Jumping the gun?
Reflections on armed violence in Papua New Guinea
Nicole Haley and Robert Muggah*

Firearms have played a significant role in exacerbating invidious forms of violence in Papua New Guinea. Victimisation rates in the National Capital District (NCD) are amongst the highest in the world. Port Moresby, the country’s largest and fastest growing urban centre, accounts for some 34 per cent of all nationally reported crimes, despite accounting for only 5 per cent of the country’s population. The Southern Highlands Province (SHP) is also rife with violent armed conflict. This feature reports on the findings from an armed violence assessment administered in NCD and SHP by the Small Arms Survey with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This assessment yields a number of critical and counter-intuitive findings that take issue with the conventional wisdom concerning armed violence in Papua New Guinea and should influence prospective interventions to mitigate insecurity and reduce arms availability and demand.

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Introduction

In response to chronic armed violence in its urban centres and highland provinces, the government of Papua New Guinea initiated a far-reaching review of its firearm legislation and controls in 2005. This review included the establishment of a National Guns Control Committee, a road-show that brought the issue of firearm control to the top of the national agenda and culminated in a National Gun Summit and a lengthy – as yet unanswered – report to Parliament. Firearms, while few in real numbers relative to the population, were determined to be a major contributor to real and perceived insecurity – and an obstacle to good governance, improved state security and sustainable development.

This paper traces the findings of an armed violence assessment administered in Papua New Guinea’s National Capital District (NCD) and Southern Highlands Province (SHP) by the Small Arms Survey with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The assessment contributed to and continues to further the public debate and policy interest as manifest in the July 2005 Gun Summit, builds upon the growing body of research on small arms in the Pacific, and offers the most comprehensive mapping of armed violence ever undertaken in the country. It also advances a forward-looking agenda by raising an array of findings that call into question received wisdoms concerning armed violence in Papua New Guinea and comes at a time when there is a rare opportunity to take some decisive steps towards addressing the problems identified. Specifically it challenges donors, practitioners, researchers and advocates alike to reconsider conventional arms control and disarmament approaches in contexts such as Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is a young nation that is chronically affected by armed violence. Its citizens are currently experiencing victimisation rates that are amongst the highest registered anywhere in the world. Firearms (both craft-made and factory-made) have played a significant role in exacerbating the country’s law and order problems and have given rise to invidious forms of violence including maiming, abduction and kidnapping for ransom.1 The costs both in human and material terms have been substantial.

The prospects for improving security in Papua New Guinea appear rather bleak. Armed violence is heterogeneous and diverse, such that the country is made up of many different law and order environments.2 It is through recognising this that interventions might be better developed and targeted. A number of critical and counter-intuitive findings are presented in this paper that should inform and influence prospective interventions designed to mitigate insecurity and reduce arms availability and demand.

Owing to time constraints arising from the need to generate preliminary findings in time for the Gun Summit, it was determined that the above assessment should be purposive and non-random, consisting of two area-based assessments – one urban, the other rural – which would assess the causes, scale and distribution of armed violence in two of the most...
conflict- and crime-ridden parts of the country. The two regions were primarily chosen because of their respective reputations and because the little objective crime data available made it evident that the urban centres of Port Moresby and Lae, as well as the Highlands provinces, were acutely affected by armed violence.

In all, 292 household surveys were completed at 12 survey locations in NCD: six suburbs (Gerehu, Ensisi, Waigani, Gordons, Tokorara and Hohola) and six settlements (Yadavada, Kaugere, Oro, Two-Mile, Morata and Nine-Mile). In SHP, some 235 household surveys were completed. They and the focus groups were administered in five of the province's eight districts (Ialibu/Pangia, Imbonggu, Koroba/Kopiago, Mendi and Tari) and in 15 of its 30 local government (LLG) areas.

Violence trends

Papua New Guinea's law and order situation has attracted much national and international attention. It is invariably described as deteriorating, with many commentators asserting that crime rates have increased steadily over the last 20 to 30 years. Indeed, local and international media reports suggest that criminal violence is rampant, small arms proliferation rife, and provinces are troubled by ethnic or tribal violence. The findings arising from this assessment that urban centres are troubled by criminal violence, whereas the mostly rural Highlands provinces were acutely affected by armed violence.

Available surveillance data does not support the widespread view that crime is at an all-time high. Instead it suggests that overall crime levels and crime in Port Moresby are falling, and have been doing so since 2000.

