



The Nature and Impact of Joy-Riding in Priorswood.

A Report to the Priorswood Task-Force on Joyriding

Authors:

Michael Rush,
Paula Brudell
Aogán Mulcahy

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Public concern about joy-riding and car crime is hugely variable. In recent months, the riots in the suburbs of Paris – which involved hundreds of cars being burnt out on a nightly basis – generated widespread alarm, and prompted far-reaching debates about the links between social cohesion, social exclusion and crime. Meanwhile in communities throughout Ireland, the regular, almost nightly occurrence of young people burning ‘robbed cars’ in front of appreciative audiences goes, in the absence of a fatality, unreported. Once a fatality occurs the young people involved are portrayed as hyenas and pariahs amidst public uproar. Shortly afterwards, the media attention dies down and the joy-riding and car-burning returns with customary regularity as a nightly occurrence played out before local spectators. It is however a nightly occurrence which impacts in profoundly negative ways on the quality of life of entire neighbourhoods, whose residents are faced with the nocturnal public spectacle of joy-riding and who awake to the squalor of burnt-out vehicles outside their homes. It also brings the risk of serious injury and death, and absorbs huge financial resources.

The Priorswood Task-Force on Joy-riding was established in 1998 to address the complex phenomenon of joy-riding at a local level. The Task Force can without doubt claim a significant degree of success in reducing the level of joy-riding in the area, and this report is published in the wake of seven years of concerted effort on its part to address the problem. Nonetheless, even with these efforts, joy-riding has remained a regular occurrence in the Priorswood area, and the area continues to be characterised as a joy-riding ‘hot spot’.

Against this background, this report considers the origins, activities and impact of the Task-Force. In addition to examining the organisation in detail, we consider two other key perspectives on joy-riding: the views and experiences of young people – including joy-riders and non-joy-riders – in the area, as well as adult residents of the area. We draw on these three distinct perspectives to analyse the problem of joy-riding and to evaluate the Task-Force’s response to it. We demonstrate that despite a degree of success, joy-riding and the burnt-out cars left in its wake remain a prominent feature of life in Priorswood, as elsewhere in Ireland, a feature which for many is experienced as one element of a broader sense of government disinterest and civic abandonment.

AREA PROFILE¹

Priorswood is considered a relatively new residential area within the greater Coolock area on the Northside of Dublin. Building development began approximately 35 years ago and the area is still expanding. Priorswood is situated about 7 miles from the City Centre, on the northern boundary of Dublin, just south of Dublin Airport and in close proximity to the M50 motorway. Due west of Priorswood is the Clonshaugh Industrial Estate, the residential area of Darndale and the Malahide Road lie to the east, and to the south is the residential area of Coolock and the Northside Shopping Centre. The Priorswood environs therefore include a mix of major shopping and industrial developments, national and international transport infrastructures and extensive suburban residential developments. The immediate catchments consist of five housing estates: Clonshaugh, Darndale, Belcamp, Moatview, and Ferrycarraig. These include municipal local authority housing estates, and privately purchased estate houses. Cara Park and Northern Close are group housing schemes and St. Dominics and Tara Lawns are official halting sites. The group housing schemes and official halting sites are occupied by the Travelling Community with a population of 338 inhabitants. These are relatively minor developments when compared to the scale of Clonshaugh, Darndale, Belcamp, Moatview and Ferrycarrig.

The Priorswood area as a whole is characterised by high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, relatively high unemployment rates (10 %), a very large youth population and a consequential range of youth-related social problems including joy-riding, illegal drug use and early school leaving. Just over half (51.4 %) of the inhabitants of Priorswood are aged 24 or under and 78.2 % of the inhabitants are under the age of 45. Children under 14 constitute 27.6 % of the local population. The percentage of adult inhabitants in paid employment is enumerated at 56 % in the 2002 Census. Few residents (8 %) have progressed to third level education. Atypically in a country with the highest percentage of home-ownership in Europe, Priorswood has a high concentration of municipal housing within its mixed economy of housing. The Clonshaugh area of Priorswood is more consistent with national patterns of home-ownership, and is predominantly characterised by privately purchased houses and a comparatively more affluent social mix.

