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**Weapons, violence and the perpetrator-
victim nexus in South Africa**

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Abstract

Given the high levels of crime and violence in South Africa, there may be a temptation for citizens to arm themselves for protection. Using quantitative survey data from the Cape Area Panel Study and qualitative interviews with residents of high-violence neighborhoods, this paper examines the question of who carries weapons outside the home in Cape Town and what the effects of weapon carrying may be. Multiple regression analysis is used to test the significance of possible drivers of weapon carrying and the results are discussed in the South African social context. Weapon carrying is found to be associated with both assault perpetration and victimization, suggesting that it is part of a violent lifestyle in which weapon carriers are likely to use their weapons both offensively and defensively. Possible weapon-related policies for violence reduction are also discussed.

Introduction

Crime and violence have dominated everyday life in South Africa since the end of apartheid and civil war in the 1990s, permeating conversations, filling newspaper headlines, and shaping people's thoughts and actions. In discussions of violence in South African society, as elsewhere, there is a tendency to view victims and perpetrators of violence as hardened, separate categories. Yet victimization and perpetration are frequently intertwined. Likewise, weapon carriers are frequently dichotomized as those who carry weapons for self-defense and those who use them to aggressively attack or threaten others. However, the capacity for violence inherent in a weapon means that a carrier may use it for either purpose, and thus a weapon may be carried by one person for both offensive and defensive purposes, with its use situationally determined. In a violent incident, whether a weapon or only fists are used, the difference between who is the victim and who is the perpetrator may be decided by which actor strikes first or strikes the most damaging blows.

Weapons are tools that help to change the balance of power in violent situations. In contemporary South Africa, this imbalance is frequently used to aid in the extraction of material goods or sexual compliance, or in interpersonal disputes. Weapons are used to obtain what Arendt calls 'the indeed 'unquestioning obedience' that an act of violence can exact' (1970: 41). Thousands of South Africans who generally lead nonviolent lives, though, also carry weapons, hoping that if threatened or attacked, they will be able to use the violent potential of their weapon to shift the situational balance of power in their favor and repulse the threat. Weapon carrying for defense from attack is a behavior shared, though, with another group with high prospects of violent victimization: criminal perpetrators, who are often themselves victims of assaults and robberies. Of course, a person may carry a weapon and never actually use it, but the possession of this means of violence still affects feelings of personal security and hence can change behavior.

An ambiguous picture of the nature of weapons is presented above to highlight the complexity of weapon carrying and the potential of weapons to both bolster and break down personal security. Focusing on the Cape Town area, and paying special attention to the experiences of young people, this paper attempts to elucidate the phenomenon of weapon carrying and how it relates to violence victimization and perpetration, and perceptions of personal security. After reviewing previous findings in international and South African research on weapon carrying and violence, perceptions of weapons in Cape Town are examined using data from qualitative interviews. Next, correlates of weapon carrying among young people are analyzed using survey data from completed

waves of the Cape Area Panel Study, henceforth CAPS (Lam et al. 2010). The statistical findings are discussed in comparison with the interview data and the question of the interrelation of violence victimization and perpetration. Finally, possible policy implications with regard to weapons and violence reduction more generally and avenues for further research are addressed.

Legal and scholarly definitions of weapons vary, but Brennan and Moore (2009: 216) provide a good general description of a weapon as ‘a tool that is designed or adapted to cause physical harm.’ For the purposes of this paper, weapon carrying refers to carrying a weapon outside the home, excluding use in sport or as an occupational requirement (i.e. gun carrying by police and security guards). Victimization and perpetration refer to experiences of suffering or carrying out threats or acts of physical violence.

Weapon carrying in the literature

Weapon carrying is usually addressed in the literature on violence as one of a number of interrelated ‘risk factors’ contributing to delinquency and suffering and perpetrating violence, alongside factors such as family dysfunction, low educational attainment, substance abuse, and peer delinquency. The majority of research on weapon carrying comes from the United States and focuses on young people, especially in urban areas. To give a few examples, in a study of youths living in ‘low-income, moderate to extremely high crime areas,’ Bell and Jenkins (1993) found weapon carrying to be the strongest predictor of witnessing violence, victimization, and perpetration. Histories of both perpetration and victimization were found to be significant predictors of gun and knife carrying among youth in Washington D.C., leading Webster et al. (1993: 1607) to conclude that for knife carriers having been victims of knife threatening was more ‘indicative of respondents’ propensity to get into fights with others who carry knives than of random victimization,’ and that gun carrying, significantly associated with both starting fights and prior victimization, ‘could more realistically be explained as a part of an extremely aggressive, rather than defensive, system of thought and behavior.’ DuRant et al. (1995) found weapon carrying among adolescents of lower socioeconomic status to be significantly associated with attacking others and being injured in physical fights.

There has also been an increasing focus on violence in schools in the U.S. since the mid-1990s. For example, Simon et al. (1999) found little difference in the predictors of weapon carrying on or off school grounds, with substance use, fighting, and exposure to school crime and violence significant for both settings. Kingery et al. (1999) similarly found in-school weapon carrying to be associated

with violence perpetration and victimization and involvement in gangs, drugs, and property crime.¹ In an attempt to determine the causal order of fear of victimization, victimization, and weapon carrying, Wilcox et al. (2006) concluded that prior victimization had a significant but modest effect on future weapon carrying, but that weapon carrying subsequently increased fear, risk perception and victimization. All of the above-mentioned studies of both in-school and general weapon carrying found male gender to be a significant predictor of weapon carrying.

