Using the UK General Offender Database as a Means to Measure and Analyse Organised Crime

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Organised crime

- A global problem affecting the stability, security and general well-being of many nations;

- Whilst volume crime has reduced across the developed world during the twenty-first century, this trend is not observed in organised crime (Brocklesby, 2012);

- To understand patterns of offending – measurement is crucial (Sullivan and McGloin, 2014, p. 446);

- Measuring organised crime is particularly troublesome – a contested concept, notoriously resistant to definition and measurement (Levi, 2012).

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Problems in measuring organised crime

- Data are difficult to find. Predominantly sourced from "offender centred" studies:
  - Observations, interviews and the retrieval of stored information (von Lampe, 2012, p. 181), emanating from proactive police investigations (van Koppen et al., 2010);

- Can only harvest those offenders for whom a successful investigation/prosecution is possible;

- Less visible forms of organised crime (as well as more sophisticated offenders) evade analysis;

- Lack of standardisation in data collection prevents comparative analysis (von Lampe, 2012, p. 186);

- The associated research methodology has become diverse and diluted, criticised by commentators from the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, UK, Belgium and Europol (Tusikov, 2012, p. 102)

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Using the general offender database to measure organised crime

- We take an offence based approach – we use the PNC
  - o Various systems, including offender sanctions for offences commissioned in Scotland, England and Wales.

- Our simple rationale – any nation maintaining a national database capturing all offender criminal convictions can use this methodology;
- Initial sample: data for all offenders who had registered a sanction between 2007 and 2010 – 20,752,827 individual sanctions for offences relating to 2,170,206 offenders;
- Will contain a significant subset of organised crime offenders emanating from a range of prosecuting agencies
  - o Increased accessibility to data at reduced costs

- How can we differentiate these offenders based on a clear conceptual understanding?
- We apply three filters based on type of crime, seriousness and co-offending

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Defining organised crime

- "One of the most contested terms in academic criminology" (Sheptycki, 2003, p. 490);
- von Lampe (2015) identified approx. 180 organised crime definitions:

  - An OCG is a "structured group of <u>three or more</u> persons existing for <u>a period of time</u> and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit" - The United Nations
  - OC is "serious crime, planned, coordinated and conducted by <u>people working together</u> on <u>a continuing basis</u>. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain" (Home Office, 2013, p. 14)

- Such offenders can be differentiated from general offenders, due to the <u>level of serious and systematic behaviour</u> that creates disproportionate harm (von Lampe, 2015);
- Hence the three filters: type of crime; seriousness; co-offending.

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Crime Type

- Decisions made across each of the Home Office list of notifiable offences (over 2,500 separate offence codes);

- Decided whether each was "likely" or "possibly" related to OC:
  - e.g. 'trafficking for sexual exploitation' (Home Office code 72.01) considered as a likely offence – a large proportion of convictions would be related to OC
  - 'Supplying or offering to supply cannabis' (Home Office code 92.41) considered as a possible offence – dependent on the level of seriousness and whether they involved co-offending

- Kirby – extensive law enforcement experience within serious organised crime;
- External and independent scrutiny group (incorporating practitioners, policy makers and researchers) generated by the UK Home Office to assist in quality assurance;
- 46 offence codes were categorised as "likely";
- 139 offence codes were categorised as "possibly" an organised crime.

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Seriousness

- Literature review identified that a period of imprisonment, fluctuating between three and five years, had previously been used to identify "seriousness";

- We use three years, maintaining consistency with English legislation and policy;

- Those crimes committed "[...].for substantial profit or gain, for which a person aged 21 or over on first conviction could expect to be imprisoned for three or more years" (NCIS, 2005, p. 1.1)

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Structure of OCGs – co-offending

- Commonly seen to be loosely affiliated networks of criminals who coalesce around certain criminal opportunities;

- Studies over the previous ten years have increasingly shown organised crime is built on flexible and non-hierarchical social networks that form collectives (Duijin et al., 2014, p. 1);

- Hence a variety of individuals engage in organised crime, facilitated through a variety of structures;

- Almost all of von Lampe's (2015) collection of 180 definitions all allude to <u>co-offending</u>, with the majority referring to groups, gangs or associations.

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The sample

- Organised crime offenders between the target period of 2007-2010 who had been:
  - Convicted of a specified offence assessed as a "likely" or "possible" offence
  - Sentenced to a minimum period of three years' imprisonment; and
  - Convicted with at least one co-offender
  - N= 4109 (2% of overall sample)

- Two comparison groups:
  - Serious offenders – custodial sentences of three years or more but not convicted with a co-offender; Offence(s) did not relate to one of the specified organised crime offences; N =4109
  - General crime offenders – received a non-serious criminal sanction for an offence that was not amongst the listed organised crimes; N = 4090

- Complete criminal conviction histories collected on all offenders.