Priorswood has two primary or national schools – St. Francis and St. Thomas. Like the vast majority of national schools in Ireland, St. Francis and St. Thomas are publicly funded and delivered on a statutory and voluntarily basis by the local Catholic diocese, on the basis of universal access. The local Priorswood Community Development Project is situated in the Outreach centre on Clonshaugh Drive, where the Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding meetings were ordinarily held. There is no secondary school in the area and most children attend the nearby Colaiste Dhulaigh that serves the greater Coolock area. There are a number of local family, community and youth initiatives and the introduction of the Home School Liaison service is a highly regarded contribution to the local welfare infrastructure as is the New Life Youth Centre (a Catholic diocesan initiative).

The Priorswood area falls under the remit of the North East Drugs Task Force, the Northside Partnership and is designated as an area of socio-economic disadvantage under the RAPID [Revitalising Areas through Planning Investment and Development] programme. The area is divided into the wards of Priorswood A & B for electoral and demographic enumeration.

¹ The area profile relies heavily on data contained in the Priorswood Community Development Project – Strategic Plan

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the historical and legislative context of joy-riding, and reviews the main research perspectives on joy-riding. The term ‘joy-riding’ is usually used to refer to the practice of stealing cars and driving them at high speeds or in other dangerous ways. In reality, joy-riding is a more complex issue than this, involving aspects of youth culture, petty crime, structural marginalisation, and the symbolic and material significance of the car in modern society. Despite the considerable difficulties involved in establishing a legal definition of this behaviour (discussed below), the term itself has nevertheless become firmly embedded in popular culture. Joy-riding has featured in several major films (including the Irish film *Accelerator*), numerous video games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, and is prominent in journalistic commentary on disadvantage and alienation (Campbell 1993).

While joy-riding has a high profile in public debate, with the exception of work by Farrington (2001), Ó Cadhla (2001) and others there have been relatively few dedicated Irish studies of it. Joy-riding has been the subject of several research projects in Northern Ireland (Kilpatrick 1994; McCullough et al 1990; Rowlett 2003), and while many similarities are evident in terms of the socio-economic background of joy-riders in both jurisdictions, the specific conditions surrounding joy-riding in Northern Ireland also suggest that direct comparisons between North and South are likely to be limited in scope.

Much debate about joy-riding in Ireland was conducted in the media, although this has been sporadic in nature. For example, during the early 1980s when concern about joy-riding ran high, the media devoted considerable attention to it. Ó Cadhla, for instance, argues that the re-opening of Fort Mitchell Prison (Spike Island) in 1985 specifically for joy-riders followed ‘a moral panic in the media’ (2001:83). Similarly, Rothman claimed that: ‘An artificial stimulation of public anger, not related to the reality of the problem but to the commercial needs of the media had dictated public policy on where resources should be applied. The decision on Spike Island seems to have been made first in the papers’ (cited in McVerry 1985: 12). Public uproar surrounding joy-riding at that time was evident in one newspaper editorial in 1984:

We say: lock them all up. And throw away the key. This country has suffered far too long. And this country is no longer going to stand for the soft-hearted pseudo-liberalism that lets lawbreakers off with warnings and ridiculous suspended sentences. The courts and the Gardaí should put the boot in, and put it in hard. (*Sunday World* 18 March 1984, cited in McVerry 1985: 12)

Similarly in April 2002 following the death of two Gardaí who were killed when a stolen car crashed into them at high speed, joy-riding received considerable media attention. Newspaper headlines from the time include: ‘Politicians finally stirred to action over the scourge of death-riders’ (*Irish Examiner* 20 April 2002); ‘Denying help until children become thugs is no solution’ (*Irish Times* 20 April 2002); ‘Who will call halt to the drivers of death?’ (*Irish Times* 1 May 2002); ‘The buck stops where?’ (*Irish Times* 7 May 2002); ‘Locking up “wild” young is no answer to problems’ (*Irish Times* 16 May 2002).

