



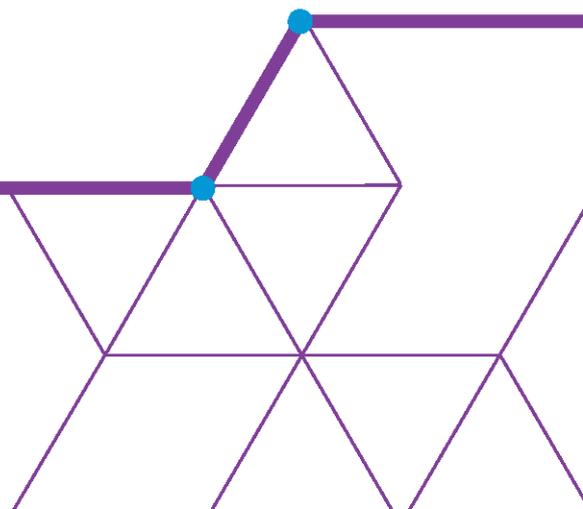
HM Prison &
Probation Service

The demand for and use of illicit phones in prison

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Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service**

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1. Summary

1.1 Introduction and background

Mobile phones in prisons are used for a range of purposes, both social and criminal, and would appear to have become a significant feature of prison life. During 2013, 7,451 illicit mobile phones or SIM cards were reported to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), formerly the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). This research project, conducted during Spring/Summer 2014, was designed to gain an understanding of what drives the demand for illicit mobile phones by prisoners, and to help identify potentially effective ways of preventing their usage.

The key research questions explored were:

- What drives the demand for mobile phones within prisons – how much is for maintaining family contact and how much is for other more criminal purposes (including criminal networks, gangs, terrorism)?
- Are certain types of prisoners more likely to want a mobile phone and so drive demand in particular establishments?
- Which non-technical factors could be most effective (and cost effective) in reducing both the supply and demand for mobile phones in prison (including ways of counteracting the prison economy that surrounds the use of mobile phones)?

1.2 Research design

The research project employed a mixed methods research design to answer the research questions, including:

- 1) a literature review on existing literature on the use of illicit mobile phones in prison
- 2) a small scale limited content analysis of the materials found on confiscated mobile phones/SIM cards across a selection of prisons
- 3) a survey of all prison establishments across England and Wales covering all three research questions
- 4) semi-structured interviews with 20 Heads of Security and 67 prisoners across 20 prisons

Interpreting findings

Due to the limitations with the various elements of the research the findings may not be fully representative of the views of all prison officers, prisoners and illicit mobile phone use in the prisons where the study was conducted or across the whole secure estate. It is also

acknowledged that policy and operational practice related to mobile phones in prisons may have changed since this study was conducted during 2014, and there have been a number of technical and technological developments over this period. Therefore a degree of caution needs to be applied when interpreting findings.

1.3 Key findings

The scale and type of mobile phone use

- Heads of Security in the surveyed establishments identified the trafficking of illicit mobile phones as one of the major risks they faced in maintaining prison discipline and providing a decent and secure environment.
- The perceived scale of illicit mobile phone usage varied widely between these establishments and prison types. Establishments had most commonly (45%) found between zero and 25 illicit mobile phones during 2013. 20% had found more than 100.
- Heads of Security reported that mobile phones had become a feature of prison life across the estate, with the exception of women's prisons and those housing juveniles. Mobile phones were seen by both the security function and prisoners as a major component of the illicit prison economy, with mobile phones acting as a key facilitator of drug dealing and use within establishments.
- A range and variety of phones were being used within establishments, with the smaller, easier-to-conceal phones being the most sought after models. Smart phones with greater functionality were seen by prisoners as posing greater risk of detection and confiscation, and so were less popular. Prices of such phones had been falling as a result.
- Prisoners concurred that mobile phones were a feature of prison life and the prison economy, even within the high security estate. Prisoners saw significant variation between establishment types, however. Prisons in higher security categories were seen as both much more difficult to traffic phones into and to retain phones within.

Criminal drivers of illicit mobile phone use

- Nine in ten of the surveys with staff in establishments strongly agreed or agreed that illicit mobile phones were used for drug dealing within the prison. Four-fifths strongly agreed or agreed that the phones were being used by prisoners wishing to maintain contact with family and friends.
- Heads of Security reported that illicit mobile phone use was associated with serious organised criminals, those continuing to run criminal business from within the prison and dominant individuals in the landing hierarchy, including gang members. They also saw mobile phones as posing a threat to the good order of the prison, not only in supporting

criminal activity and creating instability but also in exposing vulnerable individuals and their families to bullying, exploitation and extortion and providing a stimulus to the culture of violence.

- Prisoners took a more nuanced view. They concurred that the most visible phones were held by individuals with status within the landing hierarchy, often also associated with drug dealing within prisons which they also saw as a driver of instability and the culture of violence. However, they pointed also to mobile phones being more widely used by lower profile prisoners, and concealed from fellow prisoners as well as security staff, and being used for communicating with partners and family. They agreed also that the trafficking of drugs and mobile phones exacerbated the vulnerability of weaker prisoners, who could be required to act as stewards for mobile phones controlled by more powerful prisoners.
- Prisoners took the view that, given the limitations of the legitimate phone system and the tension and violence associated with disputes around access to it, the presence of mobile phones in prisons also worked to moderate the potential for violent confrontation between prisoners. They also felt that the normalised communications with loved ones enabled by mobile phones reduced the tendency for frustration around the barriers to communications with family to become translated into generalised aggression and violence.
- Prisoners also reported that in the context of a prison regime increasingly under resource pressure and in which prisoners were increasingly locked up for extended periods, access to mobile phones acted to defuse the resulting tension and resentment, which might otherwise lead to confrontation with staff and disruption to the prison regime.

Relational drivers of demand

- Heads of Security were unequivocal in their view that the primary driver of demand for mobile phones was criminal activity, but acknowledged that mobile phones would also be used for social communication purposes.
- There was some tension between the views of the security function and the prisoners themselves.
- The interviews with prisoners identified one of the major drivers of demand for using illicit mobile phones as the desire to maintain contact with loved ones and retain a meaningful presence in the outside world. Communication with families and their loved ones was the key priority for prisoners in a wide variety of circumstances. Prisoners saw mobile phones as critical to maintaining and sustaining relationships and facilitating their active participation in family life/relationships. This was particularly key for parents, with mobile phones seen as supporting their ability to continue to 'parent' from the inside.

- For younger prisoners, particularly those in Young Offender Institution (YOIs), mobile phones and 'phone sex' was seen as a means of both maintaining relationships with (and, in some cases, control over) girlfriends. Time spent on mobile phones especially when interacting with girlfriends was also seen as a way to release aggression, an escape from the tyranny of the relentlessly testosterone-driven landing environment – and simply a source of entertainment and an antidote to boredom.
- The differential between the price of drugs and mobile phones within prison relative to outside was seen by prisoners as the key driver of criminal activity, and particularly of drug dealing, within prisons. All agreed that mobile phones were critical facilitators of such activity. However, this was seen as controlled by – and confined to – a relatively small minority of 'connected', high status prisoners, some of whom were continuing to conduct an existing criminal business on the inside, leveraging existing criminal contacts, including within Organised Crime Groups (OCGs).
- The limitations and constraints of the legitimate prison phone system was widely seen by prisoners both as inadequate to maintaining effective contact with those on the outside and a major driver of mobile phone use. Prisoners cited issues with the time taken to get set up on the prison phone system on entry to prison, significant issues around gaining sufficient access to phones, particularly for low status prisoners. There was also reported to be a poor fit between the times phones were available and loved ones' working routines and lifestyles, inadequate time to hold meaningful conversations and a lack of privacy to make those calls, making it difficult to show emotion or weakness in a public context.
- The cost differential between mobile phones and the legitimate phone system was also a major driver of mobile phone use. The cost of using the legitimate phone limited prisoners' access to family and friends while mobile phone use was typically effectively free, because they were paid for by family and friends outside.
- Prisoners who had mobile phones and had been able to communicate relatively freely with family and loved ones described mobile phones as being transformational of their relationships, enabling fuller, more meaningful and sustained relationships. They also reported that maintaining close ties with partners and children meant that their mind-set was more attuned to the external world and their family as their dominant reality, reducing the influence of criminogenic peers and the prison culture and creating greater motivation for compliance as a means of minimising their sentence.
- Within establishments which had introduced in-cell phones, prisoners similarly reported a transformational effect on their ability to maintain relationships with families and social networks and improve the quality of those relationships. This was particularly true for

prisoners on enhanced status within the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) policy¹ who were able to spend more funds on their in-cell phones. The prospect of acquiring and retaining an in-cell phone had been acting as a major incentive to compliant behaviour. Both prisoners and Heads of Security perceived fewer mobile phones circulating or being found in 'IEP enhanced status' wings with in-cell phones.

- Broadly speaking, it appeared that both mobile phones and in-cell phones enabled prisoners to sustain richer and more meaningful relationships with family members and that those able to maintain effective relationships with family and friends were better able to cope with their sentence, more realistic about resettlement and more motivated on desistance.

Prevention and disruption

- Heads of Security identified that illicit mobile phones could enter prisons through a number of ways. Over-the-wall packages and offenders entering prison were most commonly highlighted by them as routes of entry.
- A range of different methods were being used in establishments to search for illicit mobile phones and SIM cards. At the time of the research, physical searching was one of the most commonly cited methods to aid detection of illicit mobile phones.
- Prisoners reported a mix of routes into prison for mobile phones – their relative importance appearing to depend on the type of user, nature of the security regime and location of prison.
- There was consensus among the prisoners interviewed that the authorities were taking mobile phones more seriously and that security was becoming more effective at detecting and removing mobile phones. In part this was attributed to more effective and systematic searching techniques. More fundamentally, it was recognised that prisons were being more focused and targeted in identifying individuals likely to have a mobile phone.
- Against the background of increased pressure on resources and budgets, Heads of Security reported that their activities in preventing and disrupting mobile phone use had become increasingly targeted and focused on those prisoners posing the highest risk to the good order of the prison and to the wider public.
- There was broad consensus among the Head of Security interviewees that the demand for mobile phones was such that – without an effective blanket blocking technology – it would not be possible to stop mobile phones entering UK prisons in significant numbers.
- The view that mobile phones were not about to go away any time soon was echoed by prisoners who opined that both the economic and human drivers of demand for mobile

¹ IEP enhanced status prisoners have demonstrated they are 'fully committed to their rehabilitation, seeking to reduce their risk of re-offending, complying with the regime and meeting the Behavioural Expectations', as set out in the Prison Service Instruction 30/2013.

phones were so strong that there would continue to be a constant flow of mobile phones into prison, even as prisons became more effective in preventing entry and disrupting their use.

- One school of thought, among both some Heads of Security and prisoners, centred on tackling mobile phones by addressing the drivers of demand through enhancing access to legitimate communications. Among the Heads of Security there were fairly polarised views on how far enhanced legitimate phone facilities or in-cell phones would address the demand drivers. Some felt strongly that in-cell phones would lead to greatly reduced demand for mobile phones and enable security to focus on the highest risk and most egregious cases.
- But there was an equally strong body of opinion that was dismissive of the social and family dimensions and felt demand was overwhelmingly criminally driven, with the corollary being that enhancing legitimate phone facilities would do nothing to address this.
- The perceived deterrent effect of sanctions if prisoners were found with a mobile phone varied depending on where they were in the sentence cycle and how much they felt they had to lose by being caught:
 - For most prisoners, the huge importance placed on communications with loved ones greatly outweighed considerations of the consequences of being caught, with sanctions seen as relatively minor, particularly for those serving long sentences.
 - For those approaching the end of a sentence, the deterrent effect of being caught with a phone was much more powerful.
 - Prisoners who were using mobile phones to support criminal activity, defrayed as much of their risk as possible by minimising the time they were holding a phone themselves. In that context, the risk of sanctions were seen as the cost of doing business.

1.4 Conclusions

Mobile phones were viewed as a feature of prison life across the custodial estate, although rarer in both women's prisons and among the youngest prisoners. They were seen by Heads of Security to be creating significant problems within prisons and for prisoner management. Significant criminal drivers for the trafficking and use of mobile phones within prisons were reported, with mobile phones being linked to criminal activity both within and outside the walls. Alongside these criminal drivers, a significant proportion of demand was driven by social communication factors and the desire to stay in touch with family and friends.