Most U.S. studies have examined the predictors and effects of gun carrying as part of the debate on gun control measures and the efficacy of concealed weapon carrying for self-defense. While some scholars have argued that concealed gun carrying is beneficial to society in that it can help reduce violent crime victimization rates (e.g. Kleck 1988; Kleck and Gertz 1995; Lott 1998), there is much evidence to suggest that increased gun carrying in fact contributes to greater insecurity in society (e.g. McDowall et al. 1991; Cook et al. 1998; Kellermann et al. 1998), with Hemenway and Miller's (2004: 398) study of California youth finding that 'Even taking the self-reports as accurate and unbiased, most of the self-defense gun uses reported by these California adolescents seem to be little more than escalating arguments or armed conflicts among rivals.' Wilcox (2002), looking at all types of weapon carrying, finds that weapon carrying *increases* individual likelihood of victimization, which is of much greater concern to weapon carriers than any effects on aggregate crime levels. Overall, guns may not increase the total number of violent events, but they do greatly increase the lethality of such incidents (see Cook 1981; Roth 1994).

South Africa, though, despite its high levels of violent crime, has seen little research specifically examining weapons, who carries them, and their effects on personal and community security. Much of the existing research has been in youth studies conducted by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention. Leoschut (2009), analyzing a national survey, found the Western Cape to have the highest prevalence of self-reported weapon carrying in a sample of 12 to 22 year olds, at 9.3%, with weapon carrying nationally significantly associated with male gender, coloured and Indian/Asian identity,² increasing age, and witnessing or being a victim of violence. Leoschut, Burton and Bonora (2009), comparing samples of youth criminal offenders and non-offenders ages 12 to 25, found

¹ See Kingery et al. (1999: 311-315) for a review of further studies of weapon carrying in schools.

² Apartheid-era racial categories continue to have social and political currency in South Africa (see Seekings 2008). In this paper, 'African' refers to black South Africans, while 'coloured' refers to South Africans of mixed racial heritage.

unsurprisingly that youth offenders were much more likely to know where to access firearms in the communities and to have carried or known people who carried weapons, but a large group of non-offenders stated that it was important to have a firearm in their neighborhoods, with the highest percentage (51.2%) in the Western Cape; protection for themselves and their families were the most frequently cited reasons for this perceived importance of gun possession.

The South African Medical Research Council has also included questions on weapon carrying in its surveys on the behavior of secondary school students. The 2002 National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey found weapon carrying, defined as having ‘carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, “panga” or “kierrie” [South African terms for long knives or clubs, respectively] on one or more days in the past month,’ to be most prevalent in the Western Cape, where 38.2% of males and 7.7% of females answering affirmatively (Reddy et al. 2003). The 2008 version of the survey had similar results, with the Western Cape once again having the highest prevalence of weapon carrying, with 35.2% of males and 9.1% of females reportedly having done so (Reddy et al. 2010). In analysis of the national data in both surveys, male gender and coloured racial identity were found to be significant predictors of weapon carrying.

Liang et al. (2007), in a study of bullying in schools in Cape Town and Durban found that children classified as ‘bully-victims,’ those who were both perpetrators and victims, were the most likely to carry weapons. Leggett (2005), reporting the results of school surveys and interviews with gang members in the high-crime suburb of Manenberg in Cape Town, found weapon carrying to be more prevalent among males than females, with 17% of males in the school survey reporting having carried a gun compared to only 1.6% of girls; guns were also found to be a fetishized component of gang life. Hennop, Potgieter and Jefferson (2001), examining police dockets in firearms related cases in Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria also found that the vast majority of firearms offenders were male. Several recent studies have also looked at the issue of gun possession in South Africa, with Cock (2001) undertaking a gendered analysis, and Altbeker (2004), Keegan (2005), and Lamb (2008) examining gun availability, government policy, and their effects on levels of crime and violence.

Beyond the above studies, little if any published work has been done specifically focusing on the issue of who carries weapons in South Africa. This paper attempts to fill that gap by providing both qualitative evidence on perceptions of who carries weapons and why, and quantitative analysis of survey data.

Capetonians' views on weapon carrying and use

In order to assess weapon carrying and its impact in Cape Town, it is necessary to understand how weapon carrying is viewed, especially in high crime areas where we might expect higher rates of defensive weapon carrying. As part of a study of violence more generally in Cape Town, 45 interviews were carried out in 2008 with Africans living in the Cape Flats communities of Khayelitsha and Delft with a subsample of 26 participants in the 2005 Cape Area Study and a further convenience sample. Interviewees ranged in age from 21 to 54. Interviews from this series are denoted by a number preceded by 'V'. A second set of five pilot interviews was conducted in May 2010 on safety and security in Cape Town, with a number of specific questions on weapons. A convenience sample was selected from among those CAPS respondents who said they had carried a weapon in the past three years. Due to fieldworker familiarity issues and safety concerns, only those respondents who said they had not assaulted a stranger in the past three years were contacted and interviews were only conducted among African respondents. Interviews from this series are denoted by a number preceded by 'S'. In both sets of interviews, only Africans were interviewed, and the samples were by no means scientific, but the experiences related and views expressed still provide useful insights into how some of the most vulnerable Capetonians understand and respond to violence in their communities.