Table 1: Reported crime incidents, 2000–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Capital District</td>
<td>5,205</td>
<td>5,132</td>
<td>4,161</td>
<td>4,650</td>
<td>3,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal/Border</td>
<td>4,317</td>
<td>3,843</td>
<td>3,773</td>
<td>3,736</td>
<td>1,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlands</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>1,430</td>
<td>1,526</td>
<td>2,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islands</td>
<td>1,614</td>
<td>1,674</td>
<td>1,543</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>1,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>13,292</td>
<td>12,043</td>
<td>11,285</td>
<td>11,813</td>
<td>9,456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is difficult to analyse these figures. Officially crime is declining, but surveillance data, where it exists, is limited, incomplete, notoriously unreliable, and shows a marked urban bias. Massive under-reporting and under-coverage mean that less than half of all crime is now recorded. That said, this survey and the 2004 Port Moresby Community Crime Survey showed that reporting rates in Port Moresby are much the same as they were a decade or so ago, suggesting that crime in NCD might well be falling or at least stabilising.

The situation in the Highlands is much less ambiguous. In contrast to the national crime trends reviewed above, reported crime in the Highlands is at an all-time high. However, only a small fraction of actual crimes occurring in the Highlands are reported. To let one example stand for many, SHP's Western Regional Administrator has revealed that there were more than 200 conflict-related deaths in Tari District in 2003/04, yet the National Crime Summary for 2004 has recorded only 38 murders for the entire province.

Despite the limitations inherent in Papua New Guinea's criminal surveillance data, it is possible to make crude cross-country comparisons. For example, there were 97 reported murders (33 per 100,000) in NCD in 2004. By contrast, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) with a population of 324,000 – comparable to that of NCD – recorded no murders in 2004. The ACT also experienced far fewer armed robberies. In 2004 there were 862 reported armed robberies (294 per 100,000 persons) in NCD, whereas in the ACT there were only 106 armed robberies (33 per 100,000).

Prior to our assessment, three previous studies had considered victimisation and insecurity in Papua New Guinea. All three studies had an urban focus. They offer opportunities for comparison with this survey. For example, Papua New Guinea was one of 13 countries covered in the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) 1992 International Crime Victimization Survey. That survey involved 1,583 respondents in Papua New Guinea – 597 of whom were resident in Port Moresby – and revealed that the country's prevalence rates with respect to assaults and threats (10.3 per cent), robbery (9.8 per cent) and sexual incidents (11.8 per cent) were higher than those reported in the other 12 countries/cities surveyed – Kampala, Dar es Salaam, Johannesburg, Cairo, Tunis, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Costa Rica, Beijing, Bombay, Jakarta and Manila.

Unlike this assessment, which focused specifically on armed violence, each of the previous studies considered both violent and non-violent crime. Doing so, the Safer Port Moresby Initiative’s Youth and Crime Survey found that 38 per cent of crimes perpetrated in Port Moresby were accompanied by violence and that 61 per cent of offenders used a weapon. By contrast, the 2004 Port Moresby Community Crime Survey found that violent crime accounted for 46 per cent of victimisation events. It also found that two thirds of NCD households had been victims of crime in the last 12 months, 57 per cent had been the victims of multiple crimes, 33 per cent had been the victims of repeat crime, and one household in eight had been the victim of crime ten or more times.
Violence and victimisation

Far from being generalised and prolific throughout the country, armed violence in Papua New Guinea is geographically and demographically specific. This survey, for instance, revealed that NCD's settlements and SHP's western Hela region were disproportionately affected by armed violence. The assessment found that in NCD 60-65 per cent of the most prevalent types of violence – domestic violence, inter-group fighting, armed robbery and armed assault – occurred in the settlements.17 Offenders are also disproportionately represented in the settlements – accounting for 90 per cent of police arrests between 1996 and 1998. That the settlements were disproportionately affected by violent crime was also borne out by the Community Crime Survey.18

Though armed violence is concentrated in specific regions and among certain groups, the assessment found that overall victimisation rates among households in NCD and SHP are higher than previously reported. The reasons for this are two-fold: surveillance in Papua New Guinea – like in other underdeveloped countries – is extremely weak and most assessments to date have not brought to bear the kind of robust and multi-source diagnostic tools used by the Small Arms Survey. These findings have implications for researchers and policy-makers alike and alert us to the fact that surveillance data should always be analysed with caution, as it will not necessarily reflect violence trends or victimisation rates.

Table 2 above provides a typology of violence and comparative victimisation rates as reported in the two survey areas. It shows that domestic violence is the principal type of victimisation and the primary contributor to insecurity in both areas, but that social conflict and armed criminality are also important. It is important to review these victimisation trends in detail. Household surveys revealed that 50 per cent of NCD households and 51 per cent of SHP households were the victims of violent crime in the six months to May 2005. What is more, over one quarter of all households (26 per cent in NCD and 28 per cent in SHP) had been victimised more than once.