2. Context

2.1 Background

Mobile phones in prisons can be used for a range of social and criminal purposes. These include communications with family and friends but also sustaining criminal activity. Mobile phones have been used to support a variety of criminal activities, with some of the more serious incidents having included commissioning serious violence, furthering organised crime, facilitating escape, harassing victims of crime and involvement in gang activity. Furthermore, access to mobile phones supports drug supply within prisons and can also be associated with violence and bullying of more vulnerable prisoners.

During 2013, 7,451 illicit mobile phone or SIM² card finds were reported to HMPPS. It is logical to target existing resources at the mobile phone usage that poses the greatest risks, such as organised crime or drug dealing within prisons, and minimise as far as possible the drivers of demand for mobile phones among prisoners, where this can be achieved. This research project was designed to help understand why mobile phones were being used within prisons and what proportion of mobile phone use falls into this higher risk category. The research was intended to help HMPPS build a policy around reducing or eradicating the potentially most dangerous mobile phone usage in prisons.

2.2 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of this study was to further the understanding of what drives the demand for illicit mobile phones by prisoners, and to help identify potentially effective ways of preventing their usage. The project was conducted during Spring/Summer 2014.

The key research questions explored were:

- What drives the demand for mobile phones within prisons – how much is for maintaining family contact and how much is for other more criminal purposes (including criminal networks, gangs, terrorism)?
- Are certain types of prisoners more likely to want a mobile phone and so drive demand in particular establishments?

² SIM stands for Subscriber Identity Module. The SIM card allows the mobile phone to operate. One mobile phone seizure could constitute a phone only, a SIM card only, or a mobile phone with one SIM card or media card inside.

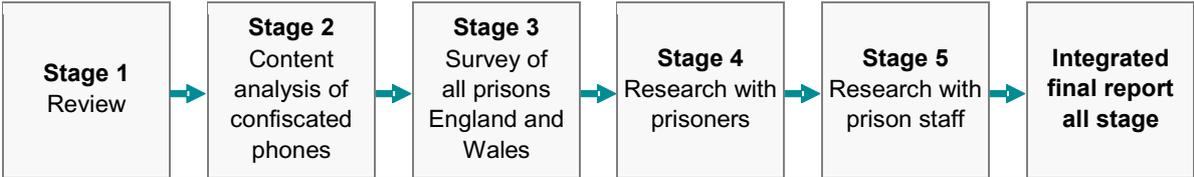
- Which non-technical factors could be most effective (and cost effective) in reducing both the supply and demand for mobile phones in prison (including ways of counteracting the prison economy that surrounds the use of mobile phones)?

3. Approach

3.1 Methodology

The study was conducted in five stages, employing a mixed methods research design (as set out in Figure 1).

Figure 1: Methodology stages



Stage 1 was a literature review to examine the existing literature on the use of mobile phones in prisons. The review was broadly scoped to encompass a range of jurisdictions and circumstances in which mobile phone use has arisen and/or been tackled by the authorities. The review commenced with searches of the Google Scholar database,³ employing a mix of direct and more indirect search terms, for example: mobile phones and English prisons; cell phones and US prisons; smuggling, prison contraband and cell phones; corrupt officers/guards and smuggling contraband goods; measures to prevent mobile phone use in prisons; prisoners on Facebook sites and so on. In addition to the UK, the geographical areas for which material was collated included the USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia and Europe. Nonetheless, it quickly became apparent that there was a paucity of studies which directly and systematically address the research questions listed above.⁴ For example, the review did not unearth any research study seeking to provide estimates for the incidence of mobile phone possession and/or use among a specific prison population, including variations in use across different categories of prisoner. Due to an initial lack of studies, the review also conducted a wider search using Google to pick up on some of the other evidence in relation to mobile phone use in prisons. This mainly identified media reports of mobile phone usage.

³ Described as providing ‘a search of scholarly literature across many disciplines and sources, including theses, books, abstracts and articles’. See <http://scholar.google.co.uk/>.

⁴ For example, a search of the Social Science Research Network (SSRN) database, which claims to contain ‘abstracts on over 531,900 scholarly working papers and forthcoming papers’, found just one study from a search on ‘phones prison’. The same study was also located using a Google Scholar search.

A total of 178 items were collated from the various searches, including 49 relating to the UK⁵ – mainly reports commissioned by government agencies and media reports. The information gathered was analysed on a thematic basis and, due to the nature of what was available i.e. a focus on media reports rather than research reports, an assessment of the quality of this information was not conducted.

Stage 2 was a small scale content analysis of the materials found on confiscated mobile phones/SIM cards across a selection of prisons; this was to gain an understanding of what the confiscated mobile phones were being used for (research question one). The analysis focused on a sample of phones which had been sent to the HMPPS Digital Forensics Unit, in January to March 2013; this team were responsible for lawfully downloading the contents from these confiscated mobile phones/SIM cards. During this time, 1,511 phones were sent from 92 establishments. The categories of the establishments which sent media in at this time are shown in Table 3.1 below.⁶

Table 3.1: Number of illicit mobile phones and SIM cards (Jan to Mar 2013) by prison function

Prison function	n	% of sample
Cat C trainer	604	40
Local	380	25
Open	284	19
YOI	89	6
Cat B trainer	83	5
High security	50	3
Female	21	1
Total	1,511	100

The range in the number of illicit mobile phones and SIM card sent from establishments varied from one to 104.⁷ It should be noted that sometimes establishments send in a large number of phones or SIM cards at one time rather than sending them in on a daily basis.

Just over a half (51%, 732) of the 1,511 phones or SIM cards were examined further to gain an understanding of the reasons for why the illicit mobile phones and media were being

⁵ The items were collated into an EndNote database, with links to their internet addresses.

⁶ This excludes an establishment which subsequently closed.

⁷ The establishment which sent in the most finds was one that was closing; no information was gathered from the establishment regarding the reason more illicit mobile phones had been sent through at this time. It could be possible that more searches were done when the prison closed or that a stock of phones was sent all at once.

used.⁸ This involved an examination of text messages. The content analysis also provided further information on the types of mobile phones being used in establishments.

Stage 3 involved a survey of all prison establishments across England and Wales. The survey included fixed response questions (providing consistent comparable information) and open-ended questions (enabling respondents to provide more detailed information where necessary), covering all three primary research questions. In total, 119 questionnaires were sent out to all prison establishments⁹ across the HMPPS estate for the Head of Security or an appropriately appointed member of staff to complete. The questionnaires were distributed through the security functional mailboxes of each establishment.¹⁰ A response rate of approximately 50% was anticipated.¹¹ In total, 80 establishments responded to the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 67% (Table 3.2). Overall the data completeness of the 80 questionnaires was very good with fairly minimal non-responses to the questions asked. The response rates by prison function ranged from 20% from the young people's estate, up to 88% from high security establishments. Of the 80 establishments which returned the questionnaire, a third were Category C establishments, just over 20% local prisons and 11% female establishments.

Table 3.2: Questionnaire returns by prison function

Prison function	Number of questionnaires sent	Number of returns (response rate)	Breakdown of final sample (%)
Local prison (male)	31	17 (55%)	21%
Cat B trainer (male)	7	5 (72%)	6%
Cat C trainer (male)	38	26 (68%)	33%
Open prisons (male)	10	8 (80%)	10%
High security (male)	8	7 (88%)	9%
YOI (male)	9	7 (78%)	9%
Young people (15 – 17)	5	1 (20%)	1%
Female	11	9 (82%)	11%
Total	119	80 (67%)	100%

⁸ To save time, the examination only focused on text messages on the phones rather than an examination of any files or pictures which may have been on them.

⁹ This includes both public and private establishments.

¹⁰ One disadvantage of using this approach was the lack of a named person to send the questionnaire to and to subsequently chase up where there was no response received. A follow up telephone call was made to establishments to ensure that the Head of Security had seen the email requesting completing the questionnaire and to boost response.

¹¹ A survey conducted by HMPPS in 2011 achieved a 49% response rate (OASys user perspective survey).

Stages 4 and 5 involved semi-structured interviews with Heads of Security and prisoners across 20 prisons, including local prisons, Category B and C trainer prisons, open prisons, high security prisons, YOIs and both closed and open female prisons. Prisons were selected to include a mix of urban and rural establishments and some contracted out. A total of 67 interviews with prisoners were undertaken for this project. Two prisons, both contracted-out establishments, were selected as they had in-cell phones – in one case in all cells and, in another, on a wing for IEP enhanced prisoners only.

1) Heads of Security – The interviews with Heads of Security were designed to build upon the quantitative data from the survey across all establishments and provide richer insights into the perceived drivers of mobile phone use and its impact on a prison's ability to deliver a safe and secure environment, the challenges faced by prison staff in seeking to combat mobile phones in prisons, and the prevention and detection approaches which had proved more or less effective.

2) Prisoners – the qualitative interviews with prisoners aimed to understand the demand dynamics of mobile phones in prison, the relative importance of their use in supporting criminal activity and communications with family, friends and social networks and the impact of mobile phones on prison life. These interviews also aimed to understand the methods prisoners used to smuggle in and conceal mobile phones in prisons and the perceived effectiveness of the authorities' approaches to preventing and detecting the trafficking and use of mobile phones.

Prisoners were recruited through the intermediation of Heads of Security, who were provided with a specification for those prisoners that the research team were seeking to interview. These included both prisoners who had been found with mobile phones and a range of prisoner types representing a greater or lesser risk to security (in terms of their potential for pursuing criminal activity, causing harm to the public or damage to the quality and security of prison life). The sample included some sub-sets of prisoners of particular interest, being Serious Organised Criminals (SOC) and those with Organised Crime Group (OCG) offending links, those convicted of terrorist or extremist offences, sex offenders, perpetrators of domestic violence and those convicted of drug and gang related crime. The sample also included prisoners across a range of ages, those serving sentences of varying lengths, and those with close and distant family relationships. There was a high interest and agreement by prisoners to participate in the research, with prison staff not reporting any reluctance from

prisoners to take part.¹² Furthermore there was little reluctance from the prisoners when discussing the use of mobile phones and also the criminal activity which is associated with their use.

The in-depth interviews, which lasted about an hour, were conducted by independent researchers from Policis on the basis of a structured discussion guide agreed with the HMPPS research team. Interviews were digitally and securely recorded and transcribed in full. The interviews with Heads of Security were largely conducted by phone while all of those with prisoners were conducted face to face on a one to one basis with the researcher and in a private situation in which prisoners could not be overheard by either staff or other prisoners. Furthermore, the interviews with the prisoners were designed in a way to ask for their general comments on the use of mobile phones within prisons and their views on why people in prison want and use mobile phones. This was clearly explained to them prior to the interview commencing and through the use of consent and information sheets. They were also informed that any undisclosed illegal acts (previous or planned) would be disclosed to the staff within the prison by the research team.

The resulting qualitative material was then analysed through a thematic grid in a structured process designed to process and analyse a large volume of material in a systematic and balanced way, mitigating against bias and subjective judgement and designed to support quality assurance of the subsequent analysis. Analysis was quality assured with a view to ensuring that all arguments developed were scrupulously balanced, couched in neutral language and supported by the evidence that tensions in the evidence were fully explored, with interpretations of the evidence and the logic of evaluative judgements fully explained.

Limitations

The literature review conducted at Stage 1 of this project highlighted the dearth of available evidence on the demand and use of illicit mobile phones in prisons. Given the limitations of the available evidence, it is only possible to paint an illustrative picture of the use of mobile phones within prisons from the literature, including greater reliance on vignettes/anecdotes than would be the case for a more developed evidence base.

¹² However, those convicted of terrorist offences and suspected of involvement in serious organised crime were more difficult to recruit and, in the case of those convicted of terrorist offences, were more suspicious of the motives and independence of the researchers.

The analysis of the text message data from mobile phones is limited by the sample of data the project was able to examine. Chapter 5 provides more detail on some of the other limitations with examining this dataset, including the possibility that text messages were being deleted and that it subsequently only provides a snapshot of the reasons why the phones were being used.

