

## Exploring the links between homicide and organised crime

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### Key findings

- Six per cent of all recorded non-terrorist homicides in England and Wales in 2005–06 were assessed as having some link to organised crime.
- In 13 cases (2% of all non-terrorist homicides), organised crime groups with some recognisable structure were involved in the homicide. However, there was little evidence to suggest that these were large-scale criminal enterprises of the kind associated with populist notions of organised crime such as the Mafia or Mob.
- In homicide cases overall, victims and suspects were predominantly male and fell within the 18-to-29 age group. These patterns were even more pronounced in cases linked to organised crime. There was also a far higher proportion of Black victims and suspects in organised crime homicides than in homicides which were not linked to organised crime.
- Homicides linked to organised crime occurred mainly on the street, whereas incidents that were not related to organised crime more commonly occurred in the victim's home.
- Victims in organised crime homicides were more likely to be stabbed or shot than victims in non-organised crime cases, where other methods (such as beatings and strangulation) were more common.
- Significantly fewer homicides linked to organised crime were detected compared to those homicides not linked to organised crime.

This report summarises research that explored the links between homicide and organised crime. The study was commissioned in the summer of 2009 as part of the commitment to reduce serious and violent crime and aimed to identify what proportion of homicides involve organised crime and the nature of the relationship between organised crime activity and homicide. The findings are based on analysis of Home Office Homicide Index data for 2005–06 and in-depth interviews with police senior investigating officers.

### Research approach

First it was necessary to develop a working definition of organised crime. Many academics and policy makers agree that organised crime tends to be *committed for profit or*

*power* and that there has to be some kind of structure or network in place for crime activities to be completed routinely. However, there are debates over what form of *structure or network* organised crime takes. Following consultation with the Home Office, the definition of organised crime used in this study was as follows:

*'Organised crime constitutes any enterprise, or group of persons, engaged in continuing illegal activities in which one of its primary purposes is the generation of profit, irrespective of national boundaries.'*

The intention behind using this definition was that it would be inclusive. The aim was to collect detailed information on all homicides associated with organised crime, however widely the latter is defined. There were four main stages to the data collection process.

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1. A total of 696 non-terrorist cases were extracted from the Home Office Homicide Index<sup>1</sup> in England and Wales for 2005–06.<sup>2</sup>
2. Contact was made with all 44 police forces to collect further information on these cases that would supplement the data available in the Index.
3. Using all available data, cases were screened for possible links to organised crime. The screening assessment was made using a scoring system which drew on characteristics that might be present in homicides linked to organised crime (such as the victim or suspect having known links to organised criminal groups, or the victim and suspect being known criminal associates).
4. Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted with investigating officers in relation to the cases which were identified as having a possible link to organised crime, to either confirm or reject this link.

## The proportion of crimes involving organised crime

Of the 696 non-terrorist cases obtained from the Homicide Index, a total of 61 (9%), were screened in as having *possible* links to organised crime. Preliminary enquiries with senior investigation officers (SIOs) about these cases reduced this number to 54.

Fifty-one face-to-face interviews were carried out with SIOs.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these interviews, 42 cases (6% of all non-terrorist homicides) were confirmed as having some link to organised crime. However, the nature and strength of these links varied widely.

- In 17 cases (2.4% of all non-terrorist homicides) the homicide was thought to be the direct result of organised crime group (OCG) activity. In these cases, the homicide was generally committed to further the interests of the OCG involved by eliminating economic competition or by seeking retribution on a rival or a member from within the group for stealing drugs/money or crossing the group in some way.
- In a further 13 cases (1.8% of all non-terrorist homicides), the homicide was thought to be the direct result of organised crime activity, but the groups in question tended to operate as loose networks rather than having a formal, recognisable structure. Their forms of conflict, co-operation and co-offending reflected shared criminal lifestyles rather than anything resembling membership of a recognisable, purposive, enduring group which plans crime in a systematic way. In these cases drug dealing often formed part of the lifestyle of the victim and/or suspect, even if drugs were not always a direct causal factor in the homicides.
- In a further 12 cases (1.7% of all non-terrorist homicides), there was some link to organised crime (for example, either the victim or suspect had links to organised crime), but the homicide itself was not directly linked to organised crime *activity* or an OCG. These cases included, for example, a domestic homicide where the suspect was an organised criminal and a case involving a fight outside a night club, in which the perpetrator happened to be a member of an organised crime group.