The survey also revealed that four out of five instances (80 per cent) of victimisation involved the use of a weapon, though not necessarily a firearm. Of those victimisation incidents where weapons were involved, bladed weapons and firearms were the weapons of choice. In all, 27 per cent of SHP households and 28 per cent of NCD households reported some form of victimisation involving a bush knife or axe in the previous six months, while 23 per cent of SHP households and 19 per cent of NCD households reported some form of victimisation involving a firearm. These findings are particularly important when reflecting on the relative utility of straightforward firearms collection or buy-back programmes in a context such as Papua New Guinea.

The household survey data concerning the typology of victimisation is confirmed by hitherto unpublished hospital and epidemiological data sourced from various hospitals and clinics. This data enables us to distil the role of firearms in victimisation as compared to other weapons. For instance, in-patient records and reports from Mendi and Tari hospitals in the Southern Highlands confirmed that victimisation involving bush knives and axes resulted in significantly more trauma admissions than victimisation involving firearms: at Mendi Hospital gunshot and bladed injuries resulted in 12 per cent and 41 per cent of all in-patient admissions respectively, while at Tari Hospital they accounted for 12 per cent and 25 per cent of serious trauma cases respectively.

Although bush knives and axes result in far more trauma admissions, firearm-related trauma is more likely to result in a lethal outcome. Indeed, while 82 per cent of the gunshot injuries treated at Tari Hospital between 2003 and 2005 proved fatal, only 30 per cent of the bush knife and axe injuries led to fatal outcomes. The Tari Hospital data also revealed that men are disproportionately affected by gunshot injuries – accounting for over 80 per cent of all cases of external injuries. There was no such bias in the case of bush knife and axe trauma. The Mendi Hospital data revealed similar patterns, although women accounted for a greater proportion of violence-related trauma admissions. Indeed, while women accounted for 47 per cent of all trauma admissions at Mendi Hospital between May 2004 and May 2005, they accounted for some 54 per cent of all violence-related admissions.19

Domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence, including that between co-wives, emerged as the chief cause of victimisation and related insecurity across both surveys. Specifically, domestic and family violence were reported to have affected 18 per cent and 26 per cent of all households in NCD and SHP in the six months prior to the survey. Although survey and focus group participants were willing frankly to discuss the issue of domestic violence, we submit that victimisation rates are still most likely under-reported, as further qualitative investigations

Table 2: Violence types and reported victimisation rates in SHP and NCD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence type</th>
<th>Percentage of SHP households victimised</th>
<th>Percentage of NCD households victimised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-group fighting</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed assault</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed robbery</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats/intimidation/extortion</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault/rape</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted murder</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
indicated that only the most serious cases – those that resulted in injury or trauma of some kind – were being reported. This is not altogether surprising. Research undertaken by the Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission (PNG LRC) in 1983/84 revealed that a third to two thirds of men in the country, 95 per cent of men in the Highlands and 57 per cent of rural women considered it acceptable for husbands to beat their wives. We note, too, that in many parts of the country cases of domestic violence only go before the village court if there is obvious trauma, such as broken bones.

Our assessment also revealed that domestic violence is likely to involve the use of weapons. Of those households reporting domestic violence, 63 per cent in SHP and 77 per cent in NCD reported the use of a weapon such as a firearm, bush knife, blunt instrument, fire or ‘red hot’ metal. These findings do not just confirm those of the PNG LRC survey on domestic violence (which evinced significant levels of victimisation involving the use of weapons) but also reveal increasingly high levels of serious domestic/family violence – something policy, advocacy and research communities will need to address more purposively in future.

Domestic violence is not, it seems, distributed evenly across all regions and households. In NCD, for example, a greater proportion of affected households were located in the settlements. We also found a correlation between province or region of origin and the likelihood that a household had been affected by domestic violence. Specifically we found that 24 per cent of households originally from the Highlands or Gulf Province and 23 per cent of households originally from the Central Province were affected by domestic violence. By contrast, no Momase or Islands households reported domestic violence.

**Inter-group fighting**

Inter-group fighting emerged as a key source of insecurity and the second most likely form of victimisation in both NCD and SHP. In the case of SHP, this finding was not particularly surprising, given the attention tribal fighting in the province has attracted. The prevalence of inter-group fighting in Port Moresby is, however, a worrying new trend. Our assessment found that in NCD, in the six months prior to the survey, 18 per cent of respondent households had been victims of inter-group fighting, 27 per cent of households included someone who had been involved in inter-group fighting as a combatant, and 15 per cent of households included someone who had changed residence because of inter-group fighting. The assessment further revealed that 65 per cent of victimised households and 75 per cent of households that included a combatant or someone who had changed residence because of inter-group fighting were located in the settlements.