Three main themes are discernible in the interviewees' discussion of weapons: weapons are used primarily by criminals; gun possession and use has been increasing since the transition to democracy in 1994; and some people do carry weapons for protection or in response to victimization, but they are in the minority.

As in most societies, there is a sense that weapon use is legitimately the province of state security forces, that 'the only people who are supposed to have a gun is those people who are fighting crime, like police, soldiers' (V44, male, age unreported). Beyond security forces, though, it is mainly violent criminals, almost universally seen to be young males (see Seekings and Thaler 2011), carrying weapons, with one informant describing violence as happening because 'these boys carry guns and that makes it very difficult to deal with them' (V20, male, 42). Young males who have weapons are believed to carry them with criminal intent:

‘Q: Do you think that they use these guns for protection or to use when they are violent?’

A: They use guns in violent situations, especially when they mug you of your possessions. When they break into houses there is usually no one at home but when they mug you they hold you up with a gun, this mostly happens to males, and with us as females they usually harass us without even taking the gun out. But there are some who use weapons at women as well, specifically knives’ (V32, female, 34).

Accounts of muggings and robberies frequently featured threats or attacks with knives and/or guns:

‘We were near the fence and when I went past the first one, another one jumped in front of me and took out a gun and told me ‘old brother don’t waste our time! We want your phone and money!’ So, I even thought of fighting them off thinking they had a toy gun and they don’t have strength. Whilst I was thinking of fighting the other two came behind my back with two knives and that’s when I knew I had no chance’ (V26, male, age unreported).

Among violent criminals using weapons in their work, the presence of guns has apparently been increasing. ‘Q: Is violence increasing as times progress? A: Yes. Back then we used to get robbed with knives but now they’ve progressed to guns’ (V20, male, 42). When asked if there was less violence under apartheid, one interviewee responded, ‘I would say so. Well I wasn’t that active or never saw it. I mean yes, they were beating up our grandfathers but you see today there is more violence because these young boys have access to guns. Guns are very central to today’s violence. I mean we never had guns during our times. Because now guns are free for anyone who wants one’ (V7, male, age unreported). This mirrors the findings of Kynoch (2003: 10) in Johannesburg, whose respondents told him that ‘prior to the 1990s most criminals only carried knives, whereas nowadays the townships are awash with firearms and shootings are a daily occurrence.’

This shift in technology has increased fear among township residents. Discussing what kind of violence she feared most, one interviewee said, ‘It’s a gun, because you can’t fight with a gun wielding person, but at least you can fight with someone who points a knife at you’ (V17, female, 43). Asked if certain types of violence are more difficult to stop than others, another said, ‘At times people carrying guns cannot be stopped, if you hear a gunshot in the streets you never even think of going out to check...you just peek through the window, because you can see that the person is armed and you’re not’ (V1, male, 38).

This perceived proliferation of guns and their value both for potential resale and as a tool for criminals makes them a sought-after commodity in robberies. The purpose of robberies is ‘to get phones and guns,’ according to one interviewee (V40, male, 39). In a robbery witnessed in a supermarket in Khayelitsha, ‘there was a group of armed people who came in there and take the money and the guns of the people who are working there’ (V4, male, 30). A pregnant tavern owner also found herself in the middle of a gun-seeking robbery: ‘Another guy got up and pulled out a gun and demanded money and my gun. I was dumbfounded and froze. I told them I don’t have a gun. The others closed the doors and started searching my customers as well. They demanded a gun even though I told them I don’t have one’ (V17, female, 42). It was suggested that it is better not to have a gun, because possessing a gun places one at higher risk of being robbed:

‘You can’t say if you have a gun you are protecting, no...It’s not like that. The only way to be safer is having nothing, nothing. You must be clean and then it’s safer. Sometimes you find that if maybe a guy owns a gun, and then there are those big guys from around and they know that I own a gun. Maybe I’m cooking here at night, watching TV and they will come and say, “Give us your gun, it’s for us it’s not for you,” whereas I bought it for myself, you see. And they will want it and then...maybe four guys and each have a gun – but they want that gun, there’s no other way, just give them’ (S4, male, 21).

These robberies feed a large market for unlicensed firearms. It is much cheaper to purchase an unlicensed firearm than a licensed one. One informant suggested that most armed robbers get handguns from ‘corrupt officials...like police, they are getting it from R200’ (S3, male, 26).³ Young people may not even be aware of the price of legal guns, since they are only exposed to the illegal market. Asked how much a gun would cost, a young interviewee responded, ‘R300, R400, R200...but at the shop I don’t even know the price’ (S4, male, 21). Unlicensed guns are also preferable to licensed ones due to their perceived untraceability: ‘if you shoot someone with a licensed gun – if you are wrong they going to take your license and your gun. They better do what...they better have unlicensed guns, and they going to shoot you and there will be no evidence and the case will be closed’ (S3, male, 26).

³ Police weapons being stolen or sold by corrupt officers was an issue highlighted in multiple interviews. Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa said that between March 2008 and March 2010, South African police nationally reported 5,362 guns lost or stolen; over 90% of those firearms have not been recovered (Agence France-Presse, 3 June 2010).