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1 The Homicide Index is compiled and held by the Home Office. It includes a wide range of information on each case of murder, manslaughter and infanticide. Data are collected via police officers responsible for homicides at the force level. Data are entered at three different points: on recording a homicide offence; when any suspect is charged; and when court proceedings are completed or other disposals decided (the deadline is within 30 days of each of these 'events'). The Homicide Index does not include a specific flag for linkage to organised crime.

2 The decision about the year was based on two considerations. First, cases should be sufficiently recent that relevant investigating officers would generally still be in post and would remember details of the case and its investigation. Second, most investigations would be complete, allowing officers to speak freely about them. Slight caution needs to be expressed over the representativeness of the sample data. As Smith *et al.* (2011) note, there have been annual falls in the numbers of recorded homicides since 1997/98 and since 2007/08 falls have been observed that fall outside of the expected normal statistical variation.

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3 For two cases, interviews could not be arranged within the timescales of the study. One case was linked to another homicide, for which an interview had already been arranged.

## The differences between homicides linked to organised crime and homicides not linked to organised crime

This section compares the characteristics of the 42 homicides linked to organised crime with the remaining 654 non-terrorist homicides committed in 2005–06, drawing on data assembled for the Homicide Index and obtained from forces. The analysis focuses on:

- the demographic characteristics of victims and suspects;<sup>4</sup>
- the location of offences; and
- how victims were killed and levels of planning in cases.

### Demographic characteristics of victims and suspects<sup>5</sup>

- **Gender of victims and suspects:** Overall, the majority of homicide victims and suspects were male, although this general pattern was more pronounced in cases linked to organised crime: significantly fewer cases linked to organised crime (18%) had female victims compared to cases not linked to organised crime (33%).<sup>6</sup> Although it appears that a greater proportion of suspects in organised crime cases (97%) were male compared to cases not linked to organised crime (93%), this difference was not statistically significant.
- **Age of victims and suspects:** Overall, homicide victims and suspects are more likely to fall into the 18-to-29 age group. As above, however, this pattern is more pronounced in those cases linked to organised crime. In homicides linked to organised crime, significantly more victims fall into this age group than in cases not linked to organised crime (58% compared to 27%). See Figures 1 and 2. The same pattern is evident when considering the age of suspects: 69 per cent of suspects in homicides linked to organised crime were aged 18-to-29 compared to 46 per cent of suspects in homicides not linked to organised crime.

Figure 1 Age of victims: homicides linked to organised crime

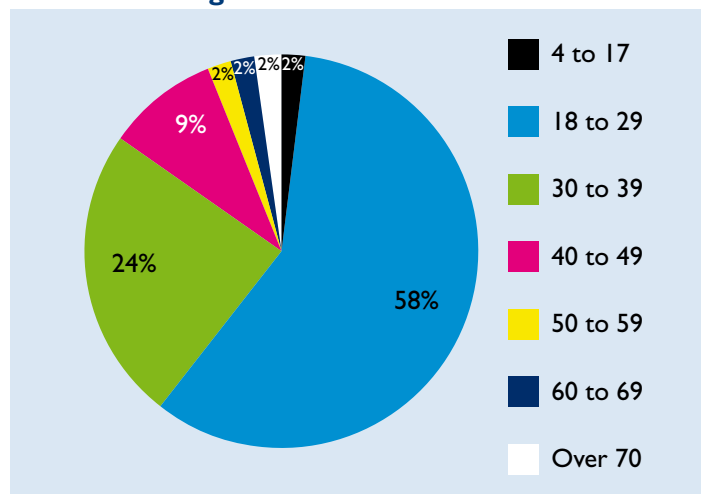
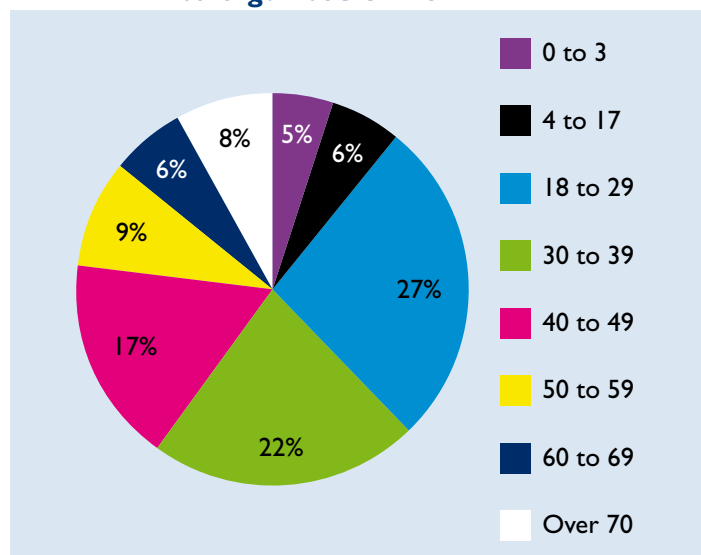