The differences in the questionnaire response rates within the prison estate should also be noted. In particular there was a lower response rate from the young people's estate compared to the other prison functions, with only one return from a possible five. It was not possible to gather reasons for the low response rate for this function, but different attempts were made to try to boost response by chasing up non-responders. The findings presented within the questionnaire returns may therefore not be fully representative of all prison functions.

In relation to the qualitative interviews with the prisoners there are some further possible limitations. Prisoners were recruited through the intermediation of Heads of Security; whilst a range of prisoners with different characteristics were recruited there may have been some bias in who was selected to take part, for example prisoners who were perceived by staff as being less compliant or more difficult to engage with were not selected. Similarly, while prisoner interviews were confidential and did not ask prisoners about specific activity with illicit mobile phones, it may be that prisoners were not completely honest due to concerns about the information given being used against them.

Interview findings were based on a small sample of Heads of Security and prisoners at one point in time and therefore did not reflect the views of all prison staff and prisoners both within the selected establishments or overall.

It is also acknowledged that policy and operational practice related to mobile phones in prisons may have changed since this study was conducted during 2014, and there have been a number of technical and technological developments over this period.

Due to the limitations with the various elements of the research the findings may not be fully representative of all illicit mobile phone use in prisons and a degree of caution needs to be applied when interpreting the findings.

Structure of the report

This report brings together the findings of the research. Chapter 4 outlines the scale and type of mobile phone use in prison establishments drawing on the findings from the literature review as well as the questionnaire to establishments. Chapter 5 discusses the risks and challenges posed by mobile phone use as identified through the interviews with Heads of Security, but informed also by the views of prisoners. Chapter 6 outlines the social drivers of demand for illicit mobile phones, setting out a mobile phone user typology. Chapter 7 examines the prevention and disruption of illicit mobile phones and Chapter 8 draws together the conclusions of the research.

4. The scale and type of mobile phone use

4.1 Literature review findings

In 2013, 7,451 illicit mobile phones or SIM cards which had been found across the prison estate in England and Wales were reported to have been sent to the HMPPS Digital Forensics Unit. The literature review found that statistics on mobile phone confiscations within prisons featured primarily in official and media reports rather than in research publications.

The studies which were identified tended to rely on media reports when citing examples of mobile phone use in prison.¹³ Media reports were relatively plentiful, albeit inherently limited due to their tendency to focus on particular individuals combined with a bias towards reporting on the linkage between mobile phone use and criminal activity. There were also no research studies which sought to provide estimates for the incidence of mobile phone possession and/or use among a specific prison population, including variations in use across different categories of prisoner.

Some publications (government and also media reports) were found which related to the use of mobile phones. The reports suggested that they can be used for a variety of purposes within prisons. The review process produced a thematic analysis of the topic areas for what drives the demand for mobile phones, identifying nine different areas. These included: maintaining family relationships; participation in social networks; orchestrating criminal activity outside the prison walls; coordinating criminal gang activity, both within and outside prison walls; smuggling drugs into prison; harassment and taunting of victims; terrorism; escapes from prison; bullying.

The literature review found there were very few studies that directly addressed the research questions and that there was also a dearth of evaluation evidence around the effectiveness of different approaches in tackling mobile phones. The scope and nature of the review confirmed that governments and prison authorities in a number of different jurisdictions view mobile phone use within prisons as a problem. The use of mobile phones as reported in the media is often seen as compromising the integrity of the facility and as undermining the ability to monitor prisoners and gain intelligence on criminal activity. Mobile phones are also

¹³ For example, Fitzgerald (2010) refers to an article in the *Wisconsin Law Review* advocating the use of jamming technology in U.S. Federal prisons.

seen as facilitating the furtherance of continued criminal activity, the harassment of victims, supporting escape efforts and supporting an illegal market within prisons for both drugs and mobile phones. However, as discussed earlier, the literature review did not identify any specific pieces of research or evaluation conducted on mobile phone use in prisons, thus it is very hard to validate the nature of the evidence gathered in this review.

A bibliography of sources for the literature review is contained within the appendix.

4.2 The scale of the problem

The interviews with the Heads of Security found that the trafficking of illicit mobile phones was seen as one of the major risks they faced in maintaining prison discipline, providing a decent and secure environment and addressing the risks of harm arising both to the prisoners for whose security they are responsible and to the wider public, through the continuance of criminal activity by serving prisoners.

A key challenge posed to the prison service by mobile phone use in certain establishments was seen as the scale of the problem and the relentlessness of the demand for mobile phones. However, there was variation in the scale of the problem across the prisons as identified in the questionnaire responses on the number of illicit mobile phones they had found in 2013 (the time when the research was conducted). From these responses, 45% of the establishments had found up to 25 illicit mobile phones during 2013. One-fifth (20%) had found more than 100 (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: How many illicit mobile phones were found within your establishment during 2013?

Number of illicit mobile phones	n	% of responses
0 – 25	36	45
26 – 50	13	16
51 – 75	6	8
76 – 100	9	11
More than 100	16	20
Total	80	100

It is clear that, while there were differences between prison types, Heads of Security believed that mobile phones had become a feature of prison life across the estate, with the exception of women’s prisons and establishments for juveniles. Within the questionnaire returns, there

was some variation in how establishments viewed the use of illicit mobile phones as a problem for them (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Is the use of illicit mobile phones a problem in your establishment?

	n	% of responses
A very serious problem	13	16
Quite a serious problem	42	53
A minor problem	19	24
Not a problem at all	6	7
Total	80	100

As above, there was variation between the prison functions. For example, the majority of local prisons saw mobile phone use as a very serious (35%) or a quite serious (65%) problem. In contrast, across the female estate, the majority (67%) stated mobile phone use was a minor problem, with the remaining 33% stating not a problem at all.

Three-quarters of establishments stated that *detecting* illicit mobile phone use in their establishment was a high or very high priority for them, with 73% stating that *disrupting* illicit mobile phone use in their establishment was a high or very high priority. Only a small percentage of establishments saw detection and disruption of mobile phones as a low or very low priority (12% and 10% respectively). These variations broadly mirrored the variations seen above in relation to prison functions. For example, the female establishments were less likely to see detecting and disrupting mobile phone use as a priority.

From the prisoner interviews they concurred that mobile phones were a feature of prison life but also took the view that it had become increasingly difficult to smuggle or retain phones in the highest security prisons.

4.3 Types of mobile phones being used

There was a range and variety of phones being used within establishments. The content analysis of the mobile phone data found that SIM cards were most commonly recovered and sent to the HMPPS Digital Forensics Unit. A large number of phones were smaller and older varieties (some of which are no longer made by the manufacturers). Establishments also noted increases in the number of smaller, easier-to-conceal phones – these seen as being easier to smuggle into prison and also conceal once inside.

Overall, it appeared that prisoners valued the ability to conceal their phones over functionality, with larger smart phones much more likely to be detected and confiscated. It was reported by prisoners that prices for such phones had been falling as they had become more difficult to retain in the face of more effective and focused security action (Chapter 7 provides further details on the prevention and disruption of illicit mobile phones).

4.4 Summary

The Heads of Security interviewed in this project reported that illicit mobile phones had become a feature and reality of prison life across the estate, with the exception of women's prisons and establishments for juveniles. Mobile phones were believed to be being used in even the high security estate, albeit on a much smaller scale than in less secure establishments. They also took the view that the scale of mobile phone use and the relentless demand for illicit mobile phones in establishments was one of the major risks that they face in not only maintaining prison discipline but also in ensuring that any risks of harm to prisoners and the public are addressed. Prisoners concurred that mobile phones had become embedded in prison life and were of the view that the scale of demand was such that mobile phones were likely to continue to be a feature of prison life for the foreseeable future.

5. Criminal drivers of illicit mobile phone use

This chapter explores in more detail the reasons identified through the Heads of Security and prisoner interviews around the criminal use of illicit mobile phones within establishments and to conduct criminal business beyond the walls. It also explores the criminal, anti-social and damaging impacts of mobile phone use on prisoners and the prison environment.

There are significant tensions between the accounts of Heads of Security and those of prisoners themselves on the drivers of mobile phone use. Heads of Security tended to see the use of and risks posed by mobile phones almost entirely through the filter of security concerns, a perspective which was given greater weight in any case because of their day to day and strategic focus on the highest risk prisoners and those most likely to be disruptive of prison security and good order. Prisoners accounts of the role of mobile phones acknowledged and expanded on the role that mobile phones played in sustaining the prison economy and criminal activity within and outside prisons but alongside this also places emphasis on prisoners human needs and the use of mobile phones that was not essentially criminally driven. This latter aspect in mobile phone use is described in more detail in Chapter 6 following.

5.1 The profile of those using and holding mobile phones

Within the questionnaire returns, one third (33%) of establishments stated that up to 25% of illicit mobile phones found could be attributed to a specific prisoner (Table 5.1). There were fairly equal percentages for the other proportions.

Table 5.1: Proportion of illicit mobile phones attributed to specific prisoners

Proportion	n	% of responses
0 – 25%	25	33
26 – 50%	17	23
51 – 75%	17	23
76 – 100%	16	21
Total	75	100

In terms of the finds which could be attributed to a specific prisoner, establishments were asked to indicate the proportions attributable to prisoners in four different age groups (see table 5.2 below).¹⁴

Table 5.2: Proportion of illicit mobile phone finds by prisoner age group

Proportion	Age groups (%)			
	18 – 20 (n=37)	21 – 24 (n=61)	25 – 40 (n=60)	41 and over (n=45)
0 – 10%	62	36	13	67
11 – 24%	14	28	5	18
25 – 49%	5	25	25	11
50 – 74%	5	8	35	2
75 – 100%	14	3	22	2

Heads of Security pointed to those prisoners dominant on the landings and those likely to be in funds, as a result of drug dealing or other criminal activity, as among the most likely to be holding mobile phones. Prisoners agreed that this was the case and that, once in prison, it was only those with access to funds, whether derived from criminal activity within or outside the prison or supplied by family and friends, who would be able to afford the (very steep) purchase price of a mobile phone. However they also pointed out that mobile phones were used by much lower profile individuals, for the most part experienced prisoners anticipating a sentence, who had managed to smuggle mobile phones into the prison from court.

During the interviews with Heads of Security, it was also reported that phones were not always held by the phone owners or the prisoners who control the distribution of the phones. More vulnerable prisoners or those who owed a debt were seen as likely to be pressured into holding phones for more powerful individuals seeking to avoid the risks of being caught. Heads of Security reported that prisoners who were suspected of directing substantive criminal businesses on an ongoing basis were particularly unlikely to be holding mobile phones themselves, with such prisoners typically presenting as model prisoners. Some of the prisoners selected for interview as being relatively high risk reported that they were likely to be targeted by intelligence and security as ‘nominals’ (prisoners of particular interest). They reported that in this context that they were now unlikely to expose themselves to the risk of using an identified mobile phone likely to be monitored by the authorities.

¹⁴ Some establishments responded that a particular age group was not applicable to their establishment - this explains the lower sample size for the 18 – 20 age group.

5.2 Reasons for illicit mobile phone use

Within the questionnaire, prison establishments were asked what they felt were the reasons for illicit mobile phone use – they were asked to indicate from a list of reasons which were fairly broad in scope. Approximately nine in ten (89%) of the establishments who responded to the questionnaire strongly agreed or agreed that illicit mobile phones were used for drug dealing within the prison, whilst approximately four-fifths (81%) strongly agreed or agreed that the phones were used by prisoners wishing to maintain contact with family and friends (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Reasons why illicit mobile phones were used within establishments

Reasons for illicit mobile phone use	n	Answer (%)			
		Strongly agree / agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree / disagree	Don't know
Drug use and dealing within the prison	70	89	3	4	4
Prisoners wishing to maintain contact with family/friends	69	81	6	9	4
Criminal activities outside the prison	70	79	10	6	6
Playing a role in the prison economy/black market	70	69	7	14	10
Harassing victims/witnesses outside the prison	70	61	21	10	7
Gang activities	70	49	23	19	10
Staff corruption	70	33	30	20	17
Inappropriate staff/prisoner relationships	70	30	35	17	17

When asked specifically about criminal activities, drug dealing was most commonly seen to be associated with the use of mobile phones (Table 5.4). This was followed by serious organised crime (44%), violent crime (33%) and acquisitive crime (30%).