The population targeted by these gun-seeking robberies is the small, but significant group of people who carry weapons for self-defense.⁴ Asked how hijacking victims can protect themselves, an interviewee said ‘some carry knives and are ready to fight’ (V42, female, 36). Weapon carrying for self-defense is also seen as a response to police ineffectiveness: ‘...some protect themselves in their homes, others carry guns and weapons because police are not always around’ (V14, female, age unreported). Summing up possible means of protecting oneself from crime and violence, an interviewee stated that, ‘some people buy guns, some have burglar bars in their houses, some also just walk around with no valuables in their possession’ (V15, female, 24). Overall, though, behavioural modifications, such as staying indoors and avoiding alcohol, and target hardening measures like putting burglar bars or extra locks on one’s home are more common than weapon carrying.

Weapon carrying is also seen to put the carrier at risk. One interviewee, despite having reported carrying a weapon in the past, said he does not generally carry one; when asked why not, he answered, ‘I’m scared of the police, when they catch you with the knife...they beat you. So that’s why I’m not carrying anything’ (S5, male, 26). Another self-reported weapon carrier said:

‘I can’t say I’m protecting myself if I go around with a knife...it’s not protecting myself, you see. The only way I can protect me is having nothing on me so I can run away. If I have a knife, no, I’m not protecting myself. I’m making it worse...Maybe, if you start with me, or want to hit me – then I’m gonna stab you – you see. But if that knife wasn’t by me, then it would be fine...easier for you to get away’ (S4, male, 21).

From these interviews, we are left with a view of weapon carriers as primarily young, male violent criminals. They frequently use guns and knives in the assaults and robberies they commit, with gun use having increased since the end of apartheid. A much smaller group of weapon carriers exists who possess weapons solely for self-defense, but this may in fact make them more vulnerable to victimization, arrest, or perpetration of violence. Using survey data from CAPS, we can quantitatively analyze the factors significantly associated with weapon carrying to test perceptions and suspicions more systematically.

⁴ In the Institute for Security Studies’ 2003 Victims of Crime Survey, only 3% of respondents said they carried a weapon ‘to protect themselves or their households from crime or violence’ (Burton et al. 2004: 67).

Weapon carrying in Cape Town in quantitative analysis

CAPS is an ongoing longitudinal study of young people and their households in the Cape Town area, examining social, political, economic and health issues. The survey was initiated in 2002 with a representative sample of youths ages 13 to 22. This panel has been re-surveyed four times since, though due to attrition, the sample is no longer representative (Lam et al. 2010). However, CAPS remains the best source of data available on the lives of young people in Cape Town or anywhere in South Africa. Wave 5 of CAPS was administered in 2009 when respondents were ages 20 to 29. This present study examines 2,823 respondents who answered the question in Wave 5 on weapon carrying (see below). The sample consisted of 1,550 women and 1,273 men. By race, the sample consisted of 1,311 African respondents, 1,424 coloureds, and 153 whites.

Respondents were asked, ‘In the past three years, have you ever carried a concealed knife or gun, outside of your home?’ There are both problems with and benefits from this phrasing of the question. The range of weapons considered is more narrow than in other comparable studies, not including clubs (Leoschut 2009) or traditional African pangas and knobkerries (Reddy et al. 2003, 2010). No condition was specified as to the purpose of the weapon carrying, which is preferable to studies that ask solely about weapons carried ‘for protection’ (e.g. Burton et al. 2009). Also, given the urban nature of our sample, weapon carrying for hunting or sport is highly unlikely, and these and occupational uses of knives or other potential weapons, like box cutters, should be excluded by the specification that the weapon have been concealed. The time window for weapon carrying is long, and there was no measure of frequency of weapon carrying within the three year period, which one might expect to lead to higher reported percentages of weapon carriers than studies with shorter time windows. However, the overall and gender-specific weapon carrying rates reported in CAPS are similar to those found by Leoschut (2009) for a 12 month time window, and much lower than those found by Reddy et al. (2003, 2010), who used a 30 day time window. Finally, this is self-report data,⁵ so respondents might have answered untruthfully to avoid revealing weapon carrying, especially if they had carried an illegal weapon. This effect should to some extent have been mitigated by the fact that this section of the survey was filled out by the respondents themselves, so responses would not have been disclosed

⁵ See Thornberry and Krohn (2000) on the issue of the reliability and validity of self-report data on crime and delinquency.

to field workers unless a respondent was illiterate and unable to complete the survey form him or herself.

In total, 8.7% of respondents reported having carried weapons, with 16% of males and 3% of females saying they had carried weapons. This gender differential supports the findings of Leoschut (2009: 54) and the two National Youth Risk Behaviour Surveys (Reddy et al. 2003: 84, 2010: 46-47) in South Africa, as well as those in the international literature. In a survey of 16-19 year old students in Manenberg, almost twice as many boys as girls reported having held a loaded gun, and while 17% of boys reported having carried a gun 'to protect themselves in the past,' only 1.6% of girls had done likewise (Leggett 2005: 18).

The higher rate of weapon carrying among males is likely related to the masculine social context in which a capacity for violence is a way of improving one's status and asserting one's masculinity. As one young Sowetan informant told Cock (2001: 47), '...for you to prove your manhood these days, you've got to own a gun.'⁶ The gendering of weapon carrying, and especially guns, does not mean, though, that women are significantly less exposed to weapons. Female members or affiliates of gangs are frequently called upon by male members to hide guns, and may join in fights using other weapons (e.g. Kynoch 2005: 54). A young female gang member told Leggett, 'Yes, we only carry knives, maybe we'll have brick gang fights and backpack gang fights and knife gang fights, but we never went to the limit of guns. Because a girl is not supposed to wear a gun...' (2005: 30). As international studies suggest, girls may be more likely to carry primarily defensive weapons 'such as pepper spray or knives, while boys might be more likely to carry firearms' (Simon et al. 1999: 346; see also Erickson et al. 2006).