These findings warrant further investigation, especially as ‘tribal’ or inter-group fighting in Papua New Guinea has tended to be viewed as a Highlands problem. Was it predominantly households that were originally from the Highlands that were affected by inter-group fighting? The answer, surprisingly, is no – though it remains the case that a significant proportion of households originally from the Highlands had been affected. Importantly, the assessment found that almost one third of victimised households, one third of households with combatants, and over half of households that included someone who had changed residence because of inter-group fighting were originally from the Central Province. It also found that households originally from the Central, Gulf and Highlands provinces were all disproportionately affected by, and involved in, inter-group fighting, and that as such tribal or inter-group fighting is not a Highlands-specific problem.

Intriguingly, inter-group fighting in SHP now appears to be less prolific than it is in NCD. Specifically SHP respondents reported that, in the previous six months, 17 per cent of households had been the victim of inter-group fighting, 24 per cent included someone who had been involved in inter-group fighting as a combatant, and 11 per cent included someone who had changed residence because of inter-group fighting. In the case of SHP, the assessment found that most households affected by and involved in inter-group fighting were clustered in the western end of the province.

**Armed assault and armed robbery**

Armed assault and armed robbery were the next most commonly experienced forms of victimisation in SHP and NCD. SHP households surveyed reported that in the six months to May 2005, 13 per cent had been affected by armed assault and eight per cent by armed robbery. By contrast, 12 per cent of NCD households had been affected by armed assault and 15 per cent by an armed robbery. In both cases victimisation events were clustered in specific geographic areas. In SHP four out of five reported events occurred in the Hela region, while three out of five events occurred in NCD’s settlements.

**Murder and attempted murder**

Households that had experienced a murder or attempted murder were similarly clustered. In SHP at least four out of five victimisation events had occurred in the western end of the province. Alarmingly, 13 per cent of households in the Hela region reported an attempted murder in the six months prior to the survey, while seven per cent of households reported an actual murder. This compared with just three per cent (attempted murder) and one per cent (actual murder) in the east. Overall victimisation rates in NCD were similar to those found in the eastern end of SHP. They were also clustered in particular areas, such that all households reporting a murder and almost three quarters of those reporting an attempted murder were located in NCD settlements.

**Sexual assault and rape**

Sexual assault and rape remain a major concern in Papua New Guinea. Over eight per cent of respondents in SHP and three per cent in NCD reported that someone in their
household had been the victim of sexual assault or rape in the six months to May 2005. In SHP one in twelve households had been affected. In both cases, reported victimisation events were geographically clustered – 89 per cent of reported SHP incidents occurred in the Hela region, while 60 per cent of NCD’s victimised households were located in the settlements. Alarming, our survey revealed that rapes and sexual assaults in SHP and NCD typically involve the use of weapons, particularly firearms and bush knives. Indeed, this was so in all but one case reported to us. The survey also revealed that the vast majority of reported rapes occurred in the village, and often in the home, and in most cases the assailant(s) were known to the victim.

Although our household survey did not obtain data concerning the age or sex of the victims or details about the contexts in which the assaults took place, we were able to obtain some supplementary data from Tari and Kainantu hospitals which suggest that young girls are disproportionately affected. When reflecting on possible intervention strategies, victim profiles are critical. Taken collectively, the Tari and Kainantu data suggest that three quarters of sexual assault and rape victims are under 20. In the much smaller Tari sample, four out of five victims were actually 15 or younger, and 35 per cent were under five years of age. In the Kainantu sample 30 per cent of rape victims were 10 years or under, while 45 per cent were aged between 11 and 20. By way of comparison, a survey undertaken by General Hospital (PMGH) in the first quarter of 1985. Seemingly, young and very young girls make up a much greater percentage of rape victims than they did two decades ago.

Where violence occurs

The home emerged as the principal location for victimisation in this violence assessment, just as it had in the 2004 Port Moresby Community Crime Survey. Indeed, 26 per cent of all victimisation events reported to the NCD assessment team occurred in the home and 18 per cent in the immediate vicinity of the home. A further 30 per cent of victimisation events were reported to have occurred within the home community. In the Southern Highlands, 40 per cent of reported victimisation events occurred in the home, seven per cent in the immediate vicinity of the home, and 29 per cent in the home community. In both cases, three-quarters of all reported victimisation events occurred within the home community.

