Lord Justice Clerk Aitchison where he outlined that 'people who use [weapons]… are not entitled to say "we did not mean to kill" if death results. If people resort to the use of deadly weapons… they are guilty of murder, whether or not they intended to kill' (HMA v McGuinness, 1937). This effectively means that an individual who is in possession of a weapon cannot make a legitimate claim in law that they did not have an intention to commit violence.

There is no explicit reference within the Theft Act 1968 section eight on the requirement for intention, however there is reference to the defendant 'seeking' to put a person (the victim) in fear, and such words would ordinarily infer that intention then is indeed a requirement. This does then leave the position on reckless conduct where the defendant does not 'seek' or *intend* to cause fear potentially unclear. In England and Wales however, a combination of cases including *Cunningham* (1957), *Mowatt* (1968), and *Caldwell* (1982), have established that in many cases of crimes against the person, the requirement for *intention* can indeed be replaced with *reckless* conduct under certain circumstances. As such, it appears that either intention to use violence, or being reckless as to whether or not violence or fear of violence might result from the conduct of the accused may be interchangeable throughout the United Kingdom.

Overall then when considering the relevant legal definitions of robbery, there are structural differences in how the offence is defined in different jurisdictions of the United Kingdom, however the circumstances surrounding an offence that may be prosecuted as robbery appear to be closely aligned in practice.

Studies examining robbery

Street robbery, street crime, and mugging are often considered as synonymous with robbery despite different applications (Stockdale and Gresham 1998). For example, Hall et al.'s (1978: 327) study, *Policing the Crisis*, explored the construction of the moral panic around 'predatory' young black males and 'mugging', utilising labelling theories, Jacobs and Wright (1999) consider motivations, and drawing upon anomie, labelling, and structural factors they argue for disadvantaged youth; securing legal work, borrowing, and securing loans are simply not viable means to generate the income needed to live the lifestyles projected. Rather, robbery becomes a quick and accessible solution.

Shover (1996) notes that individuals engaged in robbery tend to act under a sense of pressure. Yet such relief is only temporary because the proceeds gained only 'enable' further action. Jacobs and Wright (1999) term this reinforcing behaviour the Etiological Cycle of Robbery. Linking back to identifiable risk factors, they argue that offenders are 'overwhelmed by their own predicament – emotional, financial, pharmacological and otherwise – and see robbery as 'the only way out' (p.167).

In England, the Joint Inspection of the Street Crime Initiative identified that 'that many of the most prolific adult s[treet] c[rime] offenders were indeed misusers of Class A drugs' (Home Office 2006). In the UK, where scholarship on robbery has often focused on serious armed robbery (Wright et al. 2006) and scholarship on low-level street robbery is scarce, we acknowledge the contribution of Smith and his Home Office review of 2003. Smith (2003) noted that personal robbery victims were mostly male, as were suspects. Over 60% of robberies were conducted using two or more suspects. The younger the victim, moreover, the larger the group of offenders involved. Smith also identified five distinct types of street robbery offending: Blitz (dramatic overwhelming to control or stun); Confrontation (a demand for goods using threats); Con (deceiving victims into a form of street interaction); Snatch (goods are grabbed without prior interaction); and Victim-initiated (where the victim initiates contact with the suspect).

Also in the UK, Hallsworth's (2005) purview of street robbery followed the key arguments of Routine Activities Theory, where motivated offenders and suitable targets converged and capable guardians were absent (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and Clarke 1998). Much lauded by the Home Office, related opportunity perspectives have been central to how Britain has sought to reduce street robbery (see Stockdale and Gresham, 1998; Tilley et al 2004). Wright et al. (2006) suggest the motivations of UK street robbers match those of the US, but they also identify the shortcomings of rational choice theory as an explanation for the crime, arguing it oversimplifies a highly complex process (Wright and Decker 1994), whilst obscuring the wider cultural context of offending. Respondents in their sample committed street robberies not to sustain their material lives but to sustain their hedonistic lifestyles.

Wright et al. (2006: 13) argue rational choice theorists overlook the fact that street robbers operate within a pre-existing cultural context which values toughness and violence and where a street reputation 'would be compromised by the disciplined subordination to authority demanded by most employers'. Deakin et al. (2007) noted behavioural practice and use of violence was dependent upon victim selection with older, drug-using respondents more likely to employ violence as a necessary practice. Victim selection was also determined by 'a complex and insightful understanding of non-verbal communication and body language on the part of the offender' (*ibid,* p.65). Violent victimisation can be avoided through careful reading of these behavioural cues and 'signals' (Densley 2012), especially in spaces where the 'street code' thrives (Anderson 1999).