There are many theories as to what constitute the risk factors for a young person to become involved in violent activities. Drawing together these theories, there emerge basic broad categories of risk factors (see Table 1 on the next page).

With the exception of biological factors, these hypothesized risk factors can be tested for their influence on weapon carrying using the data available from the CAPS surveys.

Table 1. Risk factors for youth violence

⁶ For some men this sentiment may be a product of a 'crisis of masculinity' caused by structural inequalities and a resultant inability to succeed through 'mainstream' means, turning them instead toward violence (see Campbell 1992).

Category	Factors
Biological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth complications • Low resting heart rate
Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impulsiveness • Daring • Low intelligence • Aggressiveness
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low parental involvement • Harsh parental treatment • Low levels of family cohesion • Violent or otherwise delinquent kin
Socioeconomic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Low educational attainment • Income inequality • Poor prospects for employment and advancement
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of crime in neighbourhood • Exposure to violent adults in neighbourhood • Community disorganization • Drug and weapon availability in neighbourhood
Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drug and alcohol abuse • Early sexual activity and promiscuity
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norms supporting violence • Low religious socialization • Violence begetting violence
Adapted from Hawkins et al. (2000) and Mercy et al. (2002: 32-38).	

As the majority of weapon carriers in the sample were male, and the overwhelming perception in Cape Town is that the majority of weapon carrying and violence perpetration are carried out by males, the statistical analysis in this study focuses on the 1,273 young men in our sample. Using Stata 11, variables corresponding to the risk factors in Table 1 were tested using multivariate logistic regression for significance of influence on weapon carrying. Variables were progressively incorporated into models in four categories: socioeconomic; family and neighbourhood environment; lifestyle and personality; and personal violence exposure. Examining weapon carrying by racial population group, 10% of African respondents, 8% of coloureds, and 4% of whites reported weapon carrying. Models controlled for race, as in a multivariate regression examining racial categories, African (OR 2.52, $p < 0.05$, 95%CI 1.09-5.83) and coloured (OR 2.04, $p < 0.10$, 95%CI 0.88-4.72) respondents were more likely than white respondents to report weapon carrying, though no more likely than each other to

have done so. This finding diverges from those of Leoschut (2009) and Reddy et al. (2003, 2010) who found coloured identity to be a significant predictor of weapon carrying. However, many young weapon carriers are involved in gangs, which are more prevalent in coloured areas. These highly delinquent individuals would be unlikely to respond to a survey such as CAPS, but they might have been captured at higher levels in the earlier studies which were conducted using school-based samples. The model building process is shown in Table 2 on the next page.

Table 2. Multivariate logistic models of weapon carrying by young men, controlling for race

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	OR	95% CI						
Feel Poor	0.87	0.54-1.38	0.79	0.49-1.29	0.74	0.45-1.23	0.78	0.45-1.36
Bad Opportunities	1.01	0.68-1.49	0.98	0.65-1.47	0.95	0.62-1.47	0.91	0.57-1.44
Unemployed	1.49**	1.04-2.13	1.34	0.92-1.95	1.13	0.76-1.69	1.25	0.81-1.93
Food Insecurity	1.81**	1.15-2.85	1.73**	1.09-2.75	1.51*	0.94-2.43	1.21	0.72-2.04
Did Not Matriculate	1.21	0.75-1.97	1.18	0.71-1.96	1.09	0.63-1.87	1.21	0.68-2.16
Parental Absence			1.41*	0.97-2.04	1.21	0.82-1.78	1.09	0.72-1.65
Delinquent Kin			1.99***	1.38-2.88	1.82***	1.20-2.75	1.78**	1.14-2.79
Family Fights Violently			1.56	0.90-2.70	1.27	0.70-2.32	0.79	0.39-1.58
Neighborhood Social Disorganization			3.27***	1.95-5.48	2.81***	1.64-4.82	1.96**	1.12-3.44
Neighborhood Unsafe During Day			0.86	0.53-1.40	0.79	0.48-1.32	0.75	0.43-1.30
Neighborhood Unsafe at Night			0.60***	0.41-0.86	0.57***	0.38-0.84	0.58**	0.38-0.89
Use Drugs					1.63**	1.00-2.65	1.81**	1.07-3.08
Binge Drink					1.52**	1.05-2.21	1.40	0.94-2.10
Concurrent Partners					2.46***	1.68-3.60	1.73***	1.15-2.61
Temper and/or Impulsivity Problems					1.98***	1.37-2.86	1.60**	1.08-2.38
Irreligious					1.58*	0.99-2.51	1.44	0.87-2.37
Beaten as Child							1.14	0.57-2.25
Assault Victim							1.22	0.69-2.16
Assaulted Relative or Partner							1.75**	1.06-2.87
Assaulted Friend or Neighbor							2.42***	1.50-3.90
Assaulted Stranger							3.34***	2.06-5.40
N	1147		1147		1078		1076	
Pseudo R-squared	0.02		0.10		0.16		0.24	
Significance: * p<0.10; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01								

The full model, Model 4, was then refined by removing insignificant variables, resulting in the final model (see Table 3 below). Dropping the insignificant variables from the full model had a very small effect on the explanatory power of the model, only reducing McFadden's pseudo R-squared value from 0.24 to 0.23.