Residents of the communities in which joy-riding is concentrated often complain that media coverage is either minimal or cursory in nature, or else highly emotive; and as a consequence, there is little sustained policy focus on the issue. In an open letter to the Taoiseach, members of one such community observed that: ‘It is unfortunate that two Gardaí had to die doing their duty before society sat up, took notice and began to ask questions’ (*Irish Times* 1 May 2002). Joy-riding continues as ‘a complex and daily problem’ in such communities. ‘Stolen cars follow the pattern of an epidemic in Darndale. Everything is quiet for weeks, and then suddenly night after night we lie awake to the screech of brakes and exploding petrol tanks of burnt-out cars.’

Outrage over joy-riding is not, however, matched by an ongoing coverage or analysis commensurate with the complexity and sustained nature of the problems caused by it. As McVerry (2002) observed, the problems of joy-riding tend to be ‘ignored as long as they are largely confined to those deprived areas. It is only when the consequences of those problems, which the local community have to live with day after day, affects the wider community that shock and horror are expressed and action is taken.’

THE HISTORICAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXTS OF JOY-RIDING

While joy-riding is generally considered a modern phenomenon, references to it extend back to the early 1900s. The first literary representations of ‘taking and driving away’ are to be found in 1908 in the unlikely source of *The Wind in the Willows*, and the first usage of the term ‘joy-riding’ in its criminal sense appears to derive from the United States in 1909. Its use is recorded in the UK in 1912 (Partridge 1984, cited in Groombridge 1998: 1/14) and it is mentioned in the London Metropolitan Police Commissioner’s report in 1919. Section 28 of the *UK Road Traffic Act 1930* created the offence of ‘taking and driving away’, and this was amended to ‘taking without consent’ under the *Theft Act 1968*. The *1968 Act* saw the offence move from the ambit of motoring to theft as it became a ‘triable-either-way’ (in either the Magistrates’ Courts or in the Crown Court) offence carrying a maximum penalty of three-years imprisonment (Groombridge 1998 1/12). Twenty years later, the *Criminal Justice Act 1988* would redefine ‘taking without consent’ as a summary offence carrying a significantly lighter maximum penalty of six months imprisonment. The law then remained as it was until 1991 when riots and ‘spectacular displays of joy-riding’ in two particular estates in Oxford (Blackbird Leys) and Tyneside (Meadowell) prompted a media ‘feeding frenzy’ and a ‘toughening up’ of legislation (1998: 1/7-10): Groombridge notes that the *Aggravated Vehicle Taking Act* was passed in a single day in December of that year (1998: 1/11-4). The *Aggravated Vehicle Taking Act 1992* provided for the new offence of ‘aggravated taking of a mechanically propelled vehicle’ – one which would be a triable-either-way offence. The penalties available to the Crown Court in respect of this offence were ‘two years or five years if an aggravating accident caused death.’ By this stage, a 1992 Home Office campaign depicting joy-riders as hyenas identified them as alienated outsiders (1998: 1/16), and ‘the epitome of dangerous delinquency’ (Groombridge 1998: 2/29).

THE IRISH CONTEXT

In Ireland also there is no specific offence of ‘joy-riding’ in law. Individuals suspected of being involved in joy-riding may instead be charged with a variety of offences under various Road Traffic Acts. One TD, Tommy Broughan – representing the constituency of Dublin North East, within which Priorswood is located – sought to correct what he viewed as an important legislative failure by publishing two Road Traffic (Joy-riding) Bills – both of which would be defeated in turn. Broughan’s first Bill sought to establish ‘the offences of supplying or offering to supply a vehicle to an under-age driver and of organising, directing or participation in the unlawful taking of a mechanically propelled vehicle for the purposes of dangerous driving in a public place’ (Dáil Éireann Debates, Volume 517, 4 April 2000). In making joy-riding a specific offence, the intent of the Bill was ‘to strengthen the hands of the Gardaí, particularly in relation to discarded vehicles and company cars’ which were identified as ‘the core of the joy-riding problem in areas such as Dublin’s North side...rather than stolen vehicles’ (Ibid). The bill was opposed by the government, and was defeated in 2000.