Studies examining robbery in Illicit Drug Markets (IDMs)

Few studies directly and explicitly look at the role of robbery in illicit drug markets. Some, such as Hutton (2005) and Mclean (2019), tend to include its discussion within the wider context of the drugs trade, and thus only touch upon the subject. Harding et al. (2019) are one of the few who have done so, and adopting an offender's perspective and drawing upon Bourdieu (1984) they examined the role that gangs and organised crime groups play in regards to robbery in Scotland. They identified a typology of street robbery and the way in which this particular criminal activity may adapt and change as young men progress up the gang hierarchy. In the embryonic stages of gang activity where criminal behaviour is mostly recreational and expressive in form and nature (see Densley 2014), young men engaged in opportunistic, violent street robbery that was seen as a form of masculine performance and a reputation-building

pursuit. As young men progressed from 'young crime gangs' and the accompanying criminal activity (largely drug supply) became more instrumental in nature, robbery became more focused on targeting rival drug dealers based on intelligence-gathering and risk assessment (Harding et al., 2019). Although still clearly involving the need for potential violence, robbery became a means of 'gaining economic capital as opposed to symbolic capital' (Harding et al., 2019: 892). Finally, as young men transitioned into organised crime groups (OCGs), there was a clear shift from violent street-oriented robbery to more subtle forms of business-oriented practices including fraud and money laundering – but the occasional need for 'flash holdups' to instil fear and a sense of potential retribution among rival criminally-oriented businessmen (*ibid,* p.892).

Jacobs (2000, p.vii) highlights that street robberies can be melded with drug purchases, allowing perpetrators to capitalise on the element of surprise – with bystanders often reluctant to intervene. Further, Jacobs and Wright (2008: 529) found that 'the single biggest contributor to moralistic street robbery' was the illicit drug market. For victims of drug-related violations such as robbery, it was found that the method of redress was always violent robbery since it left no doubt in the perpetrator's mind about the opponent's 'unwillingness to take the instigating violation laying down' (Jacobs and Wright, 2008: 516).

Coomber (2006) argues that most illicit drug supply occurs in the levels below retail-level dealing, in what he terms the 'social supply' sphere. This splits the illegal drugs market into two clear brackets; 'organised' and 'disorganised'[4] supply. Organised supply refers to importers and wholesalers, while disorganised refers to retail-level dealers and social suppliers. The main focus of this study is in the disorganised sphere.

Background and methodology for the current study
The research site
Although not the capital of Scotland, Glasgow is the largest city in the country. Whilst Glasgow has a rich and vibrant history, it has also been associated with a number of serious health, social and economic ills that have been termed 'The Glasgow Effect' (Robertson 1984). This Glasgow effect is particularly evident where affluent suburbs on the city's boundary contrast

[4] The terms organised and disorganised simply indicate the level of coordination, planning and group work to move drugs. The term organised fits with Police Scotland criteria for organised crime, while the term disorganised does not (See Scottish government, 2015).

with housing estates, or 'schemes', within the city. Although some of these contrasting estates are separated by single streets, the comparable average life expectancy within such estates can drop by over 20 years. Young men living in areas like Drumchapel were twice more likely to die than their counterparts living in Bearsden (Peakin, 2014).

Against this backdrop, the Glasgow conurbation has experienced an intense criminological gaze (see Fraser, 2015). In the 1930s Glasgow was dubbed 'The Scottish Chicago' (Davies, 2013). This was largely due to entrenched sectarian division, and a growing gang problem in which sectarian-based criminal gangs would rule the streets through violence, intimidate local business owners, and be responsible for much of the high levels of knife crime in the region (Davies, 2013). The infamous razor gangs helped embed what would become a persistent knife culture in Glasgow, culminating in the city's designation as 'knife capital of Europe' as recently as 2004. In 2010, violent crimes in the west of Scotland were double the national average (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2015), with youth being three times as likely to suffer assault than in Britain's capital, London.

However, in the past 5 years violent crime rates have fallen sharply, and whilst still above national averages, in 2014 overall recorded crime was at its lowest point in over 30 years (Scottish Government 2014). Intense intervention strategies deployed by the Violence Reduction Unit and associated partners, and other agencies, such as 'No Knives, Better Lives' (Deuchar 2013) have assisted this reduction. Adopting a public health approach to violence, and tacking deeply embedded cultural stereotypes of masculinity, the combined efforts have seen significant reductions in violent crimes (Deuchar, 2013). However, some notable and concerning trends have continued to emerge. The Scottish Government (2015) identified that around 70% of organised crime in the country is located within the west coast of Scotland; over 60% of which is directly attributed to the illegal drug trade. Through consideration of the historical and social backdrop then, Glasgow must be regarded as a highly appropriate geographical area of focus for research in this context.

Sample

The data presented in this study is drawn from three separate, although related, pieces of qualitative fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2020.

The first study began in 2012 and explored gang organisation and activity in Glasgow and surrounding towns (McLean 2018). Criteria for participants' involvement was set as: (a) having been involved in group offending; (b) having been engaged in criminal behaviour defined by Police Scotland as organised crime; (c) holding residence in, or having lived in, the Glasgow conurbation; and (d) being over 16 years of age. Participants were initially accessed via practitioner services and faith-based organisations, who acted as gatekeepers. Purposive and snowball sampling yielded 40 participants, who were primarily indigenous Caucasian males, with ages ranging between mid-adolescence to mid-forties. Qualitative individual interviews formed the majority of the data, complemented by two small group interviews.