Table 5.4: Criminal activity associated with illicit mobile phone use

Criminal activity	Number of responses	% of responses
Drug dealing	59	74
Serious organised crime	35	44
Violent crime	26	33
Acquisitive crime	24	30
Extremist/terrorist activity	7	9
Sex offences	4	5
Human trafficking	3	4

The Heads of Security interviewed felt that those who were using mobile phones in prison were primarily the highest risk prisoners – those engaged in criminal activity, either within the prison, primarily focused around drug dealing, or alternatively, those seeking to sustain criminal businesses beyond the walls, including serious organised criminals. It was also believed that mobile phone use was associated with dominant individuals in the landing hierarchy, gang membership and gang related activities, and that it played a part, for prisoners serving shorter sentences in particular, in maintaining status and connections with external criminal and social peer networks.

Prisoners themselves to some extent confirmed the Head of Security views on the nature and profile of the most visible and high profile mobile phone users, albeit they were also clear that criminal activity was only one of a series of drivers of mobile phone use and then only for certain prisoner types. Prisoners reported that those using mobile phones purchased through the prison economy had to have funds or access to money through family or associates. They also pointed out that phones were used by much lower profile individuals, for the most part experienced prisoners anticipating a sentence, who had managed to smuggle phones into the prison from court. Typically those with funds were either dealing on the inside or had criminal connections or ongoing criminal business on the outside. If phones were being used with any degree of visibility, prisoners reported that individuals would need to have significant standing on the landing if they were to retain possession without challenge. Ownership of a mobile phone was seen both to confer and reinforce a prisoner's status in the eyes of their peers. Vulnerable individuals or those without connections and backers within the prison – unless holding a phone for a more powerful or connected individual – were judged unlikely to be able to hold on to a mobile phone if it became known that they had one.

Prisoners also confirmed that dealers and powerful individuals bullied and intimidated weaker prisoners into holding phones on their behalf and that, where such individuals were found with a phone belonging to another prisoner, that they would then be forced to make good the value of the phone. Family members could be extorted and intimidated into paying the 'debt' arising, in an effort to protect the prisoner from further bullying.

Based upon the prisoner interviews, there appeared to be a significant proportion of mobile phone users who held their phone on their own account and for their own exclusive use and who took great care to conceal it not only from the prison authorities but also from their fellow prisoners. These prisoners did not appear to have a distinctive profile, albeit that they tended to be experienced prisoners and were often family men or those in close and committed relationships. They came from a range of backgrounds and ages and had committed a

variety of offences. While there was some cross-over with criminal activity among such phone owners (most commonly procurement of drugs, primarily for personal use) this type of prisoner was typically using their mobile phone solely for social communication. Particularly among younger prisoners, a single phone could also be shared between a tight-knit group of friends, on a non-commercial basis. In this case, a single phone could be moved between close prisoner associates to reduce the risk of it being discovered and confiscated by authorities.

The content analysis of the sample of phones aimed to gain a further understanding of the reasons for why illicit mobile phones were being used in establishments. Thirty-nine per cent (282) of the phones reviewed had text messages on them. For the remaining 61% (450) there was no record of text or Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) messages. Of those that had text or MMS messages, they ranged in number from one to 252. Table 5.5 below shows the range of text or MMS messages on these phones, with a higher percentage of this sample having ten or fewer messages on them.

Table 5.5: Number of text or MMS messages

Numbers of text or MMS messages	n	% of cases with text/MMS
1 – 10	120	43
11 – 20	49	17
21 – 30	23	8
31 – 40	29	10
41 – 50	23	8
51+	38	14
Total	282	100

Looking at the content of these messages it was possible in some cases to group them into the reasons why the phones were being used. However, in the majority of the cases, this was not possible. The messages lacked any context, making it very difficult to give an accurate account of the nature of the messages. This was complicated by the ‘text speak’ i.e. abbreviated or shortened words, and the slang terms used in the messages.

The following categories outline the reasons that were identified for the use of the phones. The numbers in parenthesis below give a broad count of the number of phones where these issues were being discussed and they are not related to each individual text message or MMS message on the phones.

- Maintaining contact with family and friends outside of prison:
 - Maintaining contact – positive support to and from family and friends (154)
 - Intimacy/connection with family and friends outside of prison (104)
- Texts from mobile phone providers (79)
- Getting mobile phones and other media and using them in prison (37)
- Controlling/threatening remarks and behaviour (27)
- Money transfers (14)
- Criminal activity – drug use (9)
- Prison issues (7)
- Criminal networks (2)
- Criminal activity – guns (1)

It should be noted that this is only a snapshot of the text and MMS messages on the illicit mobile phones and SIM cards. It is likely that a number of the text messages had already been deleted and in these circumstances it could be that the categories which are more negative in nature are under-represented. Therefore, whilst the analysis shows that a high proportion of phones appeared to be used for maintaining contact with family and friends outside of prison, a prisoner is potentially less likely to keep messages on a phone they have or are holding which are about any criminal activity within the prison.

The remainder of this chapter explores further the reasons why illicit mobile phones were used in establishments and the problems and challenges that can occur as a result.

5.3 Mobile phones and drug dealing

The interviewed Heads of Security reported that drugs and mobile phone trafficking were intimately connected, and were viewed as a significant threat to the good order of the prison. As with mobile phones, drugs commanded a high premium in prison and drug dealing within prison represented a highly attractive opportunity both for prisoners themselves and for criminal associates and OCGs. Prisoners concurred that trafficking mobile phones and drugs and drug dealing in prison was a major component of the prison economy and that the premium pricing in prisons made drug dealing highly attractive to dealers both within and outside the prison. In large part the funds associated with trafficking of both drugs and mobile phones were transmitted through external bank accounts held in the name either of prisoners themselves or connected individuals or companies.

5.4 Mobile phones and violence

Mobile phones were also seen by Heads of Security as being a key driver of violence and intimidation within prisons, undermining the good order of the prison, making prisons more difficult to manage and leaving vulnerable prisoners both more exposed to risk and more difficult to protect. Mobile phones were also seen by Heads of Security as directly connected to harassment and bullying of vulnerable individuals, either to hold phones on other people's behalf or because they had incurred debts associated with using or losing a mobile phone belonging to more powerful prisoners.

“Now drugs and mobiles in the prison have a destabilising effect. Anything to do with drugs you increase violence, you increase bullying, you increase self-harm, you increase the number of applications for protection. It really does have, you know, a significant effect on the good order and discipline within the prison.”
(Head of Security)

Heads of Security reported that prisoners found with mobile phones would not only suffer sanctions but, if they were holding a phone for someone else, could also find themselves in a position where they 'owed' the phone owner for the (highly inflated) value of the phone. Heads of Security reported that families outside could be intimidated into paying inflated 'debts' or into undertaking criminal acts to protect their family member inside. All of these effects were seen as in turn leading to elevated levels of mental health issues, stress and self-harm and to an increase in requests for protection.

Prisoners themselves had a more nuanced view of the impact of mobile phones on good order in prisons. There were mixed views on whether mobile phones have a destabilising or calming impact on prisoners' aggression and tendency to violence. There was consensus that weaker prisoners were being intimidated into holding phones for more powerful prisoners and that in some cases phones were being used by certain prisoners to put pressure on individuals or families outside. Those prisoners who felt more vulnerable and those at the greatest distance from the illicit prison economy and the landing culture tended to take the view that mobile phones and drugs fed a culture of violence and intimidation, creating a more dangerous and volatile prison environment, in which weaker individuals felt more exposed to risk.

“Say, a new inmate come, someone that we don’t know, that’s got a phone, they do get punched up and robbed, simple as that. Because a phone is power.”
(Prisoner)

The majority of prisoners took the view however that the presence of mobile phones acted to moderate the frustration around communications with the outside world and the tensions associated with the competition for the legitimate landing phones. To this extent access to mobile phones and reduced competition for the scarce landing phones was thought to act to minimise the potential for confrontation and violence within the prison.

In a context in which there was increasing pressure on staff and resources in prisons and prisoners were more frequently exposed to extended periods in their cells, access to mobile phones was seen to address the high levels of frustration and anxiety that would otherwise arise when individuals could not speak to their families, sometimes for a period of days. Again, this was felt to defuse the potential for resentment and anger towards staff and the prison regime to build up to potentially explosive effect.

“It’s keeping a lid on things, because people are happy, walking around, they know their families are all right, so it takes them out of jail, they feel closer to them.” (Prisoner)

5.5 Mobile phones and the prison economy

Mobile phones were seen by both staff and prisoners as central to the prison economy and landing hierarchy, partly because demand was such that the premium paid for even the most basic mobile phone could be many times that obtainable outside. Prices appeared to range greatly, with the questionnaire returns indicating that prices varied according to phone model and also category of the establishment. For example, one establishment identified prices ranging from £150-£500 depending on the model, and also prices for the hiring of the phones to be between £15-£50 per night. Other establishments reported much higher prices, with some phones commanding a price of £1,000.¹⁵ During the interviews, phones with greater functionality were reported to command greater prices, albeit demand for smart phones was reportedly falling off in face of the relative difficulty of concealing these items, impacting their price.

¹⁵ Some establishments reported they had no intelligence on the prices being paid.

5.6 Mobile phones and maintaining contact with people on the outside

The interviewed Heads of Security had mixed views on the relative importance of family and social contact and criminal drivers in mobile phone use (see Chapter 6 for further detail). However, whilst they tended to acknowledge that those organising criminal activity within prisons would also be using mobile phones for personal communications, the majority were adamant that the key driver of mobile phone use was the money to be made in the prison economy and the furtherance of wider criminal activity.

“Mobile phones are very, very, very rarely used to maintain family contact. It just doesn’t happen. They’re used to, for a number of things, usually to organise drugs coming in, other mobile phones coming in.” (Head of Security)

The Heads of Security were clear also that trafficking of mobile phones was itself organised, by OCG groups and through gang affiliations. Mobile phones were seen as a key facilitator not only of criminal activity within prisons but also in enabling prisoners to remain connected to outside criminal networks and to continue directing criminal businesses while serving a sentence. Intelligence and security efforts were increasingly focused on those prisoners, including serious organised criminals, who were seen as highest risk and of greatest danger to the wider public. Prisoners similarly acknowledged that mobile phones played a key part both in bringing drugs and other contraband into prison and in enabling those so inclined to continue their criminal business activities outside the prison walls. But among the prisoner interviewees who had been nominated by Governors or Heads of Security as likely to be associated with SOC, the view was that mobile phone communications were no longer a secure means of conducting their business.

There is clearly a difference between the views of the security function on the drivers of mobile phone use and the accounts of prisoners which, while acknowledging the role of mobile phones in drug dealing and criminal activity within prisons, speak rather to the greater importance of their strongly felt human need to communicate with loved ones as the major driver of phone use. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

5.7 Mobile phones and damaging communications behaviour

Both Heads of Security and prisoners indicated that mobile phones could play a part in the intimidation of witnesses (most frequently in gang-related and SOC cases) and pressuring witnesses and victims into withdrawing statements or not giving evidence to the courts.

“If you got me done for something and we were on remand, I could come in your cell with my phone and force you to ring witnesses to make them drop statements.” (Prisoner)

Mobile phones could also provide the means to access banned contacts, and to intimidate family members or associates into paying ‘debts’ incurred in prison.

Mobile phones were also linked, by both Heads of Security and prisoners, to the ongoing harassment of victims, particularly of domestic violence. More commonly however, for those who feared that their partner may be unfaithful or leave them, mobile phones could provide a means of monitoring their partner’s movements and activities. While in some cases frequent contact brought the couple closer, it was evident that this kind of behaviour could also slip into overly intrusive stalking and control.

Prisoners reported some instances of mobile phones being used to upload images to Facebook and Instagram. In these cases, however, the key motivation for uploading images was less criminal intent than bravado and the desire to impress social contacts on the outside. The most common driver was a desire to show off a newly bulked-up physique from working out in the gym. Alternatively it could simply be a matter of rebelling against the system by boasting to the outside world about how they were spending their time in prison. However, prisoners reported that this kind of activity was relatively rare as it was seen as very high risk and likely to lead to the rapid confiscation of the phone and more severe sanctions than might otherwise be incurred.