Firearm-related violence

In order to isolate the role of firearms in armed violence and victimisation, the assessment explored community views on guns and the prevalence of firearms. It found that the demand for firearms is robust in both NCD and SHP – over 40 per cent of respondents indicated that guns made them feel safer, while 41 per cent and 34 per cent of those surveyed in NCD and SHP respectively claimed that they would acquire such a weapon if they could. Many already owned weapons, claiming to hold them, inter alia, for self-protection, enforcing compensation arrangements, and status.

Perceptions concerning the prevalence of firearms, however, varied between regions, and even within them. For example, in SHP half of respondents felt that gun ownership was on the rise, while 45 per cent felt that gun numbers were static. For the most part it was people in the western end of the province who felt that gun ownership was increasing. By contrast, only 21 per cent of those surveyed in NCD felt that gun numbers were increasing. Almost half felt that gun numbers were static and close to a third actually felt they were decreasing.

There are variations in the types of weapons and their prevalence in various parts of Papua New Guinea. For example, although the reported prevalence of homemade shotguns, factory-made shotguns, M16s and AR15s, SLRs, and .22 rifles was remarkably similar in SHP and NCD, there were differences with respect to pump-action shotguns, handguns and hand grenades – all of which were twice as likely to be seen in Port Moresby. There were differences, too, as regards the types of weapons being seen in different parts of SHP. For instance, respondents in the Hela region mostly reported seeing homemade shotguns, single-shot factory-made shotguns and – to a lesser extent – pump-action shotguns, and reported seeing them at least five times as often as M16s or AR15s. In the east, however, where people were claiming to see firearms relatively infrequently, high-powered assault rifles such as M16s and AR15s, or SLRs accounted for a greater proportion of weapons seen.

Just as there were reported differences with respect to the types of weapons seen in SHP, the frequency with which people in particular areas claimed to have seen firearms of various types also varied. Respondents in the Hela region claimed to be seeing guns, albeit predominately homemade and single-shot factory-made shotguns, on a regular, if not daily basis, while people in the east claimed to see guns relatively infrequently. Although firearm sightings differed from region to region in SHP, no such variation was found in NCD.

Another indicator of firearm prevalence is market price. In SHP and NCD there was a strong relationship between the prevalence of particularly valued firearms and their market price. Predictably, the more sought after the firearm, the higher its price. Table 3 below lists reported firearm prices by type in mid-2005. Variations in price were evident in SHP, but not in NCD.

It was evident too that other forms of currency – particularly women and locally grown marijuana – are being used to acquire firearms and store-bought goods of various kinds in SHP’s remote areas where there is little cash and few income-earning opportunities.
Worryingly, the assessment revealed that ammunition supplies, previously thought to be tight, are in fact comparatively abundant and that prices are rapidly declining, especially in the Hela region, where new supply routes have opened up. As current pricing suggests, NATO standard ammunition (5.56 x 45 mm and 7.62 x 51 mm) is fairly abundant on the black market in SHP, but shotgun cartridges are increasingly hard to come by, relative to other ammunition types. This price differential has given rise to some quite innovative practices including the production of more sophisticated homemade firearms – ones that take 5.56 x 45 mm ammunition, ones that operate like traditional bolt-action rifles, and in some cases that are self-loading – as well as the production of modified ammunition, in which NATO standard ammunition is fitted into spent shotgun cartridges for use in homemade shotguns and pistols. Collectively these innovations represent potential catalysts for increased violence in the near future.

Table 3: Firearm types and their market prices (PGK, kina) in SHP by district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firearm type</th>
<th>NCD range (PGK)</th>
<th>NCD (average)</th>
<th>SHP range (PGK)</th>
<th>SHP (average)</th>
<th>Kopiango District (average)</th>
<th>Tari District (average)</th>
<th>Mendu District (average)</th>
<th>Ialibu’ Pangia and Imbonggu districts (average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homemade shotgun</td>
<td>100-800</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>100-500</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemade shotgun No 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>700-1,500</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory-made shotgun</td>
<td>200-6,000</td>
<td>2,105</td>
<td>400-5,000</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>2,667</td>
<td>1,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pump-action shotgun</td>
<td>1,500-14,000</td>
<td>6,393</td>
<td>1,500-10,000</td>
<td>4,344</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,200</td>
<td>4,290</td>
<td>3,785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M16/AR15</td>
<td>4,500-20,000</td>
<td>8,365</td>
<td>4,000-15,000</td>
<td>8,085</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,750</td>
<td>10,750</td>
<td>8,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLR</td>
<td>8,000-20,000</td>
<td>13,295</td>
<td>5,000-14,000</td>
<td>9,438</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,125</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>10,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handgun</td>
<td>1,000-7,000</td>
<td>2,720</td>
<td>200-3,000</td>
<td>1,025</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand grenade</td>
<td>400-2,000</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1,000-1,800</td>
<td>1,267</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine-gun</td>
<td>12,000-30,000</td>
<td>23,625</td>
<td>20,000-40,000</td>
<td>27,500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Causes of and responses to armed violence