Table 3. Final Model of weapon carrying by young males, controlling for race

Independent Variable	OR	95% CI
Delinquent Kin	1.66**	1.11-2.48
Neighborhood Social Disorganization	2.49***	1.47-4.20
Neighborhood Unsafe at Night	0.57***	0.39-0.83
Use Drugs	2.36***	1.49-3.75
Concurrent Partners	1.86***	1.27-2.70
Temper and/or Impulsivity Problems	1.71***	1.19-2.48
Assaulted Relative or Partner	1.72**	1.08-2.75
Assaulted Friend or Neighbor	2.34***	1.49-3.65
Assaulted Stranger	3.21***	2.06-5.00
N	1199	
Pseudo R-squared	0.23	
Significance: * p<0.10; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01		

Socioeconomic Factors: Measures of perceived or actual low socioeconomic status were not significantly related to weapon carrying in the final model. Low educational attainment also did not have a significant effect on weapon carrying. While crime and violence are often viewed as products of poverty and unemployment (see also Seekings and Thaler 2011), this is not borne out by the statistics from the CAPS sample.

Lifestyle: Using illegal drugs and having engaged in concurrent sexual partnerships, measurements of deviant lifestyle choices, were both significantly associated with weapon carrying. The association of these variables with weapon carrying suggests that weapons are a part of what Katz (1988) calls the 'life of deviant action,' characterized by hedonism in the form of sexual promiscuity and substance abuse, as well as profligate spending and perpetration of crime and violence. Cock (2001: 47) found gun possession to be a key component of the deviant and consumeristic lifestyles of young men in Johannesburg, with one informant telling her, 'If you have a BMW, a cell phone and a glamorous woman, you've got a lot; if you've got a gun as well, you've got everything.' Drug use among criminals in Cape Town has also been found to be linked to higher rates of violent offending, with more arrestees in Cape Town charged with violent offenses than those in Durban and Johannesburg, and 46.8% of these violent arrestees testing positive for at least one drug (Parry, Plüdemann, and Leggett 2004).

Personality: Personality and psychological background may predispose some people to violence and to seek a life of action. Reporting having a short temper or being impulsive significantly increased the likelihood of weapon carrying. Impulsiveness may be linked to ‘deficiencies in the executive functions of the brain, located in the frontal lobes,’ hindering ‘effective self-monitoring and self-awareness of behaviour, and inhibitions regarding inappropriate or impulsive behaviours’ (Mercy et al. 2002: 33). This may lead to greater engagement in violent activities, including weapon carrying.

Social environment: Weapon carrying is also shaped by the family and neighborhood contexts in which young people live. Living in a socially disorganized neighborhood or having family members who use drugs or commit crimes, increasing the likelihood of deviant behaviors being accepted or normalized, made respondents significantly more likely to report carrying weapons. One would think that living in a neighborhood with drug users and criminals would be a cause of fear and feelings of insecurity. Weapon carriers, however, were significantly more likely to report feeling safe walking around their neighborhoods after dark. This is one of the few variables for which the causal direction of the relationship with weapon carrying seems clear: those who carry weapons should consequently feel safer walking in their neighborhoods after dark, as carrying a weapon bolsters one’s sense of personal security, making nighttime, when ‘even the gang members who are thought to be the main culprits of violence’ recommend not going out (Standing 2006: 27), seem less menacing. This lack of fear is also affected by gender and age, as young men ‘express more confidence in their after-dark safety,’ despite being the most frequent victims of violence (Skogan and Maxfield 1981: 64-65).

Violence: Finally, perpetration of assaultive violence was significantly associated with weapon carrying. Having assaulted a stranger in the past three years had the largest effect of any variable on the likelihood of weapon carrying. This was expected, as weapons are tools of the trade for those who frequently engage in violence. Having assaulted a family member had a significant, but smaller effect, though if we were to include weapon carrying or use in the home, this association would likely be stronger. Being a victim of assaultive violence did not have a significant effect on weapon carrying in the final model. However, when the sample of assault perpetrators was divided into groups of ‘only perpetrators’ and ‘perpetrator-victims,’ perpetrator-victims were significantly more likely to have carried weapons than those who were only victims or had not been assaulted (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Final model of weapon carrying by young males, controlling for race and distinguishing assault perpetrator-victim type

Independent Variable	OR	95% CI
Delinquent Kin	1.78***	1.19-2.68
Neighborhood Social Disorganization	2.43***	1.44-4.10
Neighborhood Unsafe at Night	0.59***	0.40-0.86
Use Drugs	2.31***	1.45-3.67
Concurrent Partners	1.86***	1.28-2.71
Temper and/or Impulsivity Problems	1.67***	1.16-2.41
Perpetrator Only	5.57***	3.78-8.22
Perpetrator-Victim	6.95***	3.89-12.42
N	1201	
Pseudo R-squared	0.24	
Significance: * p<0.10; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01		

Victimization and perpetration

The associations of both assault perpetration and assault victimization with weapon carrying beg the question of whether being a victim of violence makes one more likely to commit violence or vice versa. The temporal order cannot be inferred from the survey data, but it does appear that there is a significant nexus of perpetration and victimization, with many people experiencing both sides of violence. Among male CAPS respondents, a bivariate regression shows assault perpetrators were almost six times more likely than non-violent respondents to have been victims of assault (p<0.001).