The second dataset used for the research presented here comes from a follow-up study carried out between 2017 and 2019, which went beyond the Glasgow locality and included Inverclyde, West and South Ayrshire, alongside interviews with a limited sample from the Central Belt, Edinburgh, the Highlands, and Stornoway. A more inclusive entry criteria for participants was set as: (a) being, or having experience of being, involved in what Police Scotland identify as serious and organised criminal activity; or (b) involvement in agencies seeking to reduce organised crime harms; or (c) having been significantly affected by organised crime. In addition to outstanding gatekeepers, several charitable organisations working with (ex) offenders seeking to disengage from gangs and desist from crime were also contacted. Purposive and snowball sampling yielded a sample of 35 interviewees aged 14–60 years of age. While not all participants were white or Caucasian, all but 3 participants identified as Scottish, and all offenders were male. Participants were primarily interviewed in small groups numbering 2-5. Five practitioners and eight local residents were also interviewed to validate and triangulate data. Qualitative interviews covered a range of topics, from gangs to organised crime to victimisation to other illegal activities and criminality.

The third dataset draws upon fieldwork carried out between 2019-2020. 68 participants were interviewed; 22 of which were practitioners, the rest primarily consisting of young people and young adults in the west of Scotland, some under 16 years of age and mostly white Caucasian males. Access to young people was typically granted through practitioner gatekeepers. The interviews sought to look at contemporary gang behaviour, drug supply, sectarianism, knife crime, victimisation, and the impact of social media on socialising, delinquency, and crime.

For the purposes of this paper, thematic analysis was applied to the collective datasets (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). By bringing together these datasets, as authors we were able to focus on those aspects of the thematic analysis pertaining to robbery within the context of IDMs and gangs. In particular, we were interested in the participants' views on how robbery may have evolved within criminal networks within the west of Scotland; the alleged motivations of those involved in street robbery; the described nature and patterns of robbery, and how engagement may evolve as offenders progress through the gang hierarchy. In the following sections, we draw upon the voices of the participants to present the overarching themes relating to robbery that emerged from the data. These are broken into four. The first is *the evolution of robbery;* the second is *motivation for robbery within IDMs*; the third is *opportunistic robbery* ; and the fourth is *planned and organised robbery.*

Findings

The evolution of robbery

Traditionally, professional criminals in Britain were most commonly affiliated with predatory crimes like robbery, theft, burglary. Other crimes tended to include aspects of extra-legal governance, and were perhaps most notably associated with quasi-mafia type organisations (von Lampe, 2016). However, this changed dramatically in the 1980s with the newly reinvigorated heroin boom (See McLean et al, 2019b). Widespread media attention was given to this new wave of heroin use, as overdoses, seizures, the AIDS epidemic, and heroin-related deaths increased.

Furthermore, the 1980s also saw a notable increase in use of recreational drugs among young people (See Parker et al, 1998). In turn, this increased political concern regarding growing links between drugs and crime. Reminiscing of his early years in law enforcement, former police officer David explained the changes he witnessed amongst serious offenders involved in organised crime:

> 'Old time [criminals tended to be involved in] carr[ying] out robbery…. Not many were drug dealers, like you would [see today]. Weekends, your usual Friday and Saturday nights, have you, [police mostly] patrol[ed or were stationed at] the [town centre] for [pub] closing time. Drugs were not high on the agenda…. [in] 1990, I noticed the real trouble with… harder drugs. Heroin brings trouble. [We] had a high number of assaults, [in the town, linked] to [an ongoing] feud between dealers… That gave us a real incentive, maybe an eye opener, to the real issue, of hard drugs… the real guys, the top end players, had now seen the luxuries [selling] drugs brought. I knew [from] then drugs

were going to be where the future of policing would lie [in regard to] organised criminality.'

David notes by the late 80s, early 90s that a number of high profile, and often public, incidents began to occur with increasing regularity. This trend signalled to David, and colleagues, that the more serious offenders involved in organised crime were beginning to make real moves towards concerting their efforts to monopolising the drugs trade, and as such begun drift away from commercial robberies. The incident in which David referred to linked to the Paisley Drugs War (PDW), in which no fewer than a dozen individuals were murdered over several years in OCG efforts to control the booming drugs trade.

 Many (auto)biographical accounts of well-known British gangsters acknowledge this 'turn' in the criminal underworld, in which gangsters steadily moved away from primarily committing predatory-based organised crime in favour of undertaking more market-based organised crime (See Boyle, 1977; Ferris, 2005). Indeed, one of the most recognisable criminal figures from this period, Paul Ferris, notes that having been a successful armed robber carrying out jewel heists, led to him begin to be recruited as an enforcer for a drug kingpin, and Glasgow's godfather, Arthur Thompson Snr, who himself had been an experienced safe cracker in his early years before making the switch to being a drug supplier (See Ferris, 2005).