Figure 2 Age of victims: homicides not linked to organised crime



- **Ethnicity of victims and suspects:** There was a statistically significant relationship between cases linked to organised crime and the ethnicity of victims and suspects. A significantly higher proportion of Black victims (42%) and suspects (59%) featured in cases linked to organised crime than in cases not linked to organised crime (where the corresponding figures were nine per cent and 16 per cent respectively). These findings may be linked to the large number of organised crime homicides occurring in metropolitan areas: 79 per cent of all organised crime cases (n=33) occurred in Manchester, Merseyside, Birmingham or Greater London compared to 53 per cent (n=355) of cases not linked to organised crime.

4 A suspect is someone who has been arrested and charged with the offence.

5 In total there were 45 victims of homicide linked to organised crime and 654 victims of homicide not linked to organised crime. There were 82 suspects identified in the organised crime-linked homicides and 838 in the homicides not linked to organised crime. Please note that not all organised crime homicides had a suspect identified.

6 Throughout the report, all statistically significant results are at p <0.05 or below.

In summary, homicides linked to organised crime tended to reflect general patterns for the age and sex of victims and suspects involved in homicides, but these patterns were slightly more exaggerated. However, homicides linked to organised crime had a higher proportion of Black victims and suspects.

### The location of offences

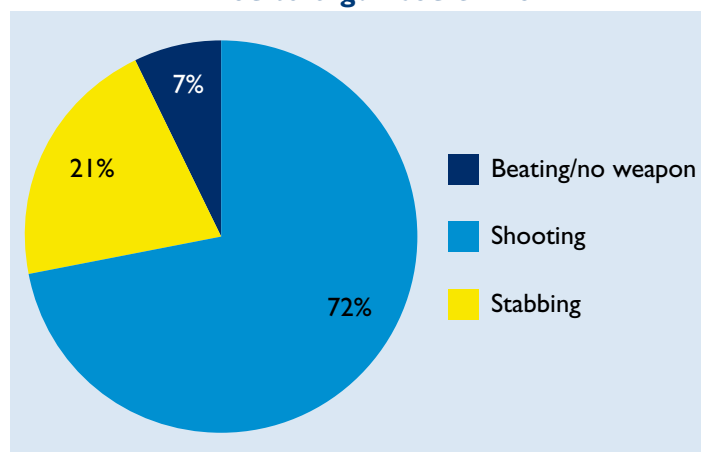
Differences were observed in the location of cases linked to organised crime and cases not linked to organised crime. Over 40 per cent of the organised crime homicides took place on the street, compared to a quarter of the cases not linked to organised crime. Homicides linked to organised crime were less likely to take place in the victim's home than homicides not linked to organised crime (15% compared to 40%).

### How victims were killed and levels of planning

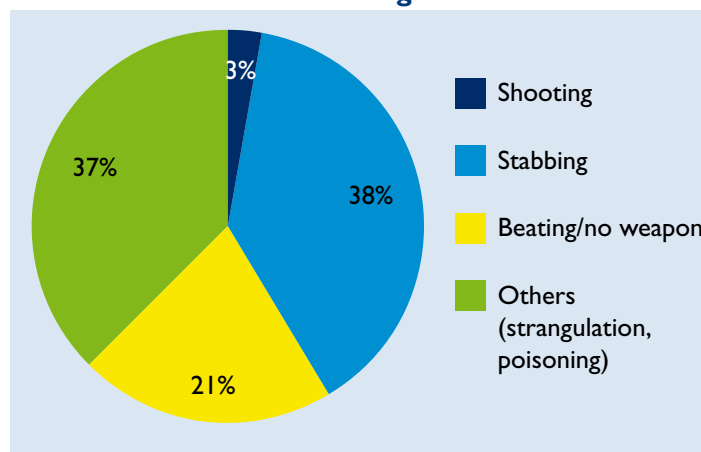
A statistically significant relationship was also observed between method of killing and whether a case was linked to organised crime. The most striking finding related to the use of firearms, with almost three-quarters of the organised crime victims being killed by a firearm, compared to less than four per cent of the victims in cases not linked to organised crime. Stabbings and shootings accounted for 93 per cent of the organised crime cases, but only 42 per cent of the cases not linked to organised crime, where other methods (such as beatings and strangulation) were more common (see Figures 3 and 4).

