The decision-making patterns of armed robbery offenders

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Executive Summary

The Australian Institute of Criminology was commissioned by Chubb Security Services (Chubb) in October 2005 to explore the deterrent value of firearms by conducting a literature review of the current state of knowledge regarding the general decision-making patterns of armed robbery offenders. It was anticipated that a review of this kind would provide useful and relevant empirical evidence to assist Chubb to develop appropriate internal policies, particularly in their cash-in-transit (CIT) security function.

Every crime involves both offenders and victims. Understanding the decision-making processes of offenders is one important way to reduce risk to victims, both in terms of harm done and the likelihood of being a victim. Importantly, understanding what motivates offenders to commit crime can also help the task of devising effective prevention measures as well as identifying ways of reducing the risk of harm to victims.

Situational crime prevention is an important form of crime prevention that makes extensive use of an understanding of offenders’ decision-making processes (Clarke 1995). Situational crime prevention works through manipulating environmental factors to achieve crime reduction outcomes. For instance, in the banking industry, situational measures may include the use of safes, locks, alarms and security guards. Situational measures such as these, makes offending more difficult, while simultaneously reduces the risk of being victimised.

The following report explores the current state of knowledge regarding the general decision-making patterns of armed robbery offenders—their motivations, attitudes and levels of planning. It also describes the different types of armed robbery offender (particularly those engaged in commercial armed robbery) and provides a discussion on important points of consideration for crime prevention practitioners. Importantly, the report highlights a general dearth of recent Australian research exploring the nature of armed robbery targets and offenders’ attitudes towards these and their victims. It suggests that modern research is needed in this area, particularly in light of new security technology and possible changes in the armed robbery offender profile.

A brief overview of the report’s key findings is provided below:

Trends in armed robbery

- In the 1990s, the number of victims of armed robberies in Australia increased from around 5000 per year to a peak in 2001 of over 11,000. Between 2001 and 2004 the number then steadily dropped to around 6000 victims of armed robberies per year. The number of banks being robbed and the number of victims of armed robberies involving firearms have generally mirrored this pattern.
- Factors underlying the above trends may include reductions in regional and metropolitan bank branches and/or bank security hardening. There is some evidence suggesting that traditional career robbers may also be turning to other, more easily obtained, sources of illicit income (such as through the armed robbery of pubs and clubs).

Typologies of armed robbers and levels of planning

- Different typologies of armed robbery offenders exist, although generally there appears to be two extremes of offender—amateur/opportunists at one extreme and professionals at the other. Among other differences, amateur/opportunist offenders tend to rob individuals and are not necessarily likely to go on to become regular robbery offenders. However, professional robbery offenders are more likely to rob commercial establishments (and use firearms in these robberies).
- The amount of time and effort put into planning an armed robbery varies greatly, although is chiefly related to whether an offender is operating as an amateur/opportunist or as a professional. Amateur/opportunist typically spend little or no time planning and so do not do things such as researching the target and wearing disguises. In contrast, professional robbers often spend several weeks planning a robbery and consider in detail any security measures that may be present and, where possible, take action in an attempt to overcome them. They also spend considerable time and effort organising disguises and escape plans.
• The amount of time spent planning an armed robbery also varies by the type of target and there is a close relationship between the amount of money available at these targets and the consideration for robbing them. Typically, robberies of high risk/hard targets like banks require more planning than low risk/soft targets like convenience stores.

**Attitudes towards victims, violence and weapon use**

• Levels of violence used in armed robberies are not simply a function of offender inclination, but are also dependent on the reactions of victims and bystanders.
• The resistance of victims to the demands of offenders, or the attempt of victims or other bystanders to otherwise obstruct them greatly increases the chances of violence occurring. People who stand in the way of an armed robber and his/her main objectives (money and escape) run the highest risk of physical injury.
• Most research demonstrates that the actual use of violence by armed robbery offenders and serious (physical) injuries sustained by victims are relatively uncommon.
• Offenders typically view the use of violence as about gaining control over an unpredictable situation and reducing the resistance of victims.

**Recidivism and progression into armed robbery**

• Involvement in criminal activity, both robbery and other criminal activities, characterises an armed robbers way of life. Armed robbery offenders are frequently observed to have ‘graduated’ to armed robbery after having tried many other forms of primarily non-violent crime, such as breaking and entering, motor vehicle theft, receiving stolen goods, fraud and so on.
• Convicted armed robbers have extensive prior criminal records. Overall, regular Australian armed robbery offenders have an average of seven lifetime armed robbery charges, five convictions and two sentences to prison. However, their actual level of armed robbery offending is often far greater than officially reported.

**Commercial targets**

• Perceived by offenders as one of the most profitable of targets, banks have in the past often accounted for a large proportion of armed robberies of commercial establishments.
• Cash-in-transit (CIT) are highly lucrative targets but are much less frequently robbed. This is because they are high risk—guards have to be confronted directly (which poses great personal risk to offenders) and there are higher levels of security than found in most other non-bank targets.

**Number of offenders**

• Most armed robberies, even of commercial establishments, are committed by sole offenders. However, the number of offenders involved in armed robbery generally varies with the type of weapon used.
• Firearm robberies are more likely than knife and other weapon robberies to be committed by multiple offenders. Firearm robberies are also more likely to be used in professional armed robberies.

**Economic proceeds**

• The most significant factor that differentiates professional armed robbers of commercial establishments from other types of armed robber is the value of the takings, where professional armed robberies often claim higher rewards.
• Higher average values are associated with firearm robberies than with other types of weapons, such as knives or syringes.

**Weapon use in commercial targets**

• Offenders are more likely to carry a firearm in the robbery of commercial establishments (particularly robberies of financial institutions) than in any other setting.
The type of firearm used in banks has changed over time. Pistols were used more often than longarms (for example, rifles) in Australian bank robberies in the early to mid 1980s, but the reverse held true for the late 1980s. However, between 1998 and 2002 pistols were once more used in the majority of robberies involving firearms. An increasing proportion of pistols relative to other firearms is similar to trends observed for other violent crimes, like homicide.

The most dramatic change in weapon use over time is among offender gangs (three or more offenders). In the 1980s, almost all gangs used weapons during bank robberies, with almost half of these involving pistols and around half involving longarms. However, between 1998 and 2000, most bank robberies committed by gangs involved no weapon. Evidence suggests that this trend may be due to a change in the type of offender now targeting financial institutions (that is, less well planned amateurs who rely on intimidation through sheer offender numbers, rather than through the use of firearms).

Injuries

- The number of victim injuries (of a physical nature) caused by firearms is relatively few compared to other weapon types. While firearms can result in far more serious injuries than other weapons when used, they are infrequently discharged.
- Where victims do resist armed robbers, physical injury is much more likely to occur.
- The presence of multiple offenders may pose an increased risk of victim injury, particularly where alcohol and loaded firearms are involved.
- Where targets have no physical barriers (such as screens) and where there are multiple offenders there is also an increased risk of victims experiencing physical injuries.

Implications for situational crime prevention

Displacement of armed robbery

- Target hardening, through the use of security screens, safes, security guards and so on, has reduced the risks of robbery for certain sorts of targets (like banks) but whether this has been at the expense of displacing crime into other areas and/or onto other targets is still not entirely certain. Modern research in this area is required.
- Professional armed robbers are the most likely type of offender to alter their methods in response to security measures designed to deter them, particularly where there are multiple offenders undertaking a robbery.
- Offenders who usually commit robberies against multiple targets are more likely to move to a different type of target in response to blocked opportunities in relation to their initial choice. However, offenders who specialise in a particular type of robbery (for example, bank robbery) may not be so easily put off by target hardening.