Pitts (2008) argues the days of bank heists, safe cracking and train robbery in London have diminished considerably to be replaced by more consistent and predictable criminal ventures, like drug supply. This does not mean that robbery has disappeared, however. Robbery, like other crimes, has continued to evolve, and is now tied most notably to the illegal drugs trade. Contemporary robbery has several forms. It may be addicts robbing other addicts, the public, recreational users or drug dealers for drugs, or for money in order to purchase drugs or pay drug-related debts. It may be those who still engage in predatory crimes targeting drug users or dealers in order to secure economic gains, knowing that their victims have no recourse to law. It may be established OCGs, either robbing or hiring other criminal groups on their behalf to rob other criminals in order to relieve them of their drugs, firearms, and money and simultaneously further their own position. In regard to the IDM, Darren (an [ex]offender) stated:

> 'Folk are robbing folk all the time [in the IDM]. There isn't no way of getting away
> from it. [Individuals] have to always be watch[ing] their back[s]. [The number of] folk

I know who have done the dirty (betrayed) their mates for a couple of grams (indicator of drug weight purchased) is bang out now.' - Darren

Darren indicated that the addictive attributes, and intoxicated states, that drugs may produce result in a significant lack of trust amongst users, dealers, friends, and so forth, in the IDM. Trust is a commodity which is in very short supply. Darren goes on to explain that his experienced opinion, is that it is more common now than historically for robberies to be either carried out by people who intend on getting money to spend on drugs, or for food and drink since they will spend all of their money on illicit drugs. As a relatively wealthy and successful individual with extensive legitimate and illegitimate connections throughout his local community and the wider region, Darren felt that he was in a good position to gauge the nature of robbery, and analyse emerging trends.

Goldsmith was a convicted armed robber, and after spending a number of years living abroad, was finally convicted for his part in a bank robbery. Being an older individual who was no longer active in crime, Goldsmith was questioned about changes in the criminal underworld:

I: You think that gangsters [now] are more likely to be involved in crimes like drug distribution then?

G: It is harder to do a bank over [nowadays]. It can be done, but not in the same way as once before. You see the Hatton crew… [it is more] theft.

As Goldsmith noted, changes to security and policing in banking mean that essentially 'old school' methods to bank robbery are now largely obsolete. Banks are still targets but how to access their funds has changed. Gone are the days of a getaway car, shotguns, and a crew. This has meant that robbers are more likely to change their criminal trade or be motivated to seek easier targets. When discussing the motivation behind such changes Goldsmith stated:

G: Every fucking bastard out there shifting a sniff of gear now believes he is a ticket (gangsters)…. Dealers will sell to kids. Wreck communities. No [morals], no nothing. [Older professional criminals] got respect. Stole from the wealthy. No[t] the poor… It is about money. It has always been about money. That is why I [committed armed robbery]. But it was not the same. The rush from pulling up in the car, brimmed and loaded. It cannot be outdone. The money and [the thrill] went [hand in hand]…. I get it man, I honestly get it. I see why punters will move [to selling drugs]. I couldn't. Just couldn't.

I: Was it not something that you ever considered having always been involved in like crime?

G: No… [Drug dealers] are bullies, a fucking virus on the planet. I have no respect for them. They are not criminals, fucking vermin. I can see why it might be justification to take money from them. The thought crossed my mind, course… [but] end of it all, its still drug money. Tainted isn't it?

Goldsmith's statement demonstrates that he was witness to these 'turns' in the criminal underworld, where as bank robbery became more difficult and simultaneously less profitable, former colleagues may have been more willing to turn to drug distribution in order to maintain a high level of income and continue to live particular lifestyles which require 'fast money'. Having already established access to criminal networks, having a supportive criminal group, access to firearms, and having the criminal credentials, it made sense to became a drug dealer. Yet, Goldsmith's statement also captures a typical narrative that emerged in relation to the robbery of dealers, in that action against them and targeting their ill-gotten gains was largely justified by being involved in a 'dirty' trade. Thus old professional criminals had a choice to make, should they wish to continue to pursue a criminal career; either they became involved in market-based crime, such as drug supply, or continued to be involved in predatory based crime, such as robbery, but merely find a different, easier, target, i.e. drug dealers. Ultimately, they had to become the hunter or the hunted.