5.8 Summary

It is clear that the use of mobile phones in prisons can present serious security risks and challenges. Mobile phones appeared to be embedded in the prison economy and entwined with drug and gang culture in key parts of the prison estate. Mobile phones clearly facilitated criminal activity both within and outside prisons – primarily drug dealing and the trafficking of mobile phones. Mobile phones had also been used to facilitate other types of criminal activity, including serious organised crime. It would appear however that organised criminals had become much more conscious of the risks of the authorities monitoring mobile phone calls and were less likely to rely on them. Mobile phones also had a role to play in harassing victims and witnesses and in fostering a culture of intimidation and a climate of fear among vulnerable prisoners.

For all of these reasons the presence of mobile phones in prisons could be argued to be undermining the ability of prison security to provide a stable and safe environment for prisoners, whilst also compromising the ability of prison security to monitor high risk criminals and prevent and disrupt criminal activity.

This chapter has focused on the risks associated with mobile phone use and on the criminal activity and antisocial impacts that arise from mobile phones in prison. This is not the full story however. Although Heads of Security tended to see mobile phone use as almost exclusively criminally driven, the prisoners' accounts suggested that this type of activity may represent use by a relatively small group of high profile prisoners. These prisoners appeared to create harm and risks for other prisoners and the public entirely disproportionate to their numbers. It is far from clear however that this is true of all or even the majority of mobile phone use. The risks associated with mobile phones in prisons and the criminal drivers of demand need therefore to be seen in the context of the wider drivers of demand for mobile phones. The following chapter focuses on the social drivers and impacts of mobile phones in prisons.

6. The social drivers of demand

One of the key aims of the project was to understand the demand dynamics of mobile phone use from the perspectives of prisoners themselves. Chapter 5 has described the criminal and commercial drivers of mobile phone use, both in terms of the profits to be made from trafficking drugs and mobile phones into prisons and in facilitating the continuance of criminal business activities while serving a prison sentence. The majority of this chapter focuses on the social, human and practical drivers of demand. Section 6.8 pulls together the findings from both chapters by presenting a typology of mobile phone users in UK prisons.

6.1 The role of communications in prisoners' lives

The interviews with prisoners identified that separation from partners, family, children and friends was often the most keenly felt element of a prison sentence and most difficult to bear. Most prisoners had a deeply felt need to communicate with families and loved ones, which, for many, was their key priority. For many it was connections to family and loved ones that kept them going, especially for those with long sentences. Parents in particular felt shame and guilt, and wanted desperately to maintain connections with their children and to bring them comfort in separation.

"I'm living really for the times when I can speak to them, talk to my wife, try and reassure the children and show them that even though Dad's not around I love them and miss them." (Prisoner)

Many prisoners interviewed had a real fear of the potential for the breakdown of their relationships during the course of their sentence and of being replaced by a new partner and a new father figure. Young men in particular could be obsessively jealous about what their girlfriends may be doing and worry about being forgotten by friends or losing respect and influence among their social network.

Against this background, communication with the outside world and with loved ones was seen as hugely important to the prisoners interviewed. They wanted not only to know what was going on with their loved ones but actively to be part of the world outside, to continue to be a presence in their loved ones lives. Similarly, those prisoners interviewed who were also parents wanted to be able to make an active contribution to their children's lives – to continue to 'parent' while on the inside.

Prisoners who were effective in maintaining relationships appeared also to have greater motivation for compliance with the prison regime and appeared to be more motivated for desistance from crime and to avoid re-offending than those whose relationships had broken down or who lacked a sense of strong external connections. The latter appeared also to be much more likely to look inwards to the prison hierarchy and culture and the criminal lifestyle as their dominant reality while those able to maintain meaningful relationships were more likely to see their family and the outside world as the real world to which they aspired to return.

6.2 Legitimate communications within prison

In order to understand the drivers of mobile phone use it is necessary to set these in the context of the legitimate communications facilities provided to prisoners within the prison environment.

6.2.1 Entry to the prison system

Prisoners can face a series of practical and emotional challenges on entering prison, among the most difficult of which can be communicating with family and the outside world. Prisoners are allowed a two-minute phone call on entry to advise a nominated person of their situation. Although prisoners reported officers have some discretion in allowing new prisoners to make phone calls, both Heads of Security and prisoners reported that it can then take some weeks for the vetting process to be completed which enables prisoners to use the prison phones to call approved contacts. During this time new prisoners can have very limited opportunity to communicate with family members or other contacts.

Seasoned prisoners and those expecting a custodial sentence have often had the opportunity to plan for separation and to make appropriate arrangements. For those new to prison or where incarceration was not anticipated, the shock of imprisonment and the prospect of serving a sentence can itself be traumatic, particularly for younger, vulnerable prisoners and women. Such prisoners may have made no forward planning to offset the practical, financial and emotional dimensions of imprisonment and may have little knowledge of the communication facilities that will be available to them. For such prisoners, their family may be unaware of what has happened. On a practical level there may be issues in relation to dealing with ongoing commitments such as rent, debt repayment or court fines. There may also be issues in accessing legal support. For foreign nationals, all of these challenges may be further compounded by language barriers, immigration issues and by difference in time zones between the UK and their country of origin.

The limited communications available to prisoners on point of entry can make addressing these various issues very difficult. Prisoners reported that they were not always able to get through during their allowed phone call on entry or that they were able only to leave a message. They further reported that this period, in which they were effectively cut off from communications with family members, created serious practical and emotional problems. The distress associated with imprisonment was exacerbated by not being able to communicate with family. There was also guilt and anxiety about not being able to mitigate the worries of family members, especially children to whom prisoners without access to communication were unable to offer reassurance or support. Parents also reported practical difficulties in finding out information or making arrangements in relation to children's welfare or whereabouts. Others reported that they experienced significant additional stress and worry because they had been unable to sort out financial and housing arrangements.

Against this background, experienced prisoners could see bringing a mobile phone into prison as a means of avoiding the initial communications challenges. Experienced prisoners anticipating custodial sentences reported that they had come to court with miniature phones concealed within body orifices, in order to ensure that they could communicate with partners and family once in prison.

6.2.2 The PIN phone system

Prisoners are able to communicate with a limited number (15 – 20 depending on establishment) of pre-approved and validated contacts who have agreed to receive calls. Heads of Security and prisoners concurred that this vetting process takes about three weeks typically but can take considerably longer if the family members or friends on the numbers specified by the prisoner are not available during the working hours when the prisons phone to validate their identify and obtain their consent to being called.

Prisoners are able to use phones located on the landings and operated via a PIN system, with PINs being unique to each prisoner. There are two to four phones per landing, each servicing between 50 and 120 prisoners. These phones generally offer minimal privacy – some have hoods and some prisons have phone booths. In most establishments, phones have a ten minute cut off, after which the call is shut down, with no recall to the number dialled allowed for an interval of five minutes. Landing phones can be used during 'association'¹⁶ and at some other times for those working outside their cells. A notice above

¹⁶ This is the period when prisoners are let out of their cells and can move around the wing to socialise, shower and undertake recreational activities.

the phones advises prisoners that conversations are being monitored and recorded. Typically, the association period is around two hours in late afternoon but can be significantly less in some establishments, for those on basic privileges or those unlocked from their cells last. Prisoners are locked back up again typically between 6 and 6.30pm, but in some prisons (e.g. those under resource pressures), this can be considerably earlier. In some prisons, association may not be possible every day and prisoners can, on occasion, be locked up in their cells without access to the landing phones for 48 or even 60 hours.

6.3 The experience of using the legitimate phone system

A large part of the demand dynamics and the desire for mobile phones rests on frustrations associated with the constraints and costs of the legitimate PIN phone system. It appeared that difficulties in accessing phones and talking to loved ones for any length of time were a constant source of tension and frustration. The interviews with Heads of Security and prisoners revealed a range of approaches to managing access to the PIN phone system in different establishments. In some prisons access to the phone is managed by a list and queuing system supervised by prison staff and designed to enable equality of access. In others, access is on the basis of first come first served. Prisoners reported that in some cases, access is managed by prisoners themselves, not infrequently by dominant individuals and their associates on the wing. Where it is controlled by a dominant individual or clique, the result is that weaker and vulnerable individuals could be unable to access phones and thus communicate with their families. Prisoners reported long queues for phones, with some prisoners – typically those on basic privileges, unlocked last or lacking ‘status’ in the eyes of other prisoners – being unable to make calls in the time available.

Prisoners reported that staff appeared to have some discretion for ‘emergency’ calls, vulnerable prisoners and special circumstances, though accounts from different prisoners and from prisoners held in different prisons suggests that the exercise of this discretion appears to vary considerable between wings and between different establishments.

Tensions over access to and use of the phone was said by prisoners to act as the most frequent flash-point issue for confrontations, intimidation and violence. The timing of association could also make it difficult or impossible to contact children and partners or family members who were in school and work. A further difficulty was that the unpredictable nature of access to the landing phones made it hard for prisoners to arrange a specific time to call. As a result, family members or children expecting a call were said to be frequently let down.

Prisoners reported that the lack of fit with the reality of partners' and children's daily lives was a big factor in the desire for a mobile phone.

Five foreign national prisoners were interviewed for this project. For those foreign nationals seeking to phone abroad they have the additional problem of time differences and they could find it very difficult and sometimes impossible to make contact with their families. Some prisoners reported that prison authorities had made special arrangements for foreign prisoners to make occasional calls and, in one case, to Skype their family, but in other cases prisoners reported that no special arrangements had been made.

6.4 Constraints of the PIN phone system and its impact on relationships

In many respects, the PIN phone system did not appear conducive to maintaining relationships and intimacy with partners or contributing to the family as a parent. Prisoners reported that they could not afford to spend the time on the phone needed to maintain and sustain meaningful relationships.

“So there will be weeks, there will be days that you will need to be more on the phone for your daughter, for your wife, to reassure your wife, to reassure your daughter, your son, calm down, and obviously what you earn it will never be enough to keep viable, focused, family times.” (Prisoner)

They were often unable to reach certain family members, most commonly children, except at weekends. Calls were also cheapest at weekends. However this, along with the fact families were possibly more likely to be around to take calls, meant that weekends were the times when queues were at their lengthiest, making access more difficult. This was a particularly acute problem for vulnerable individuals and those without connections. Parents reported that their children suffered as a result, not only missing their father/mother but also anxious about what was happening to them.

The ten minute limit on conversations made it difficult to resolve tensions arising between partners or to cover complex issues. As a result prisoners frequently reported that they had become either distressed or angry following a 'bad call', about which they could brood obsessively when locked in their cells. The nature of the landing culture and the lack of privacy when making calls also made it difficult to show emotion or weakness. In terms of the monitoring of calls, some individuals experienced it as deeply intrusive while others appeared to disregard it.

6.5 The impact of mobile phones on relationships

Prisoners reported that use of mobile phones transformed their ability to maintain relationships with loved ones but also their ability to continue to be a presence in the lives of those outside. Being able to communicate with loved ones either frequently and briefly during the day or for extended periods, typically in the evening, worked to make couples closer and to keep relationships alive. Prisoners reported that they felt better able to discuss even difficult topics or to have arguments with partners and resolve issues that might otherwise have drifted away. Most importantly for parents, individuals felt able to be a presence for their children and to be able to parent from a distance, albeit from a distance and in a limited way.

Sex was also seen to be a part of the attraction of mobile phones, allowing partners to sustain a form of shared sexual relationship. For those without a relationship, mobile phones provided access to flirting, sex lines and entertainment – and an escape from the boredom, isolation and loneliness when locked up. This was a particularly important driver for young men and those in YOIs.

For some prisoners, privacy and the sense that they are able to keep their relationships separate from – and untouched by – the prison authorities was really important as a motivator for using mobile phones, providing some sense of control around the things that matter most to them.

“I never used to ring them (family) on the prison PIN. I, just for me, that’s my family. That’s private. That’s my personal thing. I’m in prison but I still want something that’s mine...so that’s one of the reasons why I always used to use mobile phones. It’s only been the last 18 months to two years [out of last nine years] that I’ve used prison phones [because approaching end of sentence and does not want to risk extending sentence].” (Prisoner)

Prisoners also reported that being able to maintain meaningful relationships had meant that their orientation and mind-set remained anchored in the world outside and enabled them to keep some distance from prison culture and criminogenic peer influence. They also reported that keeping close to family had increased their motivation for compliance with the prison regime – and thus minimising the time they spent in prison – while also creating further motivation for desistance in the future.