The role of amphetamines

- Other recent trends in Australia indicate a greater use of amphetamines and amphetamine-type substances (ATS) among offenders. Given that the use of amphetamines and ATS has been found to be associated with more violent and impulsive behaviour, this may have important repercussions for armed robbery victims.

Key summary points

- Most Australian research on offender decision-making processes is now at least 10 to 20 years old. As such, there is a need for more up-to-date research in this area to inform modern security policy.
- Professional armed robbers typically engage in detailed planning of high risk targets where the use of firearms is common. In contrast, amateur/opportunist armed robbers often act more impulsively and rob less risky targets using weapons such as knives and syringes.
- There are no recent and reliable Australian data on the attitudes of armed robbers to the deterrent value posed by either armed or unarmed security guards.
- Target hardening of financial institutions has reduced the risk of bank robberies occurring.
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Abbreviations

ABS     Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIC     Australian Institute of Criminology
ATS     Amphetamine-type substances
CIT     Cash-in-transit
Chubb   Chubb Security Services
DUCO   Drug Use Careers of Offenders project
NARMP  National Armed Robbery Monitoring Program
UK     United Kingdom
USA    United States of America
Part 1: Introduction

Scope of the study
This report describes the nature of armed robbery offenders, including their socio-demographic and offending histories, as well as the different types of armed robbery offender. It also focuses on offenders' attitudes to armed robbery, weapon use and the victims of armed robbery; motivations to commit armed robbery and the level of planning involved. The report then provides an overview of commercial armed robbery, which includes robberies of commercial establishments (such as banks, CIT, businesses and the like). Finally, the report examines the implications of the review findings in terms of crime prevention policy for the Australian security industry.

Methodology
As outlined above, the methodology employed involved a review of relevant literature concerning armed robbery. The review assessed and amalgamated current and past research both from Australia and overseas. Literature searches for the review were chiefly undertaken using the AIC's own CINCH database. CINCH contains a comprehensive range of source documents, including journal articles, monographs, conference papers and proceedings, book reviews, research reports, theses, government documents, statistical publications and unpublished materials. CINCH's subject coverage includes criminology, corrections, crime prevention, juvenile justice, law enforcement and the police.

Defining armed robbery
The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines armed robbery offences as those which involve the unlawful taking of property, with intent to permanently deprive the owner of the property, from the immediate possession of a person, or an organisation, or control, custody or care of a person, accompanied by the use, and/or threatened use of immediate force or violence. Robbery victims can therefore be persons or organisations...Where a weapon was used in the committal of the offence, robbery is classified as armed otherwise it is classified as unarmed (ABS 2004, p.42).

By its very definition, armed robbery encompasses both property and violent crime. However, it is not a homogenous group of crimes, but is rather an umbrella term for an array of offences where the motivations, planning, attitudes and conduct of the crimes can differ substantially. For instance, earlier Australian research (Mouzos & Borzycki 2003) identified three primary armed robbery scenarios that differed in terms of offender method and choice of weapon, general location, victim injury, and in the financial gain accruing to robbers. The scenarios included:

- opportunistic street muggings, which tended to involve little long-term planning, occurred in public places, involved easily accessible weapons like knives, and tended to result in small rewards for the offenders;
- amateur retail armed robberies, which took place in easily accessible retail settings, did not involve much planning or hard-to-obtain weapons and resulted in small gains for offenders; and
- professional armed robberies, that demonstrated at least a small degree of planning, involved clear instructions to victims as to desired property, and threats with less opportunistic weapons (including firearms). While sometimes taking place in retail settings, armed robberies under this scenario also frequently occurred in financial institutions and resulted in substantially higher offender takings compared to the other two scenarios.

A more detailed discussion of the different types of armed robbery offenders is presented in Part 2 of this report.

Trends in armed robbery
The ABS publishes statistics on victims of a range of crimes, including armed robbery and robbery more generally through its annual publication Recorded Crime - Victims. The AIC also publishes annual statistics on armed robbery through its National Armed Robbery
Monitoring Program (NARMP). Derived from administrative systems maintained by state and
territory police, such statistics provide an indication of the level and nature of victims of
recorded crime in Australia and are a basis for measuring change over time (ABS 2005;
Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004). However, it should be noted that while these data provide
a useful guide to trends in well-reported crimes, they fall short of measuring the true
frequency of crime because in many cases they are a measure of policing activity (Makkai
1999). Moreover, there is no way of knowing precisely how much crime is being committed at
any given time as many crimes are either undetected or go unreported to police. Having said
that, robbery (particularly armed robbery) is the type of offence where one would expect there
to be a high rate of reporting as it is an offence against the person, it is of a non-trivial nature
and, as it usually involves strangers, there are likely to be few personal reasons for not
reporting it to police (BOCSAR 1987).

Recorded crime – victims of armed robbery

In the 1990s, the number of victims of armed robberies in Australia increased from around
5000 per year to a peak in 2001 of over 11,000 (Figure 1). Between 2001 and 2004 the
number then steadily dropped to around 6000 victims of armed robberies per year (ABS
2005). The number of victims of armed robberies involving firearms mirrored this pattern,
although in any given year this comprised only around 15 per cent of all reported armed
robberies. Data contained in the Australian Bankers’ Association ‘Armed Attacks Database’
indicate a similar downward trend in terms of the number of bank hold-ups since 1998, which
is also consistent with decreases observed in the United Kingdom (see Borzycki 2003).

There appears to be a range of factors underlying these trends. For example, it is suggested
(Borzycki 2003) that recent reductions in regional and metropolitan bank branches,
particularly in high-risk locations, might limit the proximity of banks to some offenders, thereby
eliminating some potential targets. It is also probable that bank security hardening (such as
through the use of protective screens, more secure safes, limiting the amount of cash
available at tellers and so on) may be deterring some offenders, particularly the more
opportunistic and spontaneous robbers, leaving only the most hardened and experienced
robbers to attack financial institutions. Alternatively, it is argued that traditional career robbers
may be turning to other, more easily obtained, sources of illicit income leaving only the more
opportunistic and spontaneous robbers to victimise banks. While currently there are no hard
data to support the hypothesis, it is possible that this latter situation may explain what has
been occurring in Australia recently, where the more organised and better planned armed
robbery may be being displaced away from difficult bank targets towards the currently more
vulnerable pubs and clubs (pers comm Borzycki 2005).

As Borzycki (2003) notes, popular images of robbery often depict banks as targets of armed
robbery, although ABS data indicate that only a fraction of armed robbery victims experience
this crime in a bank setting. Of the 7,817 victims of armed robbery recorded in Australia in
2002, 180 (2.3 per cent) were victimised in banks (ABS 2003). To put this in perspective, in
the same year there were 2,190 (28 per cent) victims of armed robberies recorded for
streets/footpaths and 3,038 (39 per cent) victims of armed robberies recorded for retail
settings. Beyond these data, breakdowns of specific armed robbery information are not
currently published by ABS (in part to do with the format in which the ABS receives state and
territory police data, see Mouzos & Borzycki 2003) and so further exploration of important
contextual factors surrounding armed robbery, such as targets chosen, weapons used and
the like, is not possible using these data at this stage.
National armed robbery monitoring program

Managed by the AIC, the NARMP was developed to monitor and report on armed robbery trends in Australia (Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004). The NARMP contains information describing all armed robberies reported to police. Through the examination of armed robberies over time, particularly the way in which weapons are used, insights can be gained into how best to safeguard against armed robbery and its negative impacts. The first annual report of this program summarises information derived from 2003, the first year of NARMP data collection—future reports will be able to provide trend analyses. The following summarises key statistics on armed robbery in 2003:

- Armed robberies took place in a variety of settings, including in residential, open public and other community settings, as well as retail locations. However, the largest proportion of reported robberies occurred in retail settings (46 per cent). The most frequently victimised retail sites were service stations (20 per cent of retail locations). After licensed premises (bottle shops, pubs, hotels and night clubs), banks were the least likely of retail settings to become victims of armed robbery (5 per cent of retail locations).