Motivation for robbery in IDMs

As well as the new drugs trade attracting a number of criminals who were seen as perhaps being somewhat softer than the traditional professional class, the trade itself was seen to be dirty and something which one should try to avoid getting involved with if possible. Arguably this view point is summed up by infamous robbers or enforcers in the criminal underworld such as Stephen French, also known as The Devil, for his barbaric tactics deployed in the abduction, kidnap and torture of drug dealers, and also debt collector Shaun Smith. Criminals, like French, would use their skills as highly trained martial artists, fighters, weight lifters, etc., to muscle in on local criminals who came to their attention and were known to have done well in selling drugs (Johnson, 2007). During an interview with participant Hugh (an [ex]offender), the question was forwarded regarding the morality of robbing drug dealers. Much like Goldsmith, Hugh shared a similar viewpoint. Although, unlike Goldsmith, he saw nothing wrong with taking money from drug dealers and spending it on himself and loved ones:

> 'It [robbing drug dealers] is doing the community a service. No? Aye sure it is, am saying it. I don't pollute the place wi' that pish. Fucking use it to get the things we (Hugh and his family) need. Give it to my mates, what have you, you know, whoever needs it.' - Hugh

Hugh used techniques of neutralisation, as outlined by Matza and Sykes (1961), in justifying his actions. Robbing drug dealers was something which was seen to be different from robbing a shop, a convenience store, a post office or even a bank. The money taken had no proper or legitimate owner. It is not that of 'hard-working' populations. The actors who had been relieved of the money, or assaulted in the process of the robbery, were seen as being almost non-human. Hugh used terms in his interview which associated the victim with vermin. Bauman (1989) likewise outlined that the German SS soldiers during the Second World War would use similarly dehumanising terms, in order to help justify barbaric actions deployed. The robbers, on the other hand, very much saw themselves as being more morally worthy of the money. They would use it to engage in legitimate activities and pastimes. They would use it for family and friends and even give some away. They could be viewed as believing themselves, or portraying themselves at least, as Robin Hood type figures, stealing from the rich and corrupt to give some to the poor and needy. Similar techniques could be seen even when this act involved robbing others who operated in the IDM, such as potential customers of dealers and consumers of drugs:

> '[The way] I see it, [is that I] am doing them a favour, aren't I? The guy's only going to go and spend his hard earned money on crap, make himself a pure fucking flopping about the place idiot on the stuff. Better in my pocket than [the drug dealer's] or his own if he is going to be an idiot wi' it. Am I no[t] right eh?' - Hugh

Interestingly, while making a point in his statement, Hugh continually put forward statements which were shaped as questions or were open-ended as though he was seeking reassurance or validation.

Of course, robbery, regardless of how it is carried out, and against whom it is carried, is still essentially about monetary rewards. This is true for robbery in IDMs also. Unlike other predatory-based criminal activities that are somewhat similar, such as theft or burglary, there is no need to locate and barter with third parties when trading stolen goods for money or drugs, given that robbery in illegal drug markets more often than not, like most robbery, is for hard

cash, and in this case, also drugs. The monetary rewards are therefore the main reason that one commits robbery, as participants Stephen, Richard and Dicky ([ex]offenders) stated:

'I do it for money. Really, I do, do it (robbery) for the money.' - Stephen

'Suppose I needed the money… That last time [I committed robbery], I felt [as] though, I had been chasing my tail for a fair bit, aye. Like I needed to get on top again. Weird, I didn't feel the same on the last rob. Maybe [be]cause it was purely for money.' – Richard

'Why does anyone do anything now? Self-indulgence, you know.' – Dicky

As all three participants stated, the main driving factor for committing robbery was the monetary rewards that it can bring if successful. These monetary rewards can then be used to improve, relieve, or better some of the secondary drivers which may have led to the participants need, or desire, for improving their financial position through robbery in the first place.

A further factor fuelling robbery in IDMs is drug addiction. Coomber (2006) points out that most suppliers in these economies are themselves addicts or users. The social supply of heroin in the UK is particularly primed for acts of criminality such as theft, burglary and robbery. McPhee et al (2019) point out that it is important to note that not all users of class A drugs are addicts, nor problematic users. Yet, Casey (2009) points out that, while most drug users are recreational users, for the minority who are problematic users, they cause disproportionate harm to the economy and likewise commit a disproportionate number of criminal offences; although most, while petty, are nonetheless persistent. Consistent drug use can affect thinking patterns, especially when combined with additional stresses. This can hinder inhibition, and when an individual is 'drying out' from drugs and 'in need of a fix' then they are more likely to engaging in risky behaviour. Ronald mentioned how this combination can result in the robbery and betrayal of others: usually those closest to the offender:

'[When I was an addict] it was a pure big problem. [I would do] anything for [a] hit. It is strange, unless you have been there you can't really explain it. Even now I can't actually understand why … The fear of not getting [an injection of heroin], ma[d]e [myself] think daft thoughts. It is the fear of being dry. It is a fear. [I would] ache… [Heroin addiction] pure took over my life. I [stole from] my oldest kid, [his pocket money]. I would always think, "I will get it back to him, but never did." - Ronald

As Ronald stated, while other participants suggested that drug use was a contributory factor for their motivation in robbery participation, for problematic users, drug addiction is more often than not the primary, and even the sole, reason for engaging in robbery. Similar studies on robbery and/or drug addiction have found comparable results (See Casey, 2009; Jacobs, 2000; Harding et al, 2019). Ronald suggested that he was more likely to engage in robbery and other erratic behaviour, not when intoxicated, but rather when he was in need of a hit. Jacobs (2000) likewise found that in crack cocaine markets, when addicts were in need of a hit, they were more likely to undertake particularly risky behaviour which they might otherwise weigh up more accurately before acting.