It was also more common to find evidence of planning<sup>7</sup> in cases that were linked to organised crime. Planning was evident in 77 per cent of the homicides linked to organised crime compared to only 21 per cent of homicides not linked to organised crime.

**Figure 3** How victims were killed: homicides linked to organised crime



**Figure 4** How victims were killed: homicides not linked to organised crime



### Detection and conviction patterns for homicides linked to organised crime and homicides not linked to organised crime

Table I compares the proportion of cases where a suspect was identified, the case was detected, at least one suspect was charged and a suspect was convicted for cases which were and were not linked to organised crime.

Overall, 920 individual suspects were identified: 82 for homicides linked to organised crime and 838 for homicides not linked to organised crime. Although homicides linked to organised crime appeared to be less likely than other homicides to have an identified suspect, and for a suspect to be charged or convicted, these differences were not statistically significant. However, significantly fewer organised crime cases were detected.

<sup>7</sup> In this instance offences were deemed to be planned if there was any evidence of a suspect(s) preparing to commit the offence in the days or hours leading up to the incident. This included making threats to potential victims, obtaining weapons or other tools required to commit the offence, using associates to perform specific tasks (such as driving cars, locating victims etc). This information was obtained following discussion with force representatives.

**Table 1 Percentage of cases with a suspect identification, detection, charge and conviction: cases linked to organised crime compared to cases not linked to organised crime**

	Cases linked to OC (42)	Cases not linked to OC (654)	All cases (676)
Cases with at least one suspect identified	86	93	92
Cases detected	74 <sup>a</sup>	88	87
Cases with at least one suspect charged	67	79	78
Cases with a suspect convicted (including lesser offences)	62	68	66
Cases with at least one conviction for 'homicide' offences	62	68	67

a Pearson chi-square  $p < 0.01$ .

In those homicides linked to organised crime where a suspect was identified (86%), there tended to be a greater number of suspects, on average, compared to homicides not linked to organised crime (two compared to 1.3). Overall, 52 per cent of homicides linked to organised crime had multiple suspects compared to only 22 per cent of homicides not linked to organised crime.

It is possible that the higher average number of suspects per organised crime case might partly be related to the nature of the cases and the methods by which suspects were identified. The most common method of suspect identification in homicides linked to organised crime was intelligence (56%). For other homicide cases, it was most common for a suspect to be identified by a witness (33%), through other methods<sup>8</sup> (24%) and at the scene (21%).

## Conclusion

These findings indicate that only a very small number of homicide cases can be confidently linked back to organised crime. These estimates are, of course, subject to a variety of errors. There may be additional cases where there was organised crime involvement but which the study was not able to identify (either because the screening process did not pick them up or because the police investigation did not reveal a link to organised crime). Moreover, 2005–06 may not be a typical year in terms of homicide or organised crime activity. Those uncertainties acknowledged, the proportion of cases involving organised crime appears certainly to be less than ten per cent and may be as low as two per cent (if only considering those cases with a known link to a 'formal', recognisable OCG).

For those cases which could be linked to organised crime, it should be noted that although some level of organisation was sometimes evident, none of the cases involved large-scale criminal enterprises of the kind associated with the Mafia or Mob. Indeed, one of the most striking findings of the research was the failure to uncover any evidence that substantial, well-organised criminal enterprises had been involved in homicides in 2005–06. It is not possible to conclude that there was no such involvement, although if there was, it was well disguised, unknown to the police and rare.

In terms of demographic characteristics of victims and suspects, homicides linked to organised crime tended to display similar characteristics to those not linked to organised crime, but the patterns were more pronounced. However, homicides linked to organised crime do appear to differ from other homicides in terms of their location, the method of killing and levels of planning.

## References

Smith, K. (ed), Coleman, C., Eder, S. and Hall, P. (2011) *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2009/10: Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2009/10*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/11. London: Home Office.  
<http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs11/hosb0111.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> This includes methods such as CCTV footage and through mobile phone records.