- Knives were the most frequently used weapon in armed robberies in 2003 (48 per cent). This was followed by the use of weapons such as rocks, clubs, tools and the like (24 per cent), firearms (22 per cent) and syringes (4 per cent). Knives were used far more often than firearms in open public settings, such as streets/footpaths and so on, as well as in the retail settings involving pharmacies and chemists and service stations (Table 1). However, firearms were more likely than knives to be used in banking and financial settings (49 per cent for firearms compared with 25 per cent for knives). As will be discussed later, a greater use of firearms in the robbing of banking and other financial institutions is a reflection of the perceived need of offenders to feel in control of high risk robberies.

1 Detail regarding the specific nature of all retailers was not available, therefore this is only indicative.
Table 1: Weapons used in armed robbery as percentage of each location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Firearm</th>
<th>Knife</th>
<th>Syringe</th>
<th>Other weapon</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential setting</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open public settings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational settings (parks, cinemas, etc; excluding licensed premises)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport-related settings (car parks, public transport, train and bus stations, etc)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open spaces excluding street and footpath (vacant lots, bushland, etc.)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street and footpath</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other community settings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, health, religious, justice and other community settings</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and professional settings</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesalers, warehouses, manufacturing and agricultural settings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail settings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail settings with no further detail</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking and financial settings</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacies and chemists</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service stations</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed premises (bottle shop, pub, hotel and night club)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified and other locations with no further detail, or not classified elsewhere</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (per cent)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9,204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004, p.11

- Armed robberies occurred mostly in the evening and early morning (over half between 6pm and 3am), although the spread of robberies over the day varied slightly as a function of weekends as opposed to weekdays, and with the seasons.

- Different types of property were stolen during armed robberies, although cash was the type most commonly taken (27 per cent of all property types). Personal electrical equipment comprised the next most stolen property type (21 per cent of all property types). A broad range of property, including negotiable documents (credit cards, ATM cards etc), personal documents (drivers licenses, passports etc), luggage, jewellery, alcohol/drugs, weapons and other items made up the remainder of property stolen during armed robberies. Personal goods tend to make up the majority of non-cash items because the majority of armed robberies are of individuals (74 per cent) and not organisations.

- Armed robberies in 2003 resulted in large variation in the value of offender takings, ranging from $0 to $550,000. As will be explored later, this is probably a function of unique robbery situational factors, such as the type of weapon used and robbery location. For instance, higher reported average values were associated with firearm robberies (mean=$14,085) than with ‘other weapons’ (mean=$8,461) and knives (mean=$2,200).

- Organisations were threatened with firearms in a slightly higher proportion of cases than individual victims (29 per cent, versus 21 per cent for persons), and with knives and ‘other weapons’ slightly less often (46 per cent and 21 per cent respectively for organisations, versus 50 per cent and 24 per cent).

- Data in the NARMP on lone and multiple armed robbery offenders are not completely reliable because they refer only to offenders who have been apprehended by police. Nevertheless, the data suggest that offenders operating in pairs, trios or gangs target slightly different locations to offenders operating alone. However, there also appeared to be different forms of multiple offender robbery, differentiated by the types of locations targeted and the weapons used.
Situational crime prevention and armed robbery

In essence, crime prevention is all about minimising, reducing or stopping crime. Ekblom (1994 p.194) describes it as the intervention in mechanisms that cause criminal events. He distinguishes between mechanisms that are either ‘proximal’, that is directly linked to the offending event in question or ‘distal’, that is mechanisms that are more remote and where the causal chain is longer (for instance, abuse suffered in childhood). Thinking about the causal mechanisms of crime in this way can assist crime prevention practitioners to determine the precise nature of a particular crime problem and so to help design appropriate and effective crime prevention responses. Situational crime prevention focuses on Ekblom’s proximal causal mechanisms. Through the manipulation of situational conditions, reductions in crime are possible—not only is offending made more difficult, but it also reduces the risk of being victimised. For example, the use of security guards, safes and alarms by many financial institutions all hinge on an assumption that the behaviour of potential robbers is influenced by situational features of the crime and available opportunities and not just driven by an irresistible urge or predisposition to offend (BOCSAR 1987).

Understanding why people decide to offend is a critical factor when considering how to prevent crimes from occurring. Committing an offence involves a number of decisions, including an initial decision to carry out a crime, a decision about what will be targeted and a decision about the way in which the crime will be conducted. Even in cases where offending appears pathologically motivated (for example, offending to support a drug habit) or largely impulsive, choices are made (Cornish & Clarke 1986). While situational crime prevention measures do not always influence the initial decision to commit a robbery (because decisions about committing robbery are often made away from the scene), they do have an impact at the planning and carrying out stages of the offence. As such, understanding the way an offence is committed and the influences on decisions made at various points in the process is important in terms of evaluating the potential effect of situational crime prevention measures (Gill 2000).
Part 2: Defining armed robbery offenders

Typologies of armed robbers

As touched on in Part 1 above, neither armed robbery nor the offenders that commit armed robbery are homogenous. Among other things, armed robbers differ markedly in terms of their motivations to commit armed robbery, the levels of planning involved, attitudes, weapons used and the conduct of their armed robberies. Despite these differences, general patterns are observable and criminologists have attempted to describe these through the development of particular typologies of robbery offender. For example, in a 1987 report on robbers operating in New South Wales by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR, p.88), robbers were categorised under a typology that included ‘personal robbery offender’ and ‘serial robbery offender’. Personal robbery offenders were described as being more likely to rob individuals; be young; inexperienced (not have an extensive prior criminal record); and not necessarily likely to go on to become a regular robbery offender. On the other hand, serial robbery offenders were described as being more likely to rob commercial establishments; be slightly older than personal robbery offenders; have more extensive prior criminal records; be more likely than personal robbers to use firearms in the commission of their offences; be more likely to commit more robberies; and be more likely than personal robbers to be more instrumentally motivated and better planned. This typology of robbery offender roughly equates with Walsh’s (1986) ‘opportunist/planner’ and Gill’s (2001) ‘amateur/professional’ typologies.

Other more complex typologies also exist. Matthews (2002) defines armed robbers in the United Kingdom as either ‘amateurs’, ‘intermediates’ or ‘professionals’. These groups compare in many ways with the three types of armed robbery offender identified by Mouzos and Borzycki (2003) that were outlined earlier. Under Matthews’ typology:

- amateurs represent the largest group of known commercial robbers and are characterised by their low level of organisation; their selection of more accessible targets; their lack of experience; and their frequent use of violence and weapons (although not usually firearms). They also tend to operate independently; aim for relatively small amounts of money; and have a history of failed robberies and extensive drug habits; generally, they are seen as quite desperate in their approach to armed robbery;

- intermediates in the typology are generally more organised and experienced than amateurs but are less dedicated to armed robbery than professionals. They have extensive criminal records, are more likely to carry firearms than amateurs and appear less governed by their drug use. Many intermediates are described as seeing themselves as becoming more serious and experienced criminals; and

- professionals in the typology number few but their level of motivation is described as being quite different from the two other groups, where they consider armed robbery like a job or way of life. Other differences between professionals and amateurs/intermediates are in the level of planning, selection of targets, the frequent use of firearms and the deployment of violence. Professionals tend to plan a robbery for weeks rather than days, operate in groups of three or four rather than in smaller groups or independently. They carefully consider their escape routes since the consequences of being caught are serious, particularly because they typically target lucrative establishments (eg financial institutions and CIT).