This and past research has shown that there is no single cause of armed violence in Papua New Guinea. Micro-economic analyses of urban crime in the country have by and large taken the view that rapid population growth generates crime, suggesting that marginal youth are propelled into crime as a consequence of limited economic and employment opportunities. Papua New Guinean criminologist R Sikani concurs, pointing out that urban drift, the growth of large squatter settlements, the breakdown of traditional values, limited employment opportunities, and competition over resource ownership are all contributing to contemporary criminality. Anthropological accounts, however, have shown that other factors such as prestige or the desire to escape the expectations and demands of family often come into play as well. They have also shown that fighting, both as a recurrent and legitimate means of prosecuting claims and seeking restitution, is a feature of many PNG societies. As current pricing suggests, NATO standard ammunition (5.56 x 45 mm and 7.62 x 51 mm) is fairly abundant on the black market in SHP, but shotgun cartridges are increasingly hard to come by, relative to other ammunition types. This price differential has given rise to some quite innovative practices including the production of more sophisticated homemade firearms – ones that take 5.56 x 45 mm ammunition, ones that operate like traditional bolt-action rifles, and in some cases that are self-loading – as well as the production of modified ammunition, in which NATO standard ammunition is fitted into spent shotgun cartridges for use in homemade shotguns and pistols. Collectively these innovations represent potential catalysts for increased violence in the near future.
violence as the most common and troublesome forms of violence in their communities. Women attributed domestic violence to polygamy and/or promiscuity and to drug and alcohol abuse, while men considered jealousy, gambling, alcohol, marijuana and adultery as causal factors. In the east, jealousy and sorcery accusations also emerged as key causes of violence, with sorcery being invoked to explain to explain motor vehicle fatalities and other accidental deaths.

There was also general consensus that local leaders in the east are strong and that they continue to command respect. Specifically, it was asserted that they are quick to attend to disputes and that they work tirelessly to see conflicts resolved quickly, so as to diffuse the likelihood of further conflict. It was also asserted that they take family conflicts seriously – intervening quickly before the extended family becomes involved. Because of this we found considerable respect for the rule of law, despite deteriorating confidence in the police and judicial systems. Communities in the east, for instance, were prepared to have matters dealt with by the village courts rather than take matters into their own hands.

Despite their willingness and desire to solve disputes peacefully without recourse to violence, people in the east felt that it is increasingly difficult to do so, because of inflating compensation demands. Many lamented the contradictory nature of compensation, pointing out that while it contributes to the management of disputes, it is also crippling local economies. Men and women alike felt something should be done to limit compensation payments before they become completely unmanageable. They noted that compensation demands in the event of a death are now routinely in the order of PGK40,000-50,000 (US$13,000-16,000) plus pigs and up to PGK100,000 (US$33,000) in the case of motor vehicle accidents. To put this in perspective: the average incomes in the Ialibu-Pangia and Imbonggu districts amount to less than 100 kina (US$33) per person per year. Local public servants at Ialibu also saw a correlation between the weakness of the state and these high compensation payments, saying: “The law is weak so we must pay more in order to maintain peace.”

Compensation was also found to be causing problems in the Hela region, where the rule of law is comparatively weak and local leadership undermined by young thugs with guns. Armed violence was of particular concern to people in the west – although men and women tended to envision the root causes differently. Women, for instance, saw escalating bride prices as a huge problem, pointing out that large payments kept them in bad marriages (because they could not possibly repay the bride price in the event of a divorce), causing them and their children to suffer. Women were also concerned about the growing incidence of domestic and family violence. They saw three key factors as contributing to the problems they were experiencing – polygamy, gambling and marijuana. They were most concerned about polygamy and promiscuity, and linked with it the risk of exposure to HIV and AIDS.

Men identified the same factors, but ranked them in the reverse order. They felt marijuana was the key cause of armed violence in their community. Indeed, village leaders, local mediators, and peace and good order committees complained over and over again that their attempts to maintain law and order were being undermined by ‘marijuana boys’ who turn up at village court cases and support one or other of the involved parties on a ‘no win, no fee’ basis. Because of this, local leaders feel compelled to arm themselves when hearing disputes. Indeed, throughout the province, but particularly in the west, we encountered the view that the law and order situation had deteriorated to the point where ‘good people’ were arming themselves ‘for their own protection’. That this demand appears to be growing more robust has real implications for potential disarmament.