"I think I feel more ready for it (resettlement) than I did last time. I know what I'm getting back into. My missus and I are tight, you know, the kids are not going to be awkward around me, you know. I'm not going to be a stranger. I'm more hopeful I'm not going to let them down again." (Prisoner)

6.6 The cost of calls

6.6.1 The costs to the prisoner of the legitimate phone system

The full cost of the PIN phone system is borne by the prisoners, including the cost of all of the infrastructure associated with the vetting of phone contacts and the security operation associated with recording and monitoring the content of calls. The cost is therefore significantly higher than for either landlines or mobile phones outside prison. Calls to mobile phones are significantly more expensive than calls made to landlines, but most prisoners have no option as their families and social network typically do not have landlines.

In most prisons, credit is purchased by prisoners once a week through the 'canteen' (i.e. the weekly prison shop from which small items such as toiletries or tobacco can be purchased), using prison wages and any top up funds provided by families. The scale of funds that can be provided by family is capped. Credit purchased on 'canteen' appears on the PIN phone a couple of days later. In most prisons if prisoners use up all their available phone credit they must then wait until the following week to top up. In some prisons, prisoners are able to log into a computer system to purchase credit at any time.

The cost of calls and the difficulties prisoners faced in accessing phones meant that they rarely made calls beyond their immediate family. Over time prisoners reported that they had lost touch with individuals outside their core family and were no longer able to keep up with events and developments in their wider social network and community. This left them feeling distant from the external world and resulted in a greater focus on relationships within the prison and on the prison ethos and culture.

For the prisoners interviewed, phone credit represented between a half and three-quarters of their available funds. Given that these funds covered TV, food, toiletries, tobacco and clothes, prisoners were effectively devoting the maximum possible to making phone calls. However, many prisoners reported that they were unable to afford all the calls they wanted to make and that they often ran out of credit mid-week. This was particularly likely for those on basic status within the IEP policy – and thus least likely to be earning – and those who did not have funds sent in by family. It was also a particularly acute problem for those who had to

ring mobile phones. As a result, prisoners rationed their time on the phone, prioritising who they called and calling less frequently than they would like. An event occurring during the week – such as a crisis at home or an extended argument with a partner – could use up all available credit, leaving individuals unable to keep abreast of events and obtain information or to resolve an argument until the following week. For those who had financial or other arrangements to sort out on the outside, the cost of the necessary calls could be prohibitive.

A key perceived attraction of mobile phones by prisoners was that they were not subject to the same time and cost constraints as in the legitimate PIN system. Even where the prisoner paid for top up credit (facilitated externally by friends and family), mobile phone use remained far cheaper than the landline phones. In many cases, however, mobile phones were effectively free to prisoners in that the costs of credit or contracts were paid for by external family members or associates.

Mobile phones thus allowed prisoners to talk for extended periods, to text frequently during the day and thus to explore complex issues and keep abreast of the minutiae of family life or developments in their social network or community. Moreover, not having to devote most of their own funds to phone credit, prisoners could spend more on items such as food or tobacco which they would otherwise sacrifice to phone credit. Even in prisons where in-cell phones were available, in some cases prisoners were said to still opt to use a mobile phone on cost grounds.

6.7 The impact of in-cell phones

Some contracted-out prisons have experimented with installing phones in cells. In one model, in-cell phones are provided in all cells regardless of prisoner status. In another, in-cell phones are provided in blocks for enhanced status prisoners only. Phones are monitored and operate on the PIN system to pre-approved numbers in the same way as in the rest of the prison estate, with the same charging structure. The time when the phones can be used varies slightly between establishments but is typically early morning (6 or 7am) until late evening (11 or 12pm). The time that prisoners spend on the phone is thus limited only by their earnings and the (capped) availability of funds sent in by the family. There are no incoming calls.

Prisoners reported that in-cell phones had been transformational, with this effect most marked in those models where there was a combination of in-cell phones and a population of enhanced status, long term or resettlement prisoners – these prisoners had more funds to

devote to phone credit and were more likely to have funds sent in by family. They were therefore less likely to feel restricted in the amount of time they could spend on the phone. Prisoners reported that their relationship with partners, children and the wider family had deepened and strengthened. Interactions with children and partners had become more natural and spontaneous and they were better able to contribute to family life. There was a strong sense that family and partner relationships had become more resilient as a result.

“I was probably ringing my missus once a week because it was just so much of a nightmare going on and then standing there and everyone else is right next to you and all the noise...Rang the missus, right yes, and she went ‘Christ it is quiet, where are you? And I said I’ve got a phone in my cell, Christ, yes go and get the lads. And I was having proper conversations with the kids, you all right boy, have you been good at the school, and chattering about it. And now I’m able to listen and talk to them properly, so yes, oh it’s made a huge difference.”

(Prisoner)

Parents felt empowered to make a real contribution to the family and claimed that they had become a real presence in their children’s lives, even if they were physically absent. Prisoners using in-cell phones also reported that they felt their families experienced reduced stress and that children in particular were happier and that at times of difficulty or family crises they and their families suffered less anxiety because they were better able to keep in touch.

Both prisoners and Heads of Security reported fewer mobile phones circulating/being found in enhanced status wings with in-cell phones. The risk of loss of status and thus access to in-cell phones was a significant incentive to compliance for prisoners, particularly for those nearing the end of a sentence. Equally, the prospect of gaining access to an in-cell phone had been a major incentive in aspiring to and achieving enhanced status. Those nearing resettlement reported that greater involvement of the family had made them feel both more optimistic and more realistic about moving back into family life and the community, resulting also in their having a more constructive approach to resettlement and desistance.

Prisoners in the model where all cells had phones reported very similar family/relationship benefits, albeit in diluted form in that these prisoners were unable to spend as much time on the phone because they had fewer funds available – the cost constraints of being on basic or standard IEP status being that much greater. Both prisoners and Heads of Security

reported a reduced prevalence of mobile phones, and prisoners reported that mobile phones were cheaper than in other prisons, potentially reflecting reduced demand. However, prisoners reported that some temptation remained to use mobiles, due to the cost differential between mobile phones and the legitimate in-cell phones. Similarly, in the enhanced only model for prisoners serving long term sentences, who had less to lose, mobile phones remained an attractive option because of the cost advantage and freedom from the time constraints implied by having a limited phone budget.

In the prisons with in-cell phones in all cells, both staff and prisoners reported that mobile phone use associated with drug dealing and criminal activity continued as in other prisons, driven by the powerful financial incentives and the role of drugs within the prison economy.

“Those guys are still going to be doing their business. Same as every prison. There’s too much money to be made. And they’re not going to be doing that on the prison phones, are they?” (Head of Security)

For prisoners in establishments with landing phones only, the idea of having in-cell phones was highly attractive. The key benefits were seen in terms of being able to maintain relationships and intimacy with loved ones, and in particular with children. The general view was that if in-cell phones were available, this would significantly cut demand for mobile phones. The prospect of earning a right to in-cell phones (or alternatively the potential for loss of their in-cell phone) was felt likely to act as significant incentive for compliance and good behaviour.

Prisoners also took the view that if prisons provided in-cell phones, mobile phones would be used primarily for criminal activity, albeit that some felt strongly that the cost advantage of a mobile phone would remain a powerful draw.

“Why would you want a mobile phone when you’ve got one in your cell? Why would you take the risk? That would stop a lot of people obviously who just want to talk to their families.” (Prisoner)

“80% to 90% of people with a mobile phone now would give it up if they could have a phone in their cell.” (Prisoner)

6.8 A typology of mobile phone users in prison

This section seeks to pull together the various drivers of demand for mobile phones, both criminal and social, into a typology of mobile phone users in UK prisons. It is clear that the user types which were most visible to the security function and intelligence operations within prisons were those prisoner types that have the most damaging impact and which were most active in prisons' illicit economies. These users were also those that were most connected to criminal networks and which were most active in trafficking mobile phones into prison. These users, a relatively large body of dealers, and a much smaller but very high risk group of serious organised criminals, were primarily financially and criminally motivated, albeit that they would also use mobile phones for communication with family, friends and social networks.

There was also a body of mobile phone users for whom mobile phones were tied up with status and display. By the very nature of the drivers, these users stand out as mobile phone users to both prisoners and the security function. This user type was also more likely to come to the notice of authorities – not least through human intelligence sources within prisons. These users tended to be dominant individuals within the landing hierarchy and those who set the tone of prison culture, including that of violence and intimidation. For these prisoners, use of mobile phones reinforces criminogenic drivers and an antisocial mind-set.

Alongside these high profile users, there appeared to be significant body of mobile phone users who were more discreet and lower profile and whose motivation in using mobile phones was not criminally driven but rather driven by human need and the desire to sustain relationships with loved ones on the outside. These users were strongly oriented towards external relationships and their motivation was maintaining family connections and relationships with partners and children. For these users, mobile phone use appeared to strengthen relationships, in the process appearing to create or reinforce motivation for both compliance with the prison regime and inclination to desistance for the future.

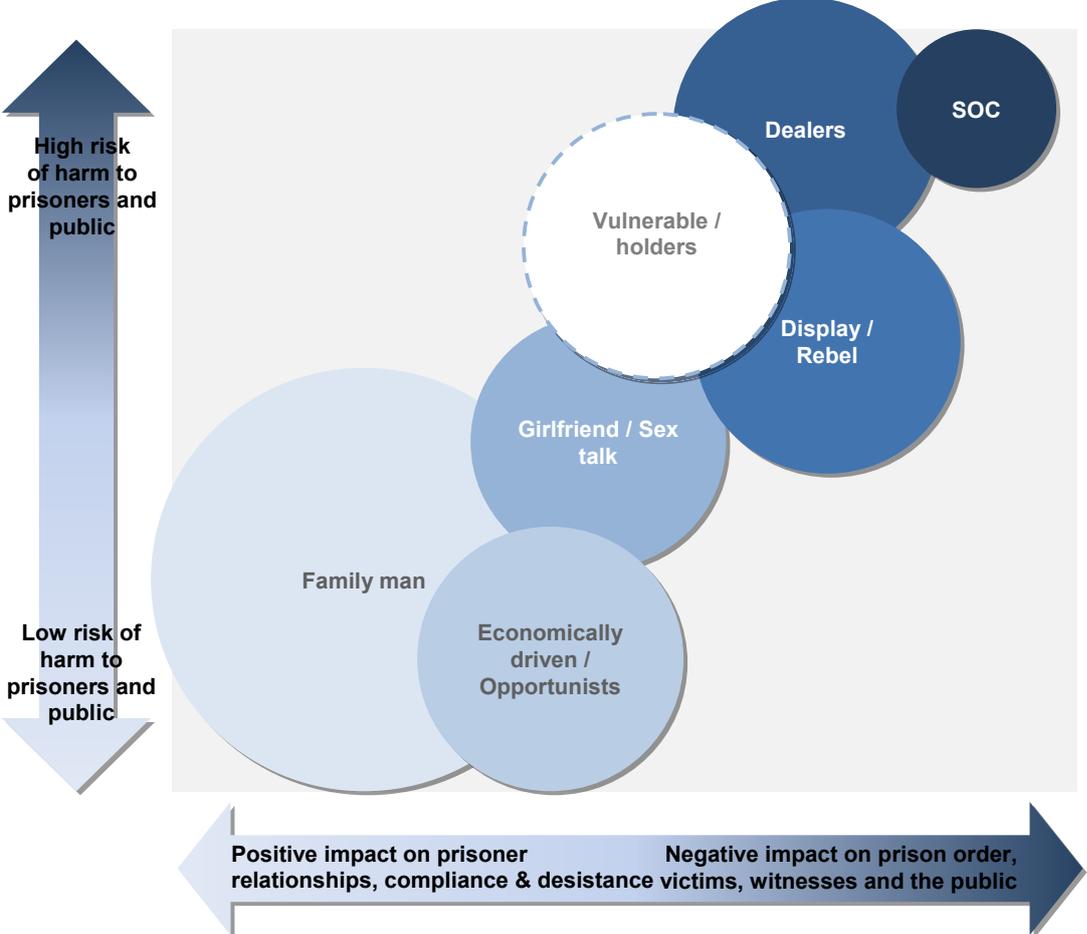
Among young men in particular, and in YOIs, there was a group of mobile phone users who were driven by sex and boredom and for whom mobile phones and sex-talk represented release and entertainment. There was also a strong desire for intimacy and self-realisation within this dynamic. At the margins there is a degree of crossover between these users and both the dealers and display-driven individuals earlier discussed.