Gabor (1988) identified four different types of armed robber in Canada: chronic offenders; professional offenders; intensive offenders; and occasional offenders. In short, chronic offenders have armed robbery careers of long duration, commit many other offences, are poorly prepared and gain moderate amounts from their crimes. These offenders contrast with the professional offenders who also have long criminal careers, but are better prepared and make larger profits. Gabor’s intensive and occasional offenders tend to have fairly short armed robbery careers that are poorly planned and reap small profits. The primary difference between these two types is that intensive offenders commit several armed robberies within quick succession but then generally desist from the crime, whereas occasional offenders commit only a small number of robberies relative to other crimes.
The different types of offender outlined in each of the typologies above represent the extremes in each offending group. However, in reality there is (to a greater or lesser extent) a degree of overlap between the groups, making it difficult to ascribe a type to some offenders. This is most effectively illustrated by Matthews’ (2002) intermediate armed robbery offenders who often see themselves as on the way to becoming professional armed robbers. The question that has to be asked here is, at precisely what point along the continuum do they become a professional? This is not a trivial notion as it has important implications for crime prevention practitioners and the types of crime prevention measures that are developed and put in place to deter would-be armed robberies from committing their crimes. Gill (2000) argues that if classificatory systems are to be useful for crime prevention purposes then it is critical to develop an awareness of the type of decisions, and the emphasis placed on them by offenders, in the conduct of their crimes. Gill calls these ‘rationality indicators’ (p.153). They include questions around monitoring potential targets, wearing disguises, choosing the specific time the offence occurs and whether certain types of target hardening have an impact on decision-making. He describes the object of these as being to find out the points at which offenders make decisions and to influence those decisions in a way that a crime is perceived as being less desirable. The discussion provided below on armed robbers motivations, planning, attitudes and so on reflects Gill’s suite of rationality indicators.

**Motivations**

The decision to commit armed robbery is complex, involving the whole past of the individual as well as their present circumstances (Feeney 1986). However, and as already highlighted, major motivations to commit armed robbery essentially fall into two camps. Research evidence clearly indicates that for the majority of armed robbers, the crime is primarily about funding a particular lifestyle. For many, this lifestyle is about drugs and alcohol use, while for others it relates more to a desire to live the ‘high life’ (of which drugs may form one component). For a small group of entrenched armed robbery offenders, evidence suggests that the motivation to commit armed robbery is more about earning a regular income; a means to pay bills and support a family.

Wright and Decker (1997) conducted research into active armed street robbers in the United States of America (USA) in the mid to late 1990s. Their research illustrates very well those armed robbery offenders whose primary motivation is about funding a lifestyle. They describe a ‘desperate partying’ mentality among many of these offenders, where the main motivations appear to cluster around supporting illicit lifestyles (such as excessive drug-taking and gambling) and/or living hedonistically (such as buying expensive clothes and other luxury items) in which there is no attempt to accumulate capital to achieve long-term goals, but is chiefly about meeting immediate needs. Of the few armed robbers (mostly robbers of commercial establishments) who indicated to Wright and Decker that they committed armed robberies to support a family, they did not explain it as relating to a pressing need for cash, but rather because they did not want their cash reserves getting too low and be left in the position where (as a number of them described) they may have taken foolish risks. These offenders exhibited a much greater degree of rationality in their decision-making than did other armed robbers in the research.

The distinction that Wright and Decker draw has been observed by others (for example, Feeney 1986, BOCSAR 1987, Nugent et al 1989, Morrison & O'Donnell 1994, Gill 2000, Gill 2001, Matthews 2002). Table 2 summarises available data from the above research. While the different research methodologies used in this research make direct comparisons problematic (for example, the questions asked of offenders in each of the studies may have been different or have a different emphasis), there is nevertheless a consistent pattern that emerges. That is, that a greater proportion of armed robbers list money for drugs rather than money for life’s essentials as a motivating factor for their crimes.
Table 2: Motivations for committing robbery (expressed as percentage of all respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money for drugs</td>
<td>n=82</td>
<td>n=110</td>
<td>n=341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money for food/shelter/family</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money to pay debts</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>n/a¹</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s what offender did for a living</td>
<td>n/a¹</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge/lost temper/angry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunk/high on drugs at time</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>n/a¹</td>
<td>n/a¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urged to by friends</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a¹</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ n/a=no relevant data provided/available

Like the small number of armed robbers in Wright and Decker’s study who targeted commercial establishments rather than individuals, the more professional armed robbers interviewed in other studies have also demonstrated a much greater degree of rationality in their decision-making than other types of armed robbers. For example, robbers of CIT in one study (Gill 2001) were described as being better prepared and they also planned their offences in more detail. They did not often respond to the immediate need for money and were far less likely than other armed robbers to start spending the money that they had robbed on the same day as the robbery. In addition, they were not as desperate and there were fewer impediments to taking a better planned approach to the risks they faced. For instance, they were the least likely subgroup of interviewed offenders to state that they drank heavily (21 per cent of these robbers compared to 36 per cent of others), and that they took illegal drugs (49 per cent compared to 59 per cent of the others).

Planning

The amount of time and effort put into planning an armed robbery varies considerably. There are two extremes: at one extreme is the robber who spends little or no time planning and so does not research the target, does not wear a disguise, and makes no plans for escape. Often, this type of robber does not choose their target in a calm, deliberate manner, but rather in a volatile state of desperation (Matthews 1996, Wright & Decker 1997). This type of robber is illustrated by the following quote:

I’m hanging out in the street on the corner [and] I’m always looking for a way to make some money. Always. And by me being right there, it’s like an accident waiting to happen…I don’t look for [the target], it comes up (Wright & Decker 1997, p.62)

The other extreme is the robber who spends a number of weeks planning for the robbery, and so thoroughly researches the target, considers in detail any security measures that may be present and, where possible, takes action in an attempt to overcome them, and spends considerable time and effort organising disguises and escape plans. This level of planning is highlighted in the following quote:

We pick a base through the Yellow Pages…; any one of them…we go to the base and we look at the base, and we look at the road leading onto motorways. We put cars on every single base and we’ll be outside the bases from 4 o’clock in the morning till about 9-10 o’clock during the day. Each time a van passes us, a car will follow the van to its first drop, then he’ll go back to…the base and pick up another van, and follow it to its first drop. The week after, when we know what vans go from this base, we’ll then change over all the cars…go to the first drop…and follow it to the second drop. The week after that we’ll change over again, and it’ll be followed from the second drop to the third drop, and so on and so forth till they get to the end of it. Once we’ve done all this and we’ve got to the end of each van, I’ll go through every single one of the drops of each van and decide which van I’m going to do, which is the best van, which carries
The decision-making patterns of armed robbery offenders

In reality, most armed robbers fall at some point between the above two extremes, although the research evidence indicates that the professional armed robber falls towards the latter extreme while the more amateur/opportunist armed robber falls towards the former (for example, Feehey 1986, BOCSAR 1987, Harding & Blake 1989, Nugent et al 1989, Gill 2000, Matthews 2002, Mouzlos & Borzycki 2003).