In the Southern Highlands resource conflict emerged as a key contributor to insecurity and a reason for acquiring firearms – particularly in the west. It was generally agreed that the upsurge in fighting in SHP coincided with the advent of resource development. Certainly many of the ongoing conflicts concern the distribution of oil and gas royalties and access to the ‘benefits’ of resource development. Much of the current conflict can be attributed to state failure: the failure to provide basic services such as health and education; the failure to mediate land and royalty disputes; the failure to address existing law and order problems; the failure to quell unrealistic expectations; and a lack of accountability in relation to the expenditure of funds generated by resource development. Throughout SHP, but particularly in the Hela region, one regularly encounters the sentiment that the money being generated through resource development is not being channelled back into rural areas, and this is an ongoing source of discontent.

The state’s failure to maximise and equitably distribute the benefits of resource development or to provide essential services in the Hela region has led to calls for the establishment of a separate Hela province, with many suggesting that if the Hela people continued to be denied essential services and a more equitable share of the benefits of resource development, then SHP would go the way of Bougainville. Certainly this was the mantra the assessment team encountered in the Tari area.

There are no services here … We are ready for a fight. If they don’t give us a Hela province we will fight … If we don’t get our province forget about the gas pipeline project. It won’t go … We men and boys are gathering guns. If...
opportunities would see violence reduced. Men, however, saw unemployment as the key contributor to violence. Most vocal about wanting to see the Vagrancy Act re-activated and about wanting to stop alcohol, citing alcohol as a key cause of violence in their communities. Women, too, were combating violence. For instance, women in NCD advocated a total ban on the sale of locally brewed alcohol such as ‘steam’.

There can be no doubt that the Hela region issue presents as a potential source of conflict in SHP. Indeed, people in the Hela region are arming themselves with the express purpose of causing widespread civil unrest should the national government fail to respond to their calls for the establishment of a separate province prior to the 2007 elections.

The problems in the Hela region alerted us to the fact that service delivery failure contributes to insecurity in that it gives rise, among other things, to contestation over non-state resources and access to non-government service. In SHP service delivery failure has seen public services become privatised, creating yet another source of conflict. Increasingly, those without cash resources are finding it difficult to utilise the judicial system and to access non-violent solutions to their problems. As such there can be no doubt that state failure is contributing to armed violence in SHP.

As in SHP, the NCD focus group participants were asked to identify the types and causes of violence in their communities. A number of key causal factors were identified, including: unemployment, school drop-outs, alcohol abuse, drug-trafficking and abuse, financial difficulties, family problems, lack of funds to pay school fees and peer pressure. Across NCD, unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, was held to be the single most important factor contributing to violence. Financial difficulties and alcohol and/or drug abuse were also widely seen to be the next most significant factors contributing to armed violence. NCD focus group participants expressed particular concern about the availability and consumption of locally brewed alcohol such as ‘steam’.

Despite these grim findings, affected communities agreed that there were a number of pragmatic and immediate interventions that might alleviate these factors. These included employment generation, programmes to reduce alcohol consumption, restrictions on carrying weapons, increased police presence and law enforcement, and compulsory education. As in SHP, views concerning the causes of violence tended to be structured by gender, with men and women having different views about the most effective ways of combating violence. For instance, women in NCD advocated a total ban on the sale of alcohol, citing alcohol as a key cause of violence in their communities. Women, too, were most vocal about wanting to see the Vagrancy Act re-activated and about wanting to stop the rural-urban drift. Men, however, saw unemployment as the key contributor to violence. More than the women, they felt that the creation of employment and income-generating opportunities would see violence reduced.

NCD residents pointed out that their communities were actively involved in trying to improve the security situation in their respective communities. Many had established community groups, neighbourhood watch initiatives, and peace and good order committees to mediate minor conflicts. Such committees were found to be particularly active in the settlements. Although people generally felt that these peace committees had strengthened law and order, it was also felt that compensation was on the rise, with some communities meeting up to five times a week at local parks to solve disputes, to discuss how compensation monies could be raised, or to agree upon demands to be imposed on other groups. As in SHP, it was felt that compensation demands were steadily inflating such that current levels of compensation were held to be unsustainable. It was also felt that rising compensation payments were contributing to greater cycles of retribution and violence.

Clearly, any effort to enact civilian disarmament will be a challenging enterprise in Papua New Guinea. Despite the havoc caused by guns, concern about rising compensation payments, and recognition that they are crippling livelihoods and contributing to the escalation of violence, the vast majority of respondents claimed that they would be unwilling to give up their guns unless the law and order situation improved. Specifically, they rejected the idea of gun buy-backs or ‘weapons for development’ programmes, arguing that such schemes would not work unless everyone disarmed simultaneously. Instead of being seen as part of the problem, guns were seen by many to be offering a degree of protection, with respondents in both SHP and NCD asserting: “I need my gun, it is my protection. It is my bodyguard.”