There was also another group of relatively discreet mobile phone users, whose motivation was simply to lower the costs and increase the convenience of their interactions with the outside world.

Finally, there was a group more properly seen as victims, enforced stewards rather than proactive users of mobile phones – the low status ‘gofers’ who were intimidated and bullied into holding mobile phones for more powerful individuals and those conducting criminal business inside and/or outside the prison walls.

The typology has been constructed on the basis of a synthesis of the qualitative material and it should be noted that the sample of prisoners interviewed was biased to higher risk prisoners. The synthesis has sought to capture the relative importance of different types of drivers of mobile phones as reported to the researchers, primarily by the prisoner sample. Figure 2 illustrates the typology, providing an indication of the relative importance of the various drivers of use as reported by prisoners, represented by the size of the circles. The overlaps between the circles of different types of users are intended as an indicator of crossover between groups in patterns of motivation and use. The size of the circles is not intended to denote the size of particular groups of mobile phone users; this cannot be deduced from a piece of qualitative research.

Figure 2. Mobile phone user typology



Mobile phone user typology

Family man

Profile: Partnered/with children. Includes very young fathers, but has older bias.

Motivation: Close to family, contribute as parent from inside, be part of family life.

Usage style: Text and voice. Discreet – aim to retain phone on sustainable basis.

Risk: Low, little cross-over with other aspects of prison economy.

Impact: Sustained relationships. Positive for resettlement/desistance.

Girlfriends/sex talk

Profile: Young men with and without partners.

Motivation: Relationships and intimacy, female company, control, sex, entertainment – presence in outside world.

Usage style: Primary focus text, voice, some picture sharing. Can be discreet – some sharing within close associate clique.

Risk: Medium, some crossover with drugs, some access to restricted numbers.

Impact: Positive for personal relationships and some diffusion of tension/aggression.

Some potential for continuation of damaging controlling relationships, relationships with criminal associates.

Economically driven/opportunists

Profile: Multiple sentences, experienced or longer term prisoners.

Motivation: Cost savings and convenience. Some to sort affairs on entry to prison.

Usage style: Text and voice. Mix of phone owners/renters, some occasional use.

Risk: Medium to low. May be some crossover with running external criminal business.

Impact: Medium, some potential for debt, exposure to intimidation and stress.

Display/Rebel

Profile: Young males, testosterone/display-driven, multiple prison terms, often gang-related.

Motivation: Status and build reputation inside/outside prison, display physique, boast to external audience, maintain presence outside world, kick against system.

Usage style: Text and voice, images key, social media.

Risk: Medium to high: some crossover with drug/mobile trafficking, harassment of witnesses/victims, continuation of gang agenda.

Impact: Negative impact on victims/witnesses, impact on reputation of prison service, glamorising negative behaviours/gang cultures – but short-lived.

Dealers

Profile: Dealers in drugs/mobiles or both, both inside prison and, in some cases also running external drug business. Some local gang connected, some OCG links.

Motivation: Financial gain, status, continuation of criminal lifestyle – also used for personal and family communications but primary driver criminal business.

Usage style: Text and voice. May have dominant position in landing hierarchy. Phone typically held by associates or third party, typically weaker, potentially vulnerable prisoners.

Risk: High. Risks to security and good order, central to the illicit prison economy, continuation of external criminal business activities.

Impact: High. Disorder and volatility, debt, intimidation, violence, extortion, both internally and externally to families, potential risks for victims and witnesses and external associates.

Vulnerable holders

Profile: Weak individuals with little status intimidated into holding phones for more powerful and connected prisoners.

Motivation: Fear of more powerful individuals and potential consequences of not agreeing to look after phone. In some cases 'quid pro quo' of being able to use phone to contact own family.

Usage style: Often not used personally, in some cases limited text and voice.

Risk: Low risk, primarily to individual if phone detected and confiscated by authorities.

Impact: Secondary effect, primary impact associated with phone owners. Some risk to holders (of debt, retaliation, sanctions) if phone detected and confiscated.

Serious Organised Criminals (SOC)

Profile: Experienced lifestyle criminals, present as 'model prisoner'.

Motivation: Continuation of criminal business activity, minimise personal exposure to risk and length of time in prison, minimise personal discomfort/restrictions within prison regime.

Usage style: Full functionality device, minimal personal use, maximum deniability, device carried/stored by associates, highly conscious of targeting and intelligence powers.

Risk: Very high – drug dealing and trafficking at scale, risks to witnesses and perversion of course of justice.

Impact: Very high – continuing of scale criminal business has ongoing negative impact on public.

6.9 Summary

There appeared to be a significant body of mobile phone users for whom the drivers of demand were essentially social and human rather than criminal and for whom the impact of mobile phone use was largely positive, not only in enabling individuals to maintain meaningful relationships with family and loved ones but also in increasing motivation for compliance and desistance. The primary social driver in these cases appears to be prisoners' deep desire to maintain relationships with loved ones, with the legitimate phone system often being a poor fit with their communication needs and the realities of family lives, partners' working hours and children's activities. From the prisoners' accounts, this appeared to be the most important driver of demand for mobile phones.

For young men and those in YOIs, demand was also driven by desire for status and display, by a strong desire for pseudo sexual contact and by a simple desire for entertainment and distraction from the pervasive boredom that characterises prison life.

Clearly there is a degree of crossover between the criminal and social drivers. Nonetheless, for many prisoners using mobile phones primarily or solely for communications, the social use of mobile phones appeared to have a series of positives associated with it, in contrast to the undoubted risks and harm arising from criminally driven use of mobile phones in prisons. Access to mobile phones appeared to go some way to defusing the frustrations and tensions that are associated with the inadequacy of the legitimate PIN phone system, and thus may also be mitigating the potential for violent confrontations and intimidation which centres on access to these phones.

Against the background of capacity and resource pressure, it could also be argued that access to mobile phones may have also been working to dilute the impact of prisoners being locked up for extended periods and thus mitigating prisoner resentment of increasingly lengthy lock-ins, which might otherwise present a powerful driver for confrontation with prison authorities.

For those with access to them, mobile phones were clearly underpinning prisoners' ability to maintain meaningful ongoing relationships with family and loved ones and to participate more fully in family life and relationships, with apparent benefits for children and partners as well as prisoners themselves. It could also be argued therefore that mobile phones – and the quality communication with family and loved ones that they facilitated – were acting to

support pro-social behaviour and moderate the culture of violence and the inward-looking prison culture.

There would also appear to be benefits arising from use of both mobile phones and in-cell phones in terms of the protective effect of maintaining quality family relationships on preventing re-offending and increasing motivation for desistance. This effect would seem to be consistent with key themes within the re-offending and desistance literature¹⁷ and is supported also by previous HMPPS research around the impact of family relationships on re-offending and the inter-generational transmission of offending behaviour,¹⁸ which suggest a positive correlation between maintaining strong family relationships and reduced re-offending and desistance. Indeed, it is on the basis of this evidence that HMPPS has promoted 'Children and Families' as one of the seven pathways to reducing re-offending, reflecting broader policy on a holistic, whole family approach to reducing re-offending.¹⁹

As noted in the previous chapter, these social drivers appeared to sit alongside the criminal drivers of demand, but with a relatively small degree of crossover. There was clearly a body of mobile phone users, primarily drug dealers and their associates, but including also those who wished to continue running criminal business beyond the walls, including serious organised criminals, whose motivation in using mobile phone was entirely or primarily criminal. For this type of user, who will likely also use their mobile phone for family communications and social and criminal peer networking purposes, the net impact of their mobile phone use will be highly damaging, presenting risks for prisons, prisoners and the wider public, regardless of whether mobile phones also enhance family relationships for these prisoners.

¹⁷ For example see May et al, MoJ (2008), which found that prisoners who maintained strong family relationships and received visits were 39% less likely to re-offend than those who did not. See also Losel et al (2012), which found that the predictors most consistently linked to positive resettlement outcomes were high quality of family relationships and good communication between father and family during imprisonment. See also Duwe and Clark (2011, 2013) for US evidence which found a positive relationship between good family relationships and visits and reduced recidivism; Derkzen, Gobell and Gileno (2009) which found that fathers receiving visits from children were less likely to be readmitted to prison; Visher (2013) which found that strong relationship between fathers and children had positive correlation with improved employment, substance abuse and mental health outcomes for ex-prisoners.

¹⁸ NOMS Parenting and relationship support services for offenders and their families (2014).

¹⁹ Reducing Reoffending: supporting families, creating better futures 2014.

7. Prevention and disruption

The final aim of the project was to gain an understanding of what non-technical factors could be most effective in reducing the supply and demand of illicit mobile phones in prison. This chapter examines the different routes of entry of illicit mobile phones into establishments and the different methods used to detect mobile phones.

7.1 The security perspective

7.1.1 Routes of entry

Illicit mobile phones can enter prisons through a number of ways. For example, over-the-wall packages and offenders entering prison were most commonly highlighted by Heads of Security as routes of entry. Of those establishments highlighting these routes, approximately one third (34%) indicated that at least half of their mobile phone finds could be linked to over-the-wall packages and one-quarter (25%) indicated that at least half of their finds could be linked to a prisoner entering prison.

7.1.2 Search methods used

A range of different methods were used in establishments to search for illicit mobile phones and SIM cards. Nearly all of the establishments (98%) stated that they used physical searching to aid detection of illicit mobile phones (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Search methods used

Search method	Number of responses	% of responses
Physical search	78	98
In-cell searching (without technical assistance)	75	94
Metal detection wand	75	94
B.O.S.S chair	73	91
Signal detectors	71	89
Detection dogs	53	66
Metal detection archway	39	49

7.1.3 Technology-led approaches

There was a widely held perception among the Head of Security interviewees that the technology provided, at the time this research project was conducted, was dated and not

adequate to the threat posed by mobile phones.²⁰ Intelligence-led focused searching was seen as far more effective in preventing and disrupting mobile phone use than the technical solutions on offer at the time.

7.2 The prisoner perspective

This section describes the prisoners' perspectives on how mobile phones were smuggled in, used and concealed in prisons. It also describes prisoners' perceptions of, and response to, the prevention and disruption strategies deployed by prisons' security and intelligence functions and the deterrent effect of sanctions for possession of a mobile phone.

7.2.1 Routes into prison

Prisoners reported a mix of routes into prison for mobile phones. Their relative importance appeared to depend both on the type of user and the nature of the security regime and location of prison. The key routes described were as follows:²¹

- Personal transport from court
- Inter-prison transfers of individuals
- Inter-prison transfers of belongings
- Incorporated into range of belongings
- Throw-overs
- Visits
- Corrupt staff

Individuals bringing phones in for their own use were said to be most likely to be carrying phones on their person or in their clothing or belongings on entry or transfer, whilst dealers were more likely to rely on 'throw-overs' and corrupt staff.

7.2.2 Concealed within body orifices

Those anticipating a sentence could plan and 'plug' a pre-prepared miniature phone within a body orifice when they appeared at court. This approach was used as phones were becoming increasingly miniaturised with fewer metal components, making them harder to detect through different search methods.

²⁰ The knowledge and experience of the users who were operating the technology may have impacted on how successful the technology was at detecting mobile phones.

²¹ At the time this piece of research was conducted the use of drones was not a route of entry for illicit mobile phones into prisons.

7.2.3 Throw-overs

Organised throw-overs were seen to be another popular and relatively successful route for smuggling mobile phones into prisons, particularly in urban environments or where prisoners had local connections. They were viewed as most likely being used for the delivery of multiple phones or SIM cards to dealers. While there appeared to be a relatively high incidence of losses to detection by security, in the context of the financial rewards to be gained, dealers regarded such losses as part of the cost of doing business.

7.2.4 Visits

Visits were viewed as less important as an entry point for the trafficking of mobile phones. Whilst this method could be successful, it was seen as relatively high risk, due to the vigilance of individual officers and circumstances on the day. Prisoners who wanted a phone for their own use could also be reluctant to ask friends and family to take risks or to risk the possibility of being forced to have closed visits in future.