Studies in the U.S. (Jensen and Brownfield 1986; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Lauritsen, Sampson and Laub 1991; Shaffer and Ruback 2002; Plass and Carmody 2005), United Kingdom (Sampson and Lauritsen 1990), Iceland (Bjarnason, Sigurdardottir, and Thorlindsson 1999) and Colombia (Klevens, Duque and Ramirez 2002) have found that those engaging in criminal and deviant activity are more likely than the ‘average person’ to have been victims of crime, and vice versa (Nofziger and Kurtz 2005). This may result from their association with other criminal types, involvement in gang activities, living in or frequenting violent locations, and the fact that offenders make attractive targets for criminal victimization because they will be less likely than ‘nonoffender-victims’ to call the police, and if they do involve the authorities, their credibility will be called into question (Lauritsen et al. 1991: 268). In South Africa, Keegan (2005: 32) was told by an anti-crime advocate in the Western Cape that ‘small-time drug dealers operating more or less on their own are not protected. So, other gangs can come in and demand protection money, which can be paid in

drugs, or rob him. The criminal-as-victim cannot complain to the police, so he must get a gun to protect himself.’ Given this vulnerability, a weapon becomes for criminals an attractive form of personal protection,⁷ in addition to its utility in victimizing others. This may explain why weapon carrying in CAPS was so strongly associated with both violence perpetration and being a perpetrator-victim. The direction of causation may also be reversed, though, for as one respondent noted, ‘Some victims end up being violent and get guns and they no longer trust anyone’ (V6, female, 43).

Yet what of those ‘everyday people’ who carry weapons for protection? Weapons can improve one’s sense of personal security and in some cases can permit self-defense that foils an attempted attack. Some studies in the United States find that increased gun ownership leads to reductions in crime due to deterrence and increased self-defense ability, but this may not be generalizable internationally (see Kates and Mauser 2007). In South Africa, while weapons are occasionally employed in self-defense, the effect of weapon possession by ‘ordinary citizens’ appears anecdotally to contribute to increasing, rather than decreasing, violence.

Guns are highly valuable commodities for criminals, and so, as mentioned above, they are sought in robberies, making gun possessors targets.⁸ In interviews, respondents argued that it is easy to tell when someone is carrying a gun, even when it is concealed. One interviewee said, ‘You know, when, someone, you know, is carrying a gun, you see, like, the way they act, they feel like they big and things, you know? So, you, like, kind of see it in the walks, you know, the way a guy responds when he talks to you’ (S1, male, 21). This increases the likelihood of attack and robbery, with the same respondent, who had a conviction for armed robbery, saying ‘the people that buy the licensed ones [guns], we take those...we rob them’ (S1, male, 21). Keegan (2005: 82) likewise found in focus groups in Cape Town that ‘Although individuals carry handguns because they can be concealed, it seems that people can be trained to identify when a person is carrying a gun – based on their deportment, their body language and their actions,’ turning them into targets for robbery. Thus legally owned weapons transition to illegality and contribute to future crime. As Cock (2001: 48) notes, ‘the distinction between legal and illegal weapons is a dubious one: guns are long-life commodities and their change of legal status does not

⁷ Sheley and Wright, among a sample of U.S. juvenile offenders, found that protection was more often cited as a very important reason for carrying a gun among those ‘who “always” or “usually” were armed with a gun when committing a crime’ (1993: 385).

⁸ Statistics on lost and stolen guns in South Africa are available, but are unreliable due to victims’ reticence to report incidents in case they might be charged with negligent handling of the firearm, a criminal offense (Chetty 2000: 41).

affect their lethal power. The legal supply of small arms is generally the seedbed of illegal flows.’

Even if one is carrying a weapon, in the event of an attack, it is difficult to deploy it, as criminals will seek to increase their situational advantage by sneaking up on the victim, physically disabling the victim by pinning or tying limbs, or simply outnumbering the victim. A female interviewee said that women cannot fight back against attackers because they are less powerful; when asked if there was a temptation to balance out this power differential by carrying a weapon, she replied, ‘No, you can’t. Because even then, they don’t come to you with one person, there are going to be five or six or eight of them. And you can’t fight many people when you are only one person’ (S2, female, 24). Another interviewee discussed this problem in the context of a housebreaking: ‘You can have a gun and all that but if someone comes into your house and they already have their gun drawn out, and your gun is hidden in your safe, there’s nothing you can do’ (V17, female, 42). In a previous study of over 500 police case files in which guns were used, Altbeker (1999) found that in over three-quarters of the incidents in which the victim was carrying a gun, the victim was disarmed by the attacker, while in only 2% of these cases was victim able to use the gun for self-defense; drawing a gun in self-defense increased the likelihood of the attacker’s weapon being fired by a factor of between three and four.

Carrying a weapon may also lead to greater risk-taking and more aggressive and confrontational behavior. Keegan (2005: 96) was told that a person’s comportment changed when he got a gun: ‘He also can become more aggressive, less ready to cooperate or compromise and far more ready to take risks: “Having a gun, you feel like no one can do anything to you.”’ There is also the risk that when carrying a weapon one will overreact violently to perceived threats or attacks from others who are, in fact, unarmed. The one instance discussed in the course of interviews of a criminal being shot by someone with a licensed firearm did not occur during the commission of the crime, but afterwards, as a measure of revenge for the robbery that had taken place: ‘They [my boyfriend and his brother] looked for them and identified one of them by my jacket, he was wearing it. His brother has a gun and he has the licence, he shot the one who was wearing my jacket in the leg and his friends ran off’ (V13, female, 26).