Opportunistic robbery in disorganised drug markets

While the term robbery conjures up particular, usually stereotypical, images, in reality it takes many different forms. This is particularly true where robberies are not planned, but opportunistic in nature. A recurring theme from the interviews was that street level dealings often cause the most trouble and could be the most problematic. This is for a number of reasons, including: actors are starting out; actors may not know one another; actors may be interacting with more people than those at the top; actors are having to take greater risks for less profit; customers may have nothing to lose; there is little trust between those involved; actors may have little experience; the relationships, business partnerships, and interactions with other criminals are still in the embryotic stages of development. Robbery may also be more likely because some do not consider it worth the effort or hassle to make a big fuss about what they would consider minor losses, of which they knew they would suffer some. Furthermore, at this level the robbery of those involved in drug markets may not always be about drugs only and can become about humiliating rivals and victims for thrills and 'kicks'.

In such circumstances, the individual often acts as a lone operator. Often this is a form of criminal opportunism and 'seizing the moment'. Transactional insecurity is widely recognised amongst the drug dealing fraternity and accepted as part of life. William recalled a past drugs transaction in which he robbed the dealer:

> '[I] knew the [dealer]... [He] stayed [near] me, [and was] a bit younger. [I] heard he was selling [ecstasy tablets] .....I didn't go [out] to rob him, but after I bought the pills I seen him take out a wad of cash and though 'fuck it, am taking that....[I] Just said "give me that". Obv[iously] he was shocked, but fuck it. [I] Got up in his face.... [and] he shat it

and gave me the money. [I] took the pills as well.... I don't feel bad. He knew what he was getting into.... his fault for no[t] protecting himself.' - William

For William, robbery was not planned but opportunistic and *ad hoc* within the circumstances. This robbery strategy involved a rapid risk assessment of both situation and the personal attributes of the dealer, with judgements made as to whether or not the dealer (soon to be opponent) was 'tooled up' or ready to fight back. As William's case indicated, among our participants, justification or techniques of neutralisation were often offered up as a way of rationalising why violent robbery was suddenly necessary, e.g. the dealer was careless, unprofessional, 'taking the piss', or waving money around.

William indicated a lack of remorse and justified his behaviour as permissible as it was not that he lacked self-control or demonstrated high impulsivity, rather these were rational grounds of an unofficial criminal code and that his victim knew what he was getting into. (Mamayek et al., 2016). This would suggest that drug dealing is a risky business (Hutton, 2005), particularly for early career dealers still learning these unofficial criminal codes—in which dealers should always be ready to respond to would-be assailants.

Planned robbery in organised drug markets

With the rise of social media and the ability to communicate online, there has been an increase in the phenomenon of 'catfishing', whereby someone will lure another individual into a relationship by means of a fictional online persona. This term is typically applied to those dating, but it can also be applied to robbery as well. It was not uncommon for individuals to 'put out lines' or tempting advertisements and deals, and wait for unsuspecting individuals to reply. As a youth, Gee indicated that he and his friend would engage in petty theft and robbery, sometimes with another peer or two. Robbery began opportunistically, with the duo simply taking advantage of situations that may present themselves to be favourable. After experiencing the thrills and the economic gains of robbery, the duo would set up a more organised system whereby they would play catfish to pull in unsuspecting victims. Gee explained the process:

> 'Me and [Individual C] would put up ads on Gumtree … things that [boys our age at that time] would have [liked]… [we gave a] fake address [when advertising] … [we wore] Bergus jackets. … They are good for pulling the hood up and hiding blades, [be]cause you had the inside zip pockets… when [the buyer] showed, we jumped out [from our hiding spots] and robbed them. I wasn't into robbing women, but [my friend] did a few times … [we would] put a knife to their throat. I always went behind them

and put knife to their side but [my friend] held it to their throat … [did] that for about two years, until I got caught … never got caught doing the crime … [but] when I [traded] the [stolen goods] into the shop… you needed to give ID. …' – Gee

Robbery is a progressive 'art', and as such the skill Gee gained through street robbery allowed him to begin targeting 'bigger jobs'. Seldom does an individual begin to engage in robbery without building up some experience first. This was the same for Gee. Given that he had been imprisoned when caught for trading goods he had been robbing individuals of, he decided to target drug dealers specifically. This showed that Gee was able to learn and adapt, and in turn also adjust his targets in accordance with changes in law enforcement and security:

'You think of everything like, if I earn this and spend that, then if I am doing robberies on the side, then it could be more profit… Spend their money, sell their drugs…. [My friend] didn't get [incarcerated] and was still doing [robberies]. He had hooked up wi' another young boy [Jiro] from the scheme. Put out a shout, "I've this much white, this much green, brown", whatever, it's all bullshit anyway. Same routine [as previously] really… were stealing money from [end-users]. Was a bit different, guys were older, and would usually come with a pal or two in the car, so we would have to give an address in middle of fucking nowhere, like parks, [football] pitches… [We] would be in the driver's seat in the car, parked up in the place, well before anyone got there. [I would] still smudge the registration] plate, [and would] sit in the car. The parks were always pitch black so hardly able to see [regardless]. We would get them to drive up so the car is side-by-side, like to talk and that, know. You always talk for a wee bit, chit chat, know? Sitting in the car[s]. I would ask to see the money, and if they handed it over, that was it. My mate would [pull out the [our] old browning pistol, know? [My friend] would stick it in his face, "don't fucking move". Wee Jiro would run out, pan the back window with a brick. They always took off. If not, he would stab a tyre and get in our [car], and we would be off. Some cunts didn't hand the money but, so I would point to a bag we planted over at the bushes or whatever and say, "the gear is in there". Gave some stories about, planted it 'case they were cops. Meant one had to get out, or if it was the driver, then he would kill the engine. Was always close enough they would[n't] drive over. Soon as that door opened… Jiro would bolt over and pull a shooter... Most times… they shite it and freeze, you know. Sometimes it went tits up and we would have to bail…. It is dodgy [but gives] a buzz, a heavy one..' – Gee

Gee would target only those who had significant money, offering deals for larger quantities of drugs, in order to make the effort worth it. The success of the robbery was largely based on Gee's ability to control many variables, pre-planning the event and anticipating potential moves, as much as possible. While this method was suited for a time, as Gee notes some victims would seek to come after Gee and his friends and thus eventually they would change tactic, carrying out similar plans in various settings. The plan always retained the criteria of getting their hands on the money, and executing the perfect ambush. As robbery became more

complex, this meant there would be a need for a colleague or two in order to make the robberies work. To this extent robbery effectively becomes a gang/group activity. The gang would progress to robbing retail-level dealers and eventually wholesalers.

Discussion

In this paper, we have identified the way in which robbery has remained a comparatively under-researched element of criminal activity, in spite of the fact that it is generally known to play a significant role within the context of IDMs. In the literature that does exist, previous researchers have identified the way in which street robbery can emerge against the backdrop of unemployment, social deprivation and drug abuse (Jacobs and Wright, 1990). We have examined the links between street culture, expressive forms of criminality and the way in which robbery can provide a relief from pressure, but that the proceeds often lead on to retaliation and further violent action (Shover, 1996; Jacobs and Wright, 1999). We have also explored previous scholarly evidence that suggests a strong correlation between drug abuse and robbery.

We have highlighted the limitations of rational choice theory as an explanation for robbery, and the need to consider the wider structural context of crime. While some may commit robbery for material gain, others may do so to sustain their hedonistic lifestyles (Wright et al., 2006). Although few studies have looked specifically at the role of robbery in illicit drug markets, we have drawn attention to the work of Harding et al. (2019) that suggests the existence of a typology of street robbery that adapts and changes as young men progress up the gang hierarchy, with opportunistic violent robbery used as a means of acquiring symbolic capital during the embryonic stages and fraud and money-laundering to acquire economic capital being more prevalent as young men progress to OCGs. Further, we have drawn attention to the way in which drug suppliers can become easy targets for street robbery but the way in which evidence also suggests that victims may redress robbery with retaliatory violent robbery (Jacobs and Wright, 2008).

The main focus of our paper has been to share insights from empirical research conducted across just under 10 years in and around the city of Glasgow, which has a long history with gangs, drug abuse and criminality. Through our collective qualitative dataset emerging from interviews with (ex)offenders and practitioners, we have been able to explore the nature of street robbery within the context of IDMs, specifically examining the way in which robbery may have evolved within criminal networks; the motivations of those involved in street

robbery; the nature and patterns of robbery; and how engagement may evolve as offenders progress through gang hierarchies.

Our findings suggest that, from the late 1980s onwards, serious offenders had begun to monopolise the illegal drugs trade and thus become less involved in commercial robbery and gravitate more towards street robbery as a by-product of market-based organised crime (namely drug dealing). Thus, robbery evolved from a commercial orientation to a violent street orientation linked to IDMs (confirming earlier insights by O'Mahoney and Ellis, 2009). Our data suggest that the addictive attributes of drug users could result in lack of trust among users, dealers and friends within the IDM and that gang members were more likely to be motivated by easier targets (namely drug users), particularly with revolutions in security and policing meaning that bank robbery had effectively become obsolete. As such, the taking of action against dealers had become justified within the context of drug supply being viewed as a 'dirty' trade. Thus, neutralisation techniques were used by our participants to justify their actions, and thus regarded their victims as vermin. However, at the same time the monetary rewards were viewed as the main motivation for street robbery among our participating (ex)offenders) and thereby a means of improving their financial position.