As evidenced above, the amount of time spent planning an armed robbery varies by the type of target and there is also a close relationship between the amount of money available at these targets and the level of consideration undertaken when robbing them (Erickson 1996). Typically, robberies of high risk/hard targets like CIT and banks require more planning than low risk/soft targets like convenience stores and other commercial premises. Even the more professional armed robber will spend differing amounts of time planning depending on the target. For example, 64 per cent of armed robbers in one study (Gill 2000) reported that they spent more than a week planning for CIT robberies but 46 per cent of the same robbers indicated that they spent a day or less planning robberies of post offices. Similarly, Nugent et al (1989) found that over a quarter of Australian armed robbers in their study spent up to two weeks planning for bank robberies, but fewer than six per cent of offenders spent the same amount of time planning robberies of other targets.

Where armed robberies are planned, this planning includes a range of elements, such as researching (or ‘casing’) the target; weapon choice; the amount of time given in which to commit the robbery; plans to overcome security measures; task allocation (where there are multiple offenders); and disguises. However, a consistent research finding is that planning for the escape that is one of the most (if not the most) critical factor that offenders consider (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Gabor 1988, Erickson 1996, Carroll & Loch 1997). The chief things that armed robbers appear to consider in their escape plans include security measures (guard/police presence); the type of escape vehicle (for instance, stolen or privately owned vehicle); and the escape route.

**Attitudes towards victims, violence and weapon use**

Research evidence about armed robbers attitudes to victims (both individuals and organisations) and the use of violence and weapons in the commission of their crimes is divided. For instance, Wright and Decker (1997) observed a strong propensity for sudden violence among armed street robbers and a general disregard for the physical and emotional trauma that they inflicted on their victims. Indeed, the majority of the offenders who they interviewed claimed that while they primarily committed their crimes to raise money, they enjoyed dominating their victims and got a great kick out of frightening them. Wright and Decker suggest that this gave these street robbers a sense of control that, at least temporarily, replaced their usual sense of personal failure. Nugent et al (1989) also found that Australian armed robbery offenders did not appear to have much concern for the victims of their crimes and that a number of the offenders who injured their victims felt little or no responsibility for their actions. This was often explained by the offenders as their having warned their victims not to do anything silly and is illustrated by the following offender’s quote:

…what was I supposed to do. I had warned her not to do anything…it was her own stupid fault (Nugent et al 1989, p.52)

In contrast to the above findings, Gill (2000) observed in his study of armed robbers living in the United Kingdom (UK) that while some offenders did sometimes use physical violence gratuitously as a means of intimidation, this applied to only a minority of offenders. Overall, they tended to take little pleasure in injuring their victims, where possible avoided doing so, and that for a range of reasons considered it a generally undesirable outcome, including that it may have: attracted unfavourable police attention and a longer sentence if they were caught; resulted in some victims being scared and shocked and unable to hand the money over; increased the likelihood of being caught and; even caused injuries to themselves. One offender’s thoughts on the matter are as such:

If you go into a place and you start pointing a gun at people, and threatening what you are going to do and what you are not going to do? Obviously you are going to frighten...
them to death. That ain’t the point…you go in there to get money, as quiet as you can, as least noticed as possible, because the last thing you want is confrontation; you want to get in and out. You don’t frighten nobody…customers, you can’t have them screaming and panicking you don’t want that, that’s the last thing you want. You don’t want to bring no, er, no notice to yourself at all. The less people that see you…the less evidence they got against you (Gill 2000, p.78).

Evidence suggesting that the use of violence varies by the type of offender (that is whether amateur/opportunist or professional) is equivocal with some north American studies indicating that the former group of offenders is far more likely to both threaten and use violence than the latter group (for example, Gabor 1988, Wright & Decker 1997), while other Australian and UK studies generally indicate the reverse situation, particularly when victims attempt to resist offenders (for instance, Nugent et al 1989, Matthews 2002, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003). It is unclear what underlies these differences in research findings, although one could speculate that at least in the USA it may relate to greater gun ownership in that country and a possible desensitisation to violent crime.

Levels of violence used in armed robberies are not simply a function of the offender’s inclinations, but are also dependent on the reactions of victims and bystanders. Robberies are fluid, dynamic events in which understanding the interaction of all the parties is vital to make sense of the outcome (Gabor 1988). Offenders are frequently nervous and wanting to complete the robbery as quickly as possible and this adds a degree of volatility to the situation (Gill 2000). Moreover, the resistance of victims to the demands of offenders, or the attempt of victims or other bystanders to otherwise obstruct them (the so-called ‘have-a-go-heroes’), has been found to greatly increase the chances of violence occurring (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Gabor 1988, Nugent et al 1989, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994, Wright & Decker 1997, Gill 2000, Matthews 2002, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003). People who stand in the way of an armed robber and his/her main objectives, money and escape, run the highest risk of physical injury. This is illustrated in Australia by the recent serious injury of a security company employee who was injured while engaged in a shoot out with an armed offender, who had ambushed the security company employee while he was carrying money into a hotel (see Sydney Morning Herald 2005). It is for this reason that employees of financial institutions and security personnel working in these settings are counselled to comply with an offender’s demands (Carroll & Loch 1997, Gill 2000).

With the exception of Wright and Decker’s (1997) study where violence appeared embedded within the street robbery culture in the USA, most research in fact demonstrates that the actual use of violence by armed robbery offenders and serious (physical) injuries sustained by victims are relatively uncommon (for instance, BOCSAR 1987, Nugent et al 1989, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994, Gill 2000). For example, in one study of armed robbers in New South Wales (BOCSAR 1987), in 60 per cent of armed robbery offences there were no, or only negligible, injuries. In a further 32 per cent of offences there were injuries caused in the nature of bruises, abrasions or minor wounds not requiring immediate medical attention. Thus 92 per cent of robbery offences in the study involved at most minor injuries. Similarly, Borzycki (2003) indicates that only around 6 per cent of bank hold-ups in Australia between 1998 and 2002 resulted in physical injury to victims. Further discussion of injuries sustained by victims during armed robberies is covered below.

While it is clear that armed robbers are quite prepared to use violence to achieve their objectives, offenders frequently view it as more about gaining control over an unpredictable situation and reducing the resistance of victims (Normandeau 1981, Harding & Blake 1989, Wright & Decker 1997, Gill 2000 & 2001, Matthews 2002, Borzycki 2003, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003). The following excerpt from a recent interview with a convicted Australian armed robber illustrates the point.

I never actually pointed a gun at anyone’s head, Okay, I’ve never physically assaulted them. I arrived at the bank, I had in mind I had to create as much fear in the shortest possible time, gain control of the situation, in and out, probably within two minutes…I was there purely for the money, in and out, before the police arrive. (ABC Radio National, 10/1/06)

In armed robberies of financial institutions and CIT, the use of firearms is the favoured method of establishing control (BOCSAR 1987, Nugent et al 1989, Gill 2001, Borzycki 2003). In such situations the stakes are high and so that offenders can obtain the money and make
quick their escape they must ensure that there is no room for negotiation with victims. Wright & Decker (1997, p.96) describe this as the need for offenders to create an immediate ‘illusion of death’. Firearms also allow for control at a distance, which makes it easier to control a number of different people simultaneously. Unlike knives or other weapons, firearms also permit a degree of impersonality, involving little or no physical contact between the offender and the victim (Matthews 2002).