An additional worry for those who would carry a weapon for protection is its potential to escalate situations—a heated argument can turn deadly if one side pulls out a gun or knife, whereas it might otherwise lead only to bruises. A final concern is the potential, mainly with guns, for accidents to occur. Combining these two issues of escalation of disputes and accidents, one study in the United

States found that ‘For every time a gun in the home was used in a self-defense or legally justifiable shooting, there were four unintentional shootings, seven criminal assaults or homicides, and 11 attempted or completed suicides’ (Kellermann et al. 1998: 263).

Conclusion

In Cape Town, weapon carrying appears to be engaged in primarily by males involved in perpetration of violence and other deviant activities, such as drug use. Having committed assault is the strongest predictor of weapon carrying among young men. Carrying a weapon makes one feel safer, especially after dark, but it also increases the risk of becoming a victim of violence, with gun carriers targeted for robbery. For non-criminal weapon carriers, it is unclear that the protective benefits of weapon carrying outweigh the potential personal and societal costs.

The findings from CAPS must be treated with caution, as previously mentioned, due to the sample in Wave 5 no longer being representative. The sample also does not include the most seriously violent youth, who are currently institutionalized and who are likely ‘not only more delinquent than the ‘average kid’ in the general youth population, but also considerably more delinquent than the *most delinquent* youth identified in the typical self-report survey’ [emphasis original] (Cernkovich et al. 1985: 706). However, a fully representative sample would in all likelihood increase the strength of the relationship between violence perpetration and weapon carrying, as well as other measures of a deviant lifestyle. Additionally, only about one-quarter of the variation in weapon carrying was explained by the final model, meaning other variables not included in CAPS, such as gang involvement, may in fact be more important in determining who carries weapons.

Weapon carrying can be a response to victimization, with weapon carriers significantly more likely to have been victims of assault, but it is more plausibly a component of violent lifestyle in which weapon carriers both perpetrate and suffer violence. This finding lends support to the idea of certain people being involved in ‘lifestyles of violence’ (Nofziger and Kurtz 2005), an offshoot of the routine activity (Cohen and Felson 1979) and lifestyle (Hindelang, Gottfredson and Garofalo 1978) theories of crime,⁹ which suggest that certain people,

⁹ These theories, while slightly different, can be treated as complementary (see e.g. Miethe et al. 1987: 184; Nofziger and Kurtz 2005: 4-6). Vazsonyi et al. (2002) argue that though these theories tend to be based on studies from the United States, they may be validly applied cross-nationally.

especially the young and males, may find themselves at increased risk of violence due to engagement in activities that make them more vulnerable, such as substance use and going out at night, as well as placing them in closer proximity to criminal offenders. As Felson writes, those going out at night, for instance, ‘may be more likely to engage in aggression, deviance, and other behaviors that others find offensive’ and ‘Their provocative behavior may lead them to be the target of violence’ (1997: 209). This combination of aggression, deviance, and risk of victimization may encourage weapon carrying. Meanwhile, the minority of weapon carriers who do so for purely defensive purposes may on occasion foil an attack, but they are just as likely, if not more so, to become a victim of violence or to injure themselves or others.

In future research on the relationship of weapon carrying with victimization and perpetration, it would be helpful to ask weapon carriers about the time sequences of their behaviors and experiences, for instance if they began carrying a weapon after victimization, or if they had perpetrated a violent crime before being a victim, or vice versa. This can lead to a clearer understanding of the relationship between weapon carrying and violence. Further qualitative research in coloured and white communities in Cape Town would also be useful to examine similarities and differences between their perceptions of weapon carrying and those of the African interview subjects in this study.

The use of metal detectors, now deployed in over 100 ‘high-risk’ schools in the Western Cape (*Cape Argus*, 14 September 2009: 1), and measures such as the South African Police Service’s gun amnesties, which help remove weapons from public spaces and from general circulation,¹⁰ may help improve safety and reduce the lethality of that violence which does occur. Given that the majority of those carrying weapons outside their homes appear to be involved in the perpetration of violence, further screening for weapons in public spaces seems warranted. Additionally, it is important to restrict the availability of guns on the illegal market, for, as one interviewee said, ‘I’d say once a firearm is involved – then it’s hard to stop such crimes. They can get arrested today and that person will return tomorrow and buy a new gun and start shooting the people who reported him. I think to stop this [armed robbery] one has to find the person selling the gun’ (V18, male, 29). In addition to restriction of the supply side, though, it is important to reduce demand for weapons. Further education about the dangers of weapon carrying is needed and could help to change norms,

¹⁰ One informant specifically mentioned gun amnesties as beneficial. When asked if there were many firearms in his community, he said, ‘Lots, lots. But it’s better for the past few years...it’s better. Because the government has introduced these things for...if you don’t want your firearm you can take it [to the police]...I think it has helped a lot that thing’ (S4, male, 21).

especially in poorer areas where ‘everybody who wants to be respected needs to own a gun first’ (S1, male, 21). Through this two-pronged approach, it may be possible to reduce the burden of serious injuries due to weapons and combat the perceived normalcy of violence in South African society.

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