Our insights also suggest that drug addiction itself was often the main contributory factor for robbery participation for our participants (echoing earlier insights by Case, 2009; Jacobs, 2000; Harding et al., 2019). Several of our participants also suggested that opportunistic robbery was common, where rapid risk assessments of situational factors and personal attributes of dealers were conducted. In some cases, our participants indicated that opportunistic robbery could later lead on to engaging in techniques like catfishing, where victims were selected online and attacks became carefully coordinated. As these approaches became more complex robbery would increasingly become a gang-related activity focused on retail-level dealers and wholesalers.

Policy implications and recommendations

As highlighted elsewhere (McLean et al. 2018; Harding et al., 2019), in its national strategy for reducing the harm caused by organised crime the Scottish Government (2015) presents a four-pronged approach. The approach focuses on the need to: *divert* people from becoming involved in organised crime; *deter* OCGs; *detect* and prosecute those involved in organised crime; and *disrupt* OCGs.

Previous research into robbery, with its predominant focus on the victim/offender profile or the type of violence utilised in offences, has largely obscured the opportunity to consider how robbery presents differently in different social contexts. Our empirical insights outlined in this paper suggest that street robbery often emerges as a by-product of organised crime, and that drug users are viewed as easy targets and the act is often viewed as a means of enhancing monetary rewards. However, in some social contexts opportunistic robbery was common, particularly at the lower echelons of street gang involvement and the more disorganised levels of the IDMs; whereas, once young men gained experience, social media could be used as a means of more coordinated forms of robbery, and those who progressed to OCGs were less inclined to become involved at all and more likely to specialise in connecting distributors and buyers, who themselves may continue to involve themselves in street robbery. Accordingly, the nuanced nature of robbery within the context of organised crime suggests more bespoke diversionary strategies are needed than the universal harm reduction approaches suggested by Scottish Government (2015).

Our findings hold the capacity to further inform Police Scotland (the national force for Scotland) in how best to identify those 'at risk' young men who are the most impulsive, as well as focusing interventions on the transition periods between street gangs and involvement in organised crime. By focusing on neighbourhoods with high levels of violent street robbery, officers could draw upon multi-agency collaboration to initiate mentoring interventions to seek to educate young men about the impact of violence while also actively deflecting them from engaging in patterns of online criminality such as 'catfishing' and from the allure of the drug market in general as a means of preventing their progression to young crime gangs or recruitment to OCGs (Densley 2014; Harding et al., 2019).

Conversely, where lower incidents of violent street robbery exist but where there are also increased incidents of online fraud combined with increased efficiency in the coordination of local drug distributors and buyers, this may indicate an increased presence of OCGs within a community, where covert, underhanded methods may be used to acquire goods. Echoing Harding et al. (2019), in such cases police officers should avoid the inclination to adopt a 'warrior mentality' and the sole use of enforcement to *deter* and *disrupt* – although it is recognised that this may be initially needed as an immediate means of stopping retaliatory gang shootings where these arise (Deuchar et al., 2018; Harding et al., 2019). More importantly, detectives will require to take a more proactive approach to community engagement (Crocker

et al., 2017), recognising local citizens' status as knowledgeable informants about their local areas and placing an emphasis on 'local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control' (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993: 8; see also Deuchar et al., 2018; Harding et al., 2019). Developing dialogue with members of OCGs as a means of encouraging members to break with their criminal environments has been found to have major benefits for both the individuals themselves and communities. Encouraging members to leave criminal gangs may help to reduce the size of the groups and their activities, including their potential for connecting drug distributors and buyers and indirectly supporting the continual prevalence of street robbery as a by-product of organised criminality (Bjørgo, 2019).

This dialogue-based approach necessitates police officers establishing a relationship of trust with key OCG members. This requires careful coordination, and considerable time devoted to investing in the co-construction of knowledge with local people and agencies; importantly, if some police patrols continue to operate a confrontational policy based solely on detecting and disrupting organised crime, this can potentially undermine the trust on which the dialogue strategy is based (*ibid*). Ultimately, a delicate mixing of 'hard' and 'soft' policing approaches may be only way to ensure that local communities become more resilient in terms of preventing organised crime to flourish (Bjørgo, 2019; Mclean et al., 2019).

Conclusions

We recognise that our research has limitations; it focuses on a small selections of areas in Scotland, our methodological approach relied on only semi-structured interviews, and the sample was almost exclusively male. As such, we must be cautious about generalising the insights to other parts of the UK, or even Scotland as a whole. However, we believe that the insights we have gained draw attention to the nuanced nature of street robbery within the context of IDMs, gangs and organised crime.

Future research should examine the extent to and ways in which patterns of robbery change and evolve as offenders progress through gang hierarchies in a wider context across Scotland and the wider UK, and how levels of group organisation affect young men's offending patterns. The role of young women within OCGs and their potential relationship with the coordination of street robbery within the context of drug distribution networks could also be explored. It is hoped that this paper may stimulate such research.

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