Attitudes towards security personnel

The specific attitudes of armed robbery offenders towards people engaged in the security industry are covered separately here for the purposes of this report. There is considerable ambiguity in the little research evidence that is available concerning offender perceptions of the deterrent value of guards (whether armed or otherwise), sometimes even within a single study. Small sample numbers in several of these studies further cloud the issue because the results are not statistically reliable. Furthermore, most available research evidence (and all of the Australian evidence) is at least 10 to 20 years old, possibly casting doubt on the applicability of this research to today’s circumstances. Modern research in this area is clearly needed to shed light on whether the attitudes of armed robbery offenders to security personnel (and other security measures) are the same as they were when much of the research was undertaken, or whether offenders have altered their views in the face of new security technology or because the type of offender has changed.

Of what has been revealed about Australian armed robbers’ perceptions, BOCSAR (1987) and Nugent et al (1989) found that security guards (armed and unarmed) do apparently influence whether financial institutions are robbed. Offenders in both of these studies generally indicated that security guards posed an important deterrent value. For example, in the study undertaken by BOCSAR (1987), in a list of 12 possible elements that would put an offender off targeting a particular establishment, four of the top five responses concerned armed and unarmed security guards (Table 3). Similarly, Nugent et al (1989) found that 71 per cent (n=34) of armed robbers in their study said that security guards (they did not specify whether armed/unarmed) would also act as a deterrent to committing a robbery. This finding is also supported by Carroll and Loch’s (1997) study of convicted armed robbery offenders in the USA (although, the sample included only 5 offenders).

### Table 3: Offender decision-making and target characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target characteristic</th>
<th>No. of responses (n=23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armed security guard outside</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed security guard inside</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unarmed security guard outside</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unarmed security guard inside</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of customers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time delay locks</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security glass petitions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop-up shields</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scorpion devices</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject to special police patrols</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of a business watch scheme</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BOCSAR 1987, p.97

Despite the above findings, a number of other international studies indicate disagreement among armed robbers over whether security guards deter would be armed robbers (for example, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994, Erickson 1996, Wright & Decker 1997). Two studies (Morrison & O’Donnell’s and Wright & Decker’s) have found that some offenders would not consider robbing an establishment if there were guards present, while others saw guards as little impediment in the commission of their crimes, particularly those offenders who operated in teams. One offender in Wright & Decker’s study even claimed that he and his partners...
would deliberately target businesses that employed security guards because they believed that guard presence was a reliable indicator of the potential payoff. In Erickson’s study, after the escape route and money, armed guards were considered by offenders to be an important consideration when committing a robbery. Indeed, half of the top-ranked deterrence measures related to getting trapped or shot, including armed guards, frequent police patrols and an armed clerk. The bottom ranked deterrence measure was considered by the offenders in the study to be unarmed guards.

**Socio-demographics of armed robbers**

**Gender**

Armed robbers are overwhelmingly male, with few females engaging in the crime (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Morrison & O'Donnell 1994, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003). In one Australian study (BOCSAR 1987) only 3 per cent of robberies included female only offenders, while a further 3 per cent of robberies involved females in the company of males. The study further found that the level of female participation did not vary greatly between commercial and personal robbery. A study of convicted armed robbers in London (Morrison & O'Donnell 1994) also found that as few as 1 per cent of robbers in the study were female.

**Age**

Armed robbers range in age, although most convicted robbers are under 30 years of age. For instance, around two thirds of armed robbers in two Australian studies (Kapardis 1988, Nugent et al 1989) were aged below 30. There appears to be a slight difference in terms of age between robbers who rob banks and other armed robbers. Nugent et al (1989) found that the proportion of bank robbers in the 15 to 19 year age group (8 per cent) was much smaller than the equivalent figure for offenders who robbed targets other than banks (23 per cent). This indicates that people who rob banks are, on average, older than robbery offenders in general and supports the notion (discussed in more detail below) that there is a progression from other forms of robbery into the robbery of banks and other high risk targets.

**Education and employment**

Few armed robbers complete high school education and fewer still are engaged in skilled employment. Australian studies of convicted armed robbers (Kapardis 1988, Nugent et al 1989) indicate that around 91 per cent of offenders drop out of school by the age of 16. While a small number of these offenders complete diplomas and trade certificates, most have no employment skills and are described as having worked as labourers. For example, Kapardis (1988) indicates that 75 per cent of convicted armed robbers in his study of Victorian robbers possessed no employment skills and one third had worked at some stage as a labourer. These findings are also reflected in studies overseas (for instance, Walsh 1986, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994).

**Ethnicity**

Convicted armed robbers are largely of European descent. Where data are available on ethnicity, they suggest that around at least 80 per cent of robbers are from such a background (for example, Kapardis 1988, Nugent et al 1989, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994).

**Recidivism and progression into armed robbery**

The research evidence suggests that for the majority of armed robbery offenders, involvement in criminal activity, both robbery and other crime, has characterised their way of life. Armed robbery offenders are frequently observed to have ‘graduated’ to armed robbery after having tried many forms of non-violent crime, such as breaking and entering, motor vehicle theft, receiving stolen goods, fraud and so on (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Kapardis 1988, Nugent et al 1989, Gill 2000). Indeed, in one study (Gill 2001) several armed robbers who specialised in robbing CIT specifically indicated that a wide range of offending experience was invaluable in the commission of their CIT robberies.

Given their self-reported levels of offending, it is of little surprise that convicted armed robbers have extensive prior criminal records. In one Australian study (Nugent et al 1989) over half of the armed robbery offenders indicated that they had been convicted of breaking and entering,
while a further 43 per cent and 25 per cent had been convicted of stealing a motor vehicle and possessing an illicit drug, respectively. In terms of institutional history, 43 per cent of armed robbers in the same study indicated that they had spent time in a juvenile institution, while 62 per cent said that they had served time in prison before; over one fifth reporting that they had been to prison three or more times. This general pattern has been observed by others both in Australia and overseas too (for example, Walsh 1986, BOCSAR 1987, Kapardis 1988, Wright & Decker 1997).

The AIC’s recent Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) project also illustrates these trends. DUCO was designed to examine the interplay between adult male, female and juvenile offenders’ drug using and criminal careers (see Makkai & Payne 2003, Johnson 2004, Prichard & Payne 2005). The adult male component of the project included the collection of self-reported offending and drug-using information from a sample of 2,135 convicted offenders in four jurisdictions (Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory). Relevant to this discussion is that data on 189 self-reported, regular armed robbery offenders were collected. Analysis of these data indicates that the majority of the regular armed robbery offenders reported that they commenced regular armed robbery in around their late teens to early twenties (Figure 2). Overall, regular armed robbery offenders had an average of seven lifetime armed robbery charges, five convictions and two sentences to prison. However, according to these offenders their actual level of armed robbery offending was far greater than was officially reported, with over two thirds (65 per cent) reporting that the police never or rarely found out about the times that they committed armed robbery.

**Figure 2: Age that DUCO males reported that they became regular armed robbery offenders**

![Figure 2: Age that DUCO males reported that they became regular armed robbery offenders](source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File])

**Drug and alcohol use**

Matthews (2002) has found that the use of drugs by armed robbers during a robbery takes two major forms. The first is that the person takes drugs or consumes alcohol and then

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2 Regular armed robbery offenders in the DUCO study include those offenders who described themselves as ‘regular’ offenders.
decides to carry out a robbery. The second is that they decide to do a robbery and then take drugs or consume a quantity of alcohol to help them get through it. Of the offenders who do use drugs, this use is typically extensive. Almost two thirds of offenders in one study (BOCSAR 1987) who were convicted of eight or more robbery offences were regular drug (and mainly heroin) users. This demonstrates that drug dependency is an important ingredient in robbery offending, and in particular in the pattern of offending of those with multiple robbery convictions. More recent work by BOCSAR in this area (Chilvers & Weatherburn 2003, Donnelly, Weatherburn & Chilvers 2004) continues to support this.