That said, respondents in NCD felt that firearms reduction might prove more successful if people received payment for their firearms and were provided with employment or other income-earning opportunities. Significantly, it was repeatedly noted that one of the many motivating factors for the acquisition of firearms, is the need to make a living. Indeed, many NCD focus group participants reported that people in their communities had obtained guns with the express purpose of leasing them out or using them to eke out a living through crime. This suggests that economic factors are contributing to the proliferation of firearms in NCD in a way that they are not in SHP, and proposed interventions will need to take account of this.

Conclusions – looking forward

As Dinnen rightly notes, external interventions need “to be grounded in a thorough understanding of the socio-economic and political complexities of the recipient countries”. Given the sheer size of mainland Papua New Guinea, large-scale external interventions of the kind undertaken in the Solomon Islands and on Bougainville are unlikely to succeed or be financially viable. Further, there is as yet little local support for gun surrenders or weapon-reduction initiatives. Certainly past initiatives have either failed or have tended to
yield mainly homemade weapons. Indeed, despite popularity amongst donors and policymakers, weapons reduction initiatives often target the wrong people, tend to enjoy only limited success, and can do more harm than good if they do not take proper account of the local context. For instance, reducing firearm numbers may well have little impact on violence against women – for as this survey has shown, SHP women are five times more likely to be admitted with a bladed injury as opposed to a gunshot injury. This is not to say that weapons reduction initiatives are doomed or that they have no merit, but that they should proceed cautiously and that in the local context, alternate small-scale local interventions focused on violence reduction and support to the customary rule of law – as compared to straight-out gun collection – will most likely prove productive. This was particularly evident in NCD, where many communities had established neighbourhood watch patrols and peace and good order committees to mediate minor conflicts as a means of improving and taking back responsibility for maintaining security in their communities.

In the absence of a strong state, civil society groups are seeking to combat the growing law and order problems in their areas. As Dinnen and Thompson point out, “women’s and church groups have been particularly active in the area of peacemaking and conflict resolution.” While undertaking this assessment we encountered several small-scale local initiatives which have not only proved successful, but self-sustaining. We are of the view that such initiatives might well be replicated elsewhere and that properly targeted donor support would not only see them grow, but would most likely yield additional results. These successful projects share several key characteristics: they were designed and developed locally such that they value and draw upon local knowledge and cultural resources; they engage and gainfully occupy the local youth; they have empowered local leaders; and they have enhanced customary governance. The last feature is particularly critical, because when local leadership is strong, law and order can be maintained, even in the absence of effective police and judicial systems. The different prevailing security situations in SHP demonstrate this.

In sum, this article finds that weapons reduction initiatives such as a national gun amnesty demonstrate this. Effective police and judicial systems. The different prevailing security situations in SHP when local leadership is strong, law and order can be maintained, even in the absence of enhanced customary governance. The last feature is particularly critical, because when local leadership is strong, law and order can be maintained, even in the absence of effective police and judicial systems.

Notes


8 This assessment found that 48 per cent of the victimisation events reported to the NCD team and only 16 per cent of the violent crimes reported to the SHP team had been reported to the police. It also found that reporting rates are geographically and demographically differentiated, such that crimes occurring in areas where there is a police presence were more likely to be reported than those occurring in remote rural areas where there are no longer any police.


10 U Zvekic and A Alvazic del Frate, Criminal victimisation in the developing world, UNICRI publication No 55, Rome, UN Intergovernmental Crime and Justice Research Institute, 1995.


13 Ibid.

14 Zvekic and Alvazic del Frate, op cit.


16 NRI, op cit.

Finding the evidence: The links between weapon collection programmes, gun use and homicide rates in Cambodia

Christina Wille*

Cambodia is a typical example of a post-conflict country where the lack of easily available data to guide policy design is one of the fundamental challenges to be addressed. While Cambodia has benefited from sustained Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) collection and destruction programmes since 1998, these have not been accompanied by any data analysis on the impact of gun proliferation and use or on these destruction programmes. In 2005, the Small Arms Survey (SAS) collected data on firearm morbidity and mortality spanning the last ten years. The objective was to develop methods that can be used for data generation in countries without systematic data collection. Using hospital admissions records and a review of the main English newspaper, the data shows that collection and destruction programmes have made a significant difference to human security in Cambodia. The study also reveals that even where no official data is available in a country, researchers can often derive useful indicators.

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