Objectives:

1. To identify the general characteristics, demographics and offending behaviour of the organised crime offenders.

2. To examine the spatial distribution of organised crime offenders.

3. To establish whether it was possible to distinguish the organised crime offenders from the two comparison groups in terms of:
   a. demographic variables and;
   b. criminal career variables.

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Results: Offender demographics and crime type

- OC group received 91,528 sanctions during their careers (mean 22.3; SD 26.5)

- Significant differences in gender distribution ($\chi2$=880.8, 2df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)
  - OC group 95% male
  - Serious offender group 95.7% male
  - General offender group 78.1% male

- Significant differences in distributions of nationality ($\chi2$=112.5, 4df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)
  - OC group 81.8% UK nationals
  - Serious offender group 86.0% UK nationals
  - General offender group 80.8% UK nationals

Results: Offender demographics and crime type

- Significant differences in distributions of ethnicity ($\chi2$=832.7, 12df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)
  - OC group 53.9% White – Northern Europeans
  - Serious offender group 70.7% White – Northern Europeans
  - General offender group 79.6% White – Northern Europeans

- Significant differences in mean ages at inclusion offence (Kruskal Wallis $\chi2$=301.2, 2df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)
  - OC group 31.7 years at inclusion offence
  - Serious offender group 31.5 years at inclusion offence
  - General offender group 28.7 years at inclusion offence

Results: Offender demographics and crime type

- We tested the differences in the proportion of each inclusion offence across the sample group separately for each crime type;

- The proportions were significantly different for each crime type e.g. % of offenders for whom their inclusion offence(s) include <u>drug</u> offences (χ2=4,231.7, 2df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)
    - OC group 73.1%
    - Serious offender group 18.8%
   - General offender group 10.4%

Results: Offender demographics and crime type

- % of offenders for whom their inclusion offence(s) include <u>fraud/forgery</u> offences ($\chi2$=57.0, 2df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)
  - OC group 5.2%
  - Serious offender group 2.1%
  - General offender group 4.0%

- % of offenders for whom their inclusion offence(s) include <u>violence</u> offences ($\chi2$=629.4, 2df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)
  - OC group 10.7%
  - Serious offender group 25.9%
  - General offender group 33.8%

Results: Offender demographics and crime type

- % of offenders for whom their inclusion offence(s) include <u>theft</u> offences (χ^2=580.1, 2df, n=12,308, p=<0.001)

  - OC group 6.3%
  - Serious offender group 3.2%
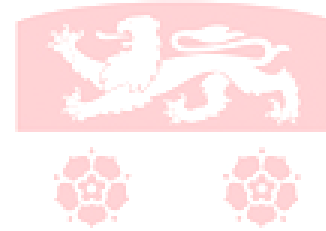 - General offender group 17.2%
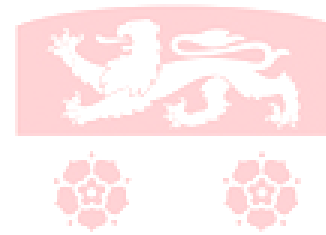
Results: Spatial distribution of offences

- Might expect that the top five police forces for general recorded crime also show the highest level of organised crime conviction;

- Police forces who are ranked as 7, 8, 12 and 14 in the general crime classification are omitted from the top 16 of organised crime prosecutions;

- Provides an indication of where detected organised crime offenders are concentrated;

- Organised crime is disproportionally concentrated in specific population centres and does not necessarily mirror general crime patterns.

Results: Offending patterns over the criminal life course

- Analysis on 3,360 UK OC offenders
    - All non-UK offenders (and those of unknown nationality) were excluded

- Significant differences in mean ages at first offence (Kruskal Wallis $\chi2=349.2$, 2df, n=10,198, p=<0.001)
    - OC group 19.0 years at first sanction
    - Serious offender group 18.8 years at first sanction
    - General offender group 21.7 years at first sanction

Results: Offending patterns over the criminal life course

- Significant differences in number of prior sanctions (Kruskal Wallis $\chi 2= 146.2$, 2df, n=10,198, p=0.001)
    - OC group 21.3 prior sanctions
    - Serious offender group 27.2 prior sanctions
    - General offender group 6.8 prior sanctions
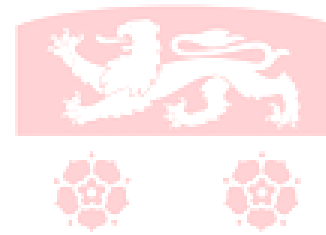
Results: Offending patterns over the criminal life course

- Time from onset to the inclusion offence
    - o Over 12 years for both the organised crime sample and the serious crime sample
    - o Around double the time for the general crime sample

- The first criminal sanction for 10% of OC offenders is for an organised crime offence, when they reach 30 years or beyond – "adult late onset";

- This analysis was repeated for the non-UK organised crime offenders who had been removed from the sample;

- 58% had also been convicted of at least one offence in England and Wales prior to their inclusion offence
    - o So almost six in ten were known to UK police agencies before their inclusion offence

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Discussion: The use of official databases in organised crime research

- This is the first attempt to establish a new methodology but limitations exist:

    o PNC data provides evidence of proven offending not actual offending
    o Selection bias
    o Not possible to establish from PNC when a crime has been perpetrated with another – can only indicate when someone is prosecuted with a co-defendant
    o Using the three year sentence length will oversample recidivists – However overall the approach provides a high threshold for inclusion – this will serve to underestimate the actual number of offenders linked to organised crime.

- The methodology provides a pragmatic and legitimate approach to differentiate organised crime offenders from others:

    o e.g. organised crime offenders are older, more prolific, and much more diverse (in terms of nationality and ethnicity) than comparison groups

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Discussion: The use of official databases in organised crime research

- Analysis provides valuable empirical evidence to improve the evidence base for policy and tactical interventions:

  - e.g. provides a method to assess the level of organised crime prosecutions (0.2 per cent), when compared with the general offender population.

- It provides further information in discussions over resources – with caveats in terms of measuring quantity over quality;

- It opens up the potential for specific agencies to develop centres of excellence for specific categories of organised crime;

- The results could assist strategic leaders when considering particular organised crime priorities and the effectiveness of legislation.

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Further research

- A spatial analysis would be a useful tool in understanding the specific threat e.g.
  - Some lesser populated but affluent areas had a low level of general crime but a disproportionately higher level of organised crime
  - Locations with maritime ports also appeared to have a higher association with organised crime convictions
  - Does organised crime concentrate around specific geographic or demographic variables?
  - Could provide a new method of assessing police force areas in relation to organised crime outputs and outcomes (prosecutions and sentencing).

- Organised crime should be included in research surrounding early intervention to prevent future negative outcomes (Farrington et al., 2001)
  - 40% of organised crime offenders receive a criminal sanction prior to 16 years

Further research

- The first criminal sanction for 10% of OC offenders is for an organised crime offence, when they reach 30 years or beyond;

- This "adult late onset" offender has previously been highlighted in Dutch organised crime studies (van Koppen et al., 2010)
  - Not a pattern generally reflected in the wider offending population
  - Two possible explanations: the offender is sophisticated and has managed to remain invisible; or the offender is a professional facilitator with specific skills or legitimate business interests (e.g. solicitor or transporter), enticed into illegality by an organised crime group

- Knowledge from further research can be used to generate disruptive and preventative strategies that seek to change an offender's perception of involvement in the organised crime activity (Kirby, 2013).

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References

This presentation is based on a paper published in Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management

Kirby, S., Francis, B., Humphreys, L., Soothill, K. (2016) "Using the UK general offender database as a means to measure and analyse organised crime", Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 78-94

Much more detail on the results and analysis can be found in:

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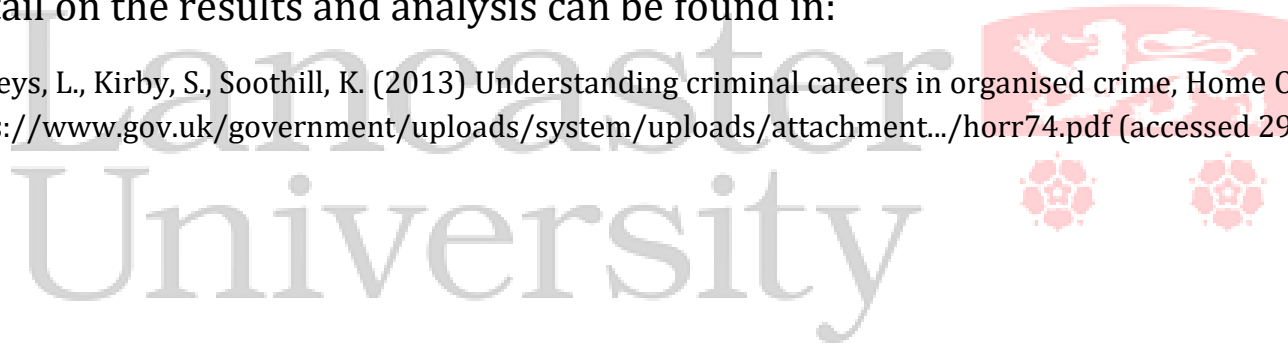
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