While drug and alcohol use is strongly linked to crimes like armed robbery, the relationship is not necessarily causal, but rather forms part of a general lifestyle that is bound up with a complex mixture of social relations, attitudes and life experiences. DUCO findings also support this point, with each of the three component studies finding that the relationship between drug use and crime varied (Makkai & Payne 2003, Johnson 2004, Prichard & Payne 2005). For instance, Makkai & Payne (2003) found that adult male offenders of different crime types started their offending and drug use at different ages and that the length of time between onset and persistence of their criminal activity and drug use varied. However, contrary to popular opinion (and with the exception of offenders who were classified as regular drug sellers) offending, on average, was found to precede the onset of drug use. That is, that their drug use did not initially cause them to offend. What can be said of these offenders though is that once they started to take drugs, this use frequently played an important role in shaping their criminal careers.

As already outlined above, many armed robbers cite money for drugs as a key motivating factor for their crimes. However, some armed robbers report that they do not engage in regular drug taking, particularly those offenders engaged in high risk armed robberies. For example, Walsh (1986) found that many more professional-level armed robbers than opportunists reported being sober and undrugged during their robberies to obtain money or goods (27 versus 7, respectively). Gill (2001) observed similar differences between robbers of CIT and other targets. While the DUCO data do not differentiate between different types of armed robber in terms of their opportunism or professionalism, the data nevertheless suggest that there may be two broad groups of armed robbers in the sample, defined by their patterns of drug use. The first appears to engage in regular, high use drug-taking, and the second in little or no drug-taking. For instance, of the 188 regular armed robbers who responded to the question about drug use in the six months before they were in prison, 41 per cent indicated that they did not use heroin at all, while 35 per cent reported that they used heroin several times a day (Table 4). A similar pattern was evident for amphetamine use, although the distinction was not as clearly marked (or was absent) for the other drug types.

### Table 4: Regular armed robbers self-reported drug use in the six months before they were in prison (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug type</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Less than monthly</th>
<th>Once to several times a month</th>
<th>Once to several times a week</th>
<th>Once a day</th>
<th>Several times a day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>heroin</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cannabis</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cocaine</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amphetamines</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcohol</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding. Offenders could endorse more than one drug type.
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [Computer File]
Part 3: Defining commercial robbery offences

Targets
Commercial robbery targets include a wide range of settings, such as:

- banks, building societies and credit unions
- CIT
- totaliser agencies (for example, TAB)
- licensed premises (hotels/clubs/bottle shops)
- service stations
- convenience stores/supermarkets
- payrolls (in transit and upon delivery to business location)
- post offices
- restaurants

Perceived by offenders as one of the most profitable of targets, banks have in the past typically accounted for a large proportion of armed robberies of commercial establishments. For example, banks were the most popular target cited by convicted armed robbers in three Australian studies in the late 1980s (BOCSAR 1987, Kapardis 1988, Nugent et al 1989). These findings are generally reflected in similar studies overseas (for example, Erickson 1996), although in the UK building societies appear to be the most preferred target (Morrison & O’Donnell 1994, Matthews 2002). Like banks, robberies of CIT are lucrative but are much less frequently targeted by robbers (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994). This is because they are high risk—guards have to be confronted directly and there are higher levels of security than found in most other targets (Gill 2001). Further Australian research on armed robbery targets is required to produce a more recent picture of events. In the next few years the NARMP will begin to provide better insight into target trends.

Number of offenders
Australian research indicates that most armed robberies, even of commercial establishments, are committed by sole offenders (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Borzycki 2003, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003, Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004). However, the research evidence also suggests that the number of offenders involved in armed robbery varies by the type of weapon used (Kapardis 1988, Borzycki 2003, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003). For example, in one study (Mouzos & Borzycki 2003) 63 per cent of firearm robberies involved two offenders—firearms were also found to be used more often in the professional armed robberies. The majority of knife and syringe robberies were found to be committed by offenders acting alone. Similarly, in another study (Kapardis 1988), the majority of offenders acting in pairs (84 per cent) and gangs of three or more (80 per cent) used firearms, while less of the loners (73 per cent) did so.

Economic proceeds
The most significant factor that differentiates professional robbers of commercial establishments from other types of robbers appears to be the value of the takings, where professional armed robberies often result in high rewards (Walsh 1986, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003). In one Australian study (Mouzos & Borzycki 2003) the amount stolen by professional armed robbers ranged from a minimum of about $700 to as high as $20,000 in one incident. In contrast, the maximum amount netted in opportunistic and amateur armed robberies was about $1,500. Similar differences in takings have been observed overseas (for example, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994, Matthews 1996, Gill 2000).

Data from the NARMP indicate that higher reported average values are associated with firearm robberies (mean=$14,085) than with other types of weapons, such as knives (mean=$2,200) or syringes (mean=$783) (Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004). There are a number of possible reasons as to why firearm robberies might result in higher average losses. Locations with high value property (like banks) may employ more security and offenders may perceive that they need highly dangerous weapons in order to instil enough fear into victims in
order to overcome the security measures. It is also possible that higher average gains are a product of better offender planning: more professional offenders who engage in substantial pre-offence planning and also target properties with the potential for high takings may simply opt for such weapons (Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004).

**Weapon use**

As briefly outlined above, while knives are the most frequently used weapon in all types of armed robberies, the research evidence indicates that offenders are more likely to carry a firearm in the robbery of commercial establishments (particularly robberies of financial institutions) than in any other setting (BOCSAR 1987, Nugent et al 1989, Mouzos & Borzycki 2003, Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004). Possible reasons for this have already been highlighted (that is, the victim fear/compliance factor). However, it appears that the type of firearm used in banks at least has changed over time (Matthews 2002, Borzycki 2003). In Australian bank robberies in the early to mid 1980s, pistols were used more often than longarms (rifles and shotguns), but the reverse held true for the late 1980s. However, between 1998 and 2002 pistols were once more used in the majority (68 per cent) of robberies involving firearms (37 per cent of all armed robbery incidents) (Borzycki 2003). Similar patterns have been observed in the UK (Matthews 2002). It is not clear why these shifts in weapon use have occurred, although an increasing proportion of pistols relative to other firearms is similar to trends observed for other violent crimes, like homicide (see Grabosky & Mouzos 1999).

Borzycki (2003) has also observed that the most dramatic change in weapon use over time is among offender gangs (three or more offenders). In the 1980s, almost all gangs used weapons during bank robberies, with almost half of these involving pistols and around half involving longarms. However, between 1998 and 2000, 62 per cent of bank robberies committed by gangs involved no weapon, with only around 10 per cent and six per cent involving pistols and longarms, respectively. Borzycki suggests that this change is linked to what she describes as a de-professionalisation of armed robbery in this country, where there has also been a trend towards less planning (for example, the use of disguises) and the use of intimidation through large numbers of offenders rather than through the use of firearms.

**Injuries**

Research evidence strongly indicates that the number of victim injuries (of a physical nature) caused by firearms is relatively few compared to other weapon types (Gabor 1994, Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004). While these weapons can result in far more serious injuries than other weapons when used, they are infrequently discharged (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994). One Australian study (BOCSAR 1987) found that among armed robberies resulting in serious physical injury, 81 per cent of these injuries were inflicted by weapons other than guns. This finding was of particular interest given that there were many more firearms robberies than robberies involving other weapons: 193 versus 95, respectively. This general pattern is also reflected in the NARMP data (Borzycki, Sakurai & Mouzos 2004) and so appears to support the argument that most robbers who carry firearms are not necessarily intent on causing injury, but that a weapon is carried to ensure swift victim compliance.