7.2.5 Incorporated into belongings

Both Heads of Security and prisoners pointed to prisoners' ingenuity in incorporating disguised phones into their belongings, both at entry points to prisons and on an ongoing basis.

7.2.6 Corruption

Prisoners reported that corrupt staff (including uniformed officers, delivery workers or ancillary workers delivering services or training) were a method of conveying phones into prisons. Relatively less experienced staff were viewed by prisoners interviewed as the most likely targets for conditioning and corruption. However, there was seen to be considerable variation between establishments in the extent to which corrupt members of staff were active in bringing in mobile phones.

7.2.7 High security establishments

It was seen as much more difficult for prisoners to bring a mobile phone through the entry process at high security prisons. Prisoners in these establishments reported that it was difficult to bring in phones within body orifices. They further reported that the real challenge was concealing phones once inside. The intensity of security and supervision in these establishments made it very difficult for prisoners to retain a phone for any length of time.

7.3 Concealing and using mobile phones in prisons

There was consensus among the prisoners interviewed that the authorities were taking mobile phones more seriously and that security was becoming more effective at detecting and removing phones. In part this was attributed to more effective and systematic searching techniques. More fundamentally, it was recognised that prisons were being more focused and targeted in identifying individuals likely to have a mobile phone.

Staff were also seen at having got much better at concealing imminent searches from prisoners and timing searches so that prisoners were unprepared for them. There was a broad view that once staff were aware of a phone, it was unlikely to evade a targeted intel-led search.

Consequently, it was reported that prisoners had become more cautious in using phones and were making greater efforts to avoid detection in order to retain them for as long as possible. As a result, prisoners reported that they now had less access to the phones available and that they were being used less than in the past.

7.4 Perceived deterrent effect of sanctions

Prisoners caught with a mobile phone can be subject to sanctions such as loss of privileges or additional time added to their sentence. In the high security establishments, possession of a phone can result in being put on the escape list, and subject to a highly intrusive level of supervision and observation. Cases can be referred to the police.

The extent to which prisoners saw the risk of detection as a deterrent tended to depend on where they were in the sentence cycle and how much they felt they had to lose by being caught. With the exception of those approaching the end of their sentence and the enhanced prisoners enjoying the greatest privileges and freedoms, few of those prisoners interviewed saw the consequences of being caught as sufficient deterrent given the perceived benefits of having a mobile phone. For prisoners serving indeterminate and lengthy sentences, extra days, or even months, added to a sentence was of insufficient immediate relevance to influence aspirations and behaviour. Similarly, for younger prisoners with an entrenched pattern of offending behaviour and a history of multiple sentences, the status conferred by possession of a mobile phone, the entertainment value inherent in access to the outside world and the value placed on communications with loved ones far outweighed the sanctions associated with mobile phone use.

For those using mobile phones to support drug dealing and other criminal businesses, the financial incentives and business imperatives involved were the only consideration. In such cases, risk was in any case mitigated by ensuring that weaker prisoners looked after the phones when not in use. These views regarding limited deterrence were widely shared by the Heads of Security and were seen as deeply demotivating for staff, who were sometimes exposed to significant risk when confiscating a mobile phone.

7.5 Targeting and focus

Against the background of increased pressure on resources and budgets, Heads of Security reported that their activities in preventing and disrupting mobile phone use had become increasingly targeted and focused on those prisoners posing the highest risk to the good order of the prison and to the wider public. Within the questionnaire responses, 90% stated that all or the majority of their searches were intelligence driven (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Percentage of searches for mobile phones which were intelligence driven

Proportion of searches	Number of responses	% of responses
All	22	28
The majority	48	61
A minority	6	8
None	2	3
Total	78	100

7.6 Intelligence and searches

Despite searching becoming more challenging as phones became increasingly miniaturised and prisoners finding new ways to conceal phones, Heads of Security were confident that – where searches were intelligence led and the search team were able to maintain the element of surprise – they were usually able to locate the phone concerned.

7.7 Collaboration with law enforcement and other partners

Some prisons reported working effectively and closely with a range of law enforcement partners and the local police, particularly when focused on prisoners of ongoing interest to other agencies. These collaborations centred primarily on intelligence gathering. However, the questionnaire responses indicated that relatively few illicit mobile phone finds were referred to the police (see table 7.3). During the interviews, Heads of Security noted that this

could be due to insufficient evidence to identify an individual as owning a phone, a particular problem given cell sharing.

Table 7.3: Number of illicit mobile phones found in 2013 which establishments referred to the police

Number of cases referred to police	n	% of responses
None	12	15
1 – 5	28	35
6 – 10	5	6
11 – 20	12	15
21+	17	22
Don't know	5	6
Total	79	100

7.8 Limits of prevention and detection

There was broad consensus among the Head of Security interviewees that the demand for mobile phones was such that – without an effective blanket blocking technology – it would not be possible to stop mobile phones entering UK prisons in significant numbers.

Among Heads of Security there was a strong desire for effective blocking technology, albeit recognition that the required investment could be prohibitive. There was also a deeply felt need for enhanced technologies and greater resource to support intelligence gathering.

“Technology and resource. That’s it. That’s what we need.” (Head of Security)

The view that mobile phones were not about to go away any time soon was echoed by prisoners who opined that both the economic and human drivers of demand for mobile phones were so strong that there would continue to be a constant flow of phones into prison, even as prisons became more effective in preventing entry and disrupting their use.

7.9 Alternative approaches to minimising demand

One school of thought, among both some Heads of Security and prisoners, centred on tackling mobile phones by addressing the drivers of demand through enhancing access to legitimate communications. Among the Heads of Security there were fairly polarised views on how far enhanced legitimate phone facilities or in-cell phones would address the demand drivers. Some felt strongly that in-cell phones would lead to greatly reduced demand for mobile phones and enable security to focus on the highest risk and most egregious cases.

But there was an equally strong body of opinion that was dismissive of the social and family dimensions of demand, which was seen as overwhelmingly criminally driven, with the corollary being that enhancing legitimate phone facilities would do nothing to address demand.

“It won’t make any difference. They’re using mobile phones because they’re at it. They’re up to no good. And they’ll still be at it and they still won’t want us listening in to their conversations.” (Head of Security)

The security function in those contracted-out prisons where in-cell phones had been installed reported that in-cell phones was correlated with reduced finds of mobile phones but qualified this by pointing out that it had had no impact on criminally driven activities supported by mobile phones because the economic drivers (related to drug dealing in particular) were so strong. Dealers and those running criminal businesses externally remained just as keen to evade supervision by the authorities and so would continue to conduct their business by mobile phone.

7.10 The future

Heads of Security took the view the risks associated with mobile phones would increase, that phones would continue to evolve and in the process mobile phones would become easier to smuggle in and more difficult to detect in use. Prisoners were confident also that prisoner ingenuity and evolving technology would ultimately enable prisoners to stay ahead of the authorities.

7.11 Summary

Both Heads of Security and prisoners concurred that prisons were becoming more effective in reducing prisoners’ ability to smuggle and use mobile phones in prison, with success resting on targeted and intelligence-led approaches. There was a strong feeling among the interviewed Heads of Security that enhanced technology and greater resource needed to be devoted to combating mobile phones.

It was the view of Heads of Security that partner agencies were seen to lack awareness of the seriousness and impact of mobile phone use in prisons and were felt to be insufficiently supportive of enforcement action. Deterrents to mobile phone use were also viewed as insufficient in the face of the social drivers of demand, the potential benefits to prisoners of mobile phones and the financial rewards of trafficking and ongoing criminal business activity.

There were mixed views on the potential for enhanced legitimate communications (whether in the form of improvements to the pin phone system or in-cell phones) to address the relentless demand for mobile phones. Those Heads of Security who saw mobile phone use as entirely or primarily criminally driven took the view that it would have no impact on either demand for mobile phones or the negative impact of mobile phones on prison life and prisoners' ability to continue criminal activity, within or outside the prison walls. Other officers believed that the introduction of in-cell phones would reduce social demand for mobile phones and enable them to focus on existing resource and intelligence on the highest risk prisoners and most damaging activities supported by mobile phones.

Prisoners rather took the view that enhanced legitimate communications and in-cell phones would go a long way to eliminate social demand for mobile phones, but only provided that the cost differential between mobile and in-cell phones could be significantly reduced or eliminated. The potential to gain access to in-cell phones was seen as likely to be a highly motivational factor in enhancing compliance with the prison regime. Prisoners concurred with the security function that criminal activity supported by mobile phones would not be impacted by the introduction of in-cell phones.

8. Conclusions

It would appear, from the accounts of both Heads of Security and the prisoners, that mobile phones were a feature of prison life across the custodial estate, including the high security estate – albeit that mobile phones were much less common in these establishments. Furthermore, mobile phones appeared to be rare in both women’s prisons and in juvenile establishments.

There was, however, significant tension between the accounts of the Heads of Security and those of prisoners in their descriptions of both the dynamics of demand for mobile phones and the patterns of use and impact of mobile phones within prisons. Heads of Security tended to see the issue of mobile phones almost entirely through a security filter, with their views in part shaped by their natural, professional focus on the highest risk prisoners. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the security function saw mobile phone use as overwhelmingly criminally driven and entirely damaging in impact. Prisoners described a more multi-dimensional reality in which human and social drivers co-existed alongside criminal ones and in which highly negative patterns of behaviour and impacts arose alongside pro-social and arguably positive effects.

There was consensus between the security function and prisoners however that mobile phone trafficking and drug dealing, in large part facilitated by mobile phone use, were a key part of the illicit prison economy. Both Heads of Security and prisoners reported that mobile phones were used by some prisoners, including some serious organised criminals, to continue to run criminal businesses from within prisons. They were also of the view that mobile phones were being used for the harassment of victims and witnesses – and thus the perversion of justice – and by prisoners seeking to control or intimidate partners and other individuals on the outside. Furthermore, they also reported that mobile phones, in combination with the drug dealing that they facilitated, had a role to play in the culture of violence and were thus acting as a stimulus to the bullying and intimidation of weaker prisoners, creating an environment that was more unstable and volatile and thus more difficult for security to manage.

Heads of Security acknowledged that mobile phones were also used to communicate with family and friends, but saw the demand and use of mobile phones as overwhelmingly criminally driven, focused almost entirely on supporting criminal activity. Unsurprisingly, against this background, the security function viewed mobile phones as a major security risk,

undermining their ability to maintain a secure, safe and decent prison environment and to monitor and prevent criminal activity by prisoners, within and outside the prison walls.

Prisoners themselves painted a more nuanced picture. They acknowledged the criminal drivers and pointed to the most visible, dominant and high profile prisoners and those involved in drug dealing, mobile phone trafficking and other criminal activities as being among the most prominent and visible users of mobile phones, with these prisoners being most likely to have the resource, funds and standing to acquire and retain a mobile phone. Prisoners also took the view that for most prisoners the primary driver of mobile phone use was social, shaped by the human need for communication with loved ones and the desire to maintain and sustain meaningful relationships. Prisoners using mobile phones to maintain close relationships with family and loved ones appeared to have a greater orientation towards family and the world outside as their dominant reality. This appeared to work to moderate the influence of criminal peers and the landing culture and acted to stimulate motivation for compliance with the prison regime and motivation for desistance. Prisoners able to keep in close touch with families and maintain a presence in their family life appeared more realistic about resettlement and more inclined to desistance.

Some contracted-out prisons have installed in-cell phones. Heads of Security reported that in-cell phones appeared to work to reduce the number of mobile phones in prisons (at least as reflected in mobile phone finds). Heads of Security also reported, however, that in-cell phones did not have an impact on criminally driven mobile phone use, in particular in relation to drug dealing. Prisoners reported that in-cell phone use could transform family relationships, with knock-on effects of a greater orientation towards the outside world and increased motivation for desistance, mirroring the reports of prisoners using mobile phones for communicating with families. The prisoners' accounts of these effects were compelling and would seem consistent with the re-offending and desistance literature which broadly confirms a causal link between maintaining close family relationships and reduced re-offending and increased desistance.

For the future, both the security function and prisoners agreed that, absent blanket banning technology, the criminal and human drivers and the financial incentives to supply were so strong that mobile phones will continue to enter prisons in significant numbers. Again both prisoners and the security function agreed that as technology advances, the challenges and risks will become greater.

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