Broughan subsequently introduced the Road Traffic (Joy-riding) Bill 2002 with the goal of making ‘joy-riding a specific crime’ and ‘to ban the supply of company cars to under-age drivers and [to impose] penalties in terms of fines of up to €32,000’ (Dáil Éireann Debates, Volume 552, 23 April 2002). The then Minister for the Environment and Local Government criticised the Bill, stating that:

the measures contained in the Bill would not advance the fight against joy-riding. Simply put, it would not provide the Garda with any additional enforceable measures to

tackle the problem...As has been said in the past in response to these proposals, there is no lack or deficiency in the legal powers available to address joy-riding. The Garda Síochána has not sought the introduction of any new powers and the various offences that constitute joy-riding are already adequately addressed under existing legislation. (Ibid)

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform concurred, noting that: ‘the Garda authorities have clearly indicated that the road traffic legislation currently in place is adequate to deal with the current situation’ (ibid).

Relevant Offences Under The Road Traffic Acts.

The main legislative provisions currently relevant to joy-riding comprise Section 112 and 113 of the *Road Traffic Act 1961* and Section 41 of the *Road Traffic Act, 1994*, and Section 30 of the most recent *Road Traffic Act 2004*. These are outlined in the table below.

<p>Road Traffic Act 1961 Sections 112 and 113</p>	<p>Taking vehicle without authority 112. —(1) A person shall not use or take possession of a mechanically propelled vehicle without the consent of the owner thereof or other lawful authority.</p> <p>Unauthorised interference with mechanism of vehicle. 113. —(1) A person shall not, without lawful authority or reasonable cause, interfere or attempt to interfere with the mechanism of a mechanically propelled vehicle while it is stationary in a public place, or get on or into or attempt to get on or into the vehicle while it is so stationary.”</p>
<p>Road Traffic Act Section 41</p>	<p>Detention of vehicles 41. —(1) The Minister, may, after consultation with the Minister for Justice, make regulations authorising and providing for the detention, removal, storage and subsequent release or disposal of a mechanically propelled vehicle in use in a public place...”</p>
<p>Road Traffic Act Section 30</p>	<p>Supply of mechanically propelled vehicles to minor. 30. —(1) A person shall not supply a mechanically propelled vehicle— to a person who is under the age of 16 years, or other than a mechanically propelled vehicle in respect of which a person who has attained the age of 16 years is entitled to hold a driving licence to drive, to a person who is under the age of 17 years.</p>

Section 112 of the *Road Traffic Act 1961* outlines the offence which Gardaí refer to as ‘Unauthorised taking.’ The offence is intended to distinguish situations in which vehicles are stolen and driven for some time before being burned-out or abandoned, from those in which a vehicle is stolen with the intention of permanently depriving the owner of his/her property (i.e. larceny).²

The offence was at that time a summary offence liable to a maximum fine of £50 or a maximum prison term of six months, or both. The enactment of the *Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 1984* subsequently attached significantly greater penalties to the offence. Upon summary conviction, a person would now be subject to a maximum fine of £1,000 and/or imprisonment up to 12

² As Farrington (2001: 17) notes: ‘For the offence to be construed as larceny, the person must intend to permanently deprive the owner of his property, this may be indicated by the retention of the vehicle for an extended period (one month) or by its disposal for profit.’

months. The *Act* also took the significant step of making the offence triable on indictment, with conviction in higher courts carrying greater penalties – a fine of up to £2,000 and/or a maximum prison sentence of five years. Following the enactment of the *Road Traffic Act 2002*, the maximum fines attaching to summary and indictable convictions for offences under Section 112 were revised upwards to €2,500 and €10,000 respectively. The 1984 decision to make ‘unauthorised taking’ an indictable offence incurring a penalty of up to five years imprisonment, also moved the offence within the ambit of the Criminal Justice Act, which conferred on the Gardaí the power to detain someone suspected of committing a serious crime for a period of up to 12 hours.

Section 113 of the 1961 Act also provided for the offence of ‘Interference’, an offence which would in most cases be a prerequisite to the committal of the more serious offence of ‘unauthorised taking’ of the car. The *Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 1984* amended this to make ‘unauthorised interference’, an offence whether committed in a public place or on private property, carrying penalties of a maximum fine of £350 and/or imprisonment for up to three months. The *Road Traffic Act 2002* subsequently revised the maximum fine attaching to an offence under Section 113