Where victims do resist armed robbers, physical injury is much more likely to occur (Cornish & Clarke 1986, BOCSAR 1987, Morrison & O’Donnell 1994). In one study (BOCSAR 1987) 67 per cent of the armed robberies resulting in serious injury, the victim offered physical resistance. This compares with 33 per cent where there was no victim resistance.

The presence of multiple offenders also appears to pose an increased risk of victim injury. In one Australian study (Kapardis 1988), a victim was found to be four times more likely to be injured if a gang of three or more offenders was involved rather than a lone offender. This was particularly the case where alcohol and loaded firearms were involved. Similarly, in a UK study (Morrison & O’Donnell 1994), where targets had no physical barriers and there were multiple offenders there was also an increased risk of victims experiencing physical injuries. For example, in robberies of banks, building societies and betting shops, the potential victims were nearly always located behind secure screens, making direct physical contact nearly impossible. Almost all of these offences were found to be carried out by one or two offenders and in 98 per cent of cases there were no injuries. However, in the case of attacks on CIT vans, one-quarter of all incidents involved three or more robbers who, by the very nature of
this offence, were in a situation where physical engagement with their victims was often possible and necessary (that is, the offenders would have to grab the bag of money from a guard’s hand). The injury rate for this type of target was found to be ten times that of banks, building societies and betting shops. While 10 per cent of attacks on CIT vans involving one robber resulted in injury to a victim, this was found to rise to 18 per cent when two robbers were involved and to 25 per cent when three robbers were involved.
Part 4: Implications for situational crime prevention

Displacement

Target hardening, through the use of security screens, safes, security guards and so on, has been shown to reduce the risks of robbery for certain sorts of targets (like banks) but whether this has been at the expense of displacing crime elsewhere is less certain. This lack of clarity derives in most part from the fact that crimes prevented, as against those committed, leave no evidence that they have been prevented (BOCSAR 1987, Clarke 1990), but also because little research work in this area appears to have been conducted. The small number of studies that deal with the issue of the displacement of armed robbery are divided in their findings, some suggesting that situational crime prevention measures have had minimal displacement effects (for instance, Nugent et al 1989, Clarke 1990, Clarke, Field & McGrath 1991) while others indicate that such measures may have had a greater impact on offenders (for example, BOCSAR 1987, Matthews 1996, 2002).

Displacement itself can take on a number of different forms, including temporal, geographical, tactical, target and offence displacement (BOCSAR 1987). In short, these five categories of displacement refer to the following:

- **temporal** – changes in the time in which the offence is to occur;
- **geographical** – changes in the general area in which the offence is to occur;
- **tactical** – changes in the method (for example, the number of offenders)
- **target** – changes in the type of location (for example, from banks to building societies)
- **offence** – changes in the type of criminal activity (for example, from robbery to burglary)

Most research that was examined for this report concentrates on geographical, tactical and target displacement and so the following discussion focuses on these three types of displacement.

Geographical displacement

Research undertaken by Clarke (1990) and Clarke, Field & McGrath (1991) suggests that little geographical displacement of armed robbery occurs across Australian jurisdictions. This finding continues to be supported by ABS’s Recorded Crime – Victims data on armed robbery, which indicates that the frequency of armed robbery has been steadily decreasing in each state and territory since the beginning of this decade (ABS 2000-2005).

Research conducted by BOCSAR (1987) suggests that geography may play less of a role for personal robbery and burglary than for commercial robbery. Most offenders in the study who committed commercial robberies said that they travelled outside of their immediate neighbourhood to commit their offences, suggesting that these types of robberies do not present problems of localised crime. BOCSAR argues that with these more mobile offenders the potential to prevent commercial robbery by concentrating policing and other security resources in a particular area may be limited as the offenders would simply target another, more vulnerable, area.

Tactical displacement

Only the work by BOCSAR (1987) dealt with the issue of tactical displacement in any detail. As this research is now nearly 20 years old, some caution must be used in interpreting the findings. Their findings suggest that professional armed robbers would be the most likely type of offender to alter their methods in response to security measures designed to deter them, particularly where there are multiple offenders undertaking a robbery. The response of one offender interviewed to questions about situational deterrents was that all of them might deter if you were by yourself, but that ultimately it depended on adjusting your methods and level of organisation to your objectives (how much money you wanted). Contrasting this view were the more opportunistic and drug-dependent offenders who committed their offences out of a sense of desperation, appeared to have little regard for whether they were caught, nor how much money they obtained from the robberies they committed. As such, these offenders were unlikely to demonstrate any form of tactical displacement.
Target displacement

This form of displacement received the most attention in the literature reviewed. Nugent et al (1989), Clarke (1990) and Clarke, Field & McGrath (1991) all found that there was little (if any) displacement to other targets, such as credit societies, payrolls, pharmacies, milk bars and service stations, because of target hardening in financial institutions. However, BOCSAR (1987) found that the type of offender largely dictated whether an offender would be put off robbing a target because of target hardening. That is to say, offenders who typically committed robberies against multiple targets were found to move to a different type of target in response to blocked opportunities in relation to their initial choice. Whereas, offenders who specialised in a particular type of robbery (for example, bank robbery) tended to not be so easily put off by target hardening. BOCSAR’s findings may not necessarily be at odds with the former findings, but could represent a slightly different profile of offender. Also, it is important to note that it is now 15 years or more since much of the research on target displacement was undertaken and new, softer targets have emerged since that time (for example, gambling rooms in pubs). As already noted at several points in this report, more research is needed to gain an insight into certain recent armed robbery trends, particularly in terms of targets and offenders’ attitudes towards these.

Raised earlier in this report, recent evidence seems to suggest that target hardening in banks may be causing traditional career robbers to turn to other, more easily obtained, sources of illicit income (through pubs and clubs) leaving only the more opportunistic and spontaneous robbers to victimise banks. Although there are no hard data available to support this idea, research by Mouzos & Borzycki (2003) provides some indirect support. They found that armed robberies of licensed premises are unlike other robberies in the retail sector. Specifically, victims in licensed premises are most often victimised by firearms (55 of 89 victims) whereas victims in other retail settings are mostly subjected to armed robberies with knives. This pattern is more like that observed for robberies of financial institutions.

If the above hypothesis is correct, then there are some significant issues for situational crime prevention. The first is that licensed premises may need to learn from the experiences of the banking industry and adopt some of the target hardening measures that have become commonplace in most banks. The second is that banks themselves may be increasingly confronted by a new type of offender that could be described as being more desperate, drug dependent (probably intoxicated at the time of the offence) and volatile.

The role of amphetamines

Given the possibility that a new, more desperate, type of offender may be emerging, recent trends in Australia towards a greater use of amphetamines and ATS among offenders (Schulte, Mouzos & Makkai 2005) are of concern. The use of amphetamines and ATS has been found to be associated with more violent behaviour. For instance, regular amphetamine users in one study (Makkai & Payne 2003) were more likely to be engaged in violent offending, such as physical assault, and were significantly more likely to act impulsively with no planning. At this stage it is too early to predict what the future consequences of greater amphetamine/ATS use will be on armed robbery offenders and their victims. However, where offenders are unpredictable and irrational and where their decision-making is erratic (whether because of drug use or otherwise), it makes the development of effective situational crime prevention measures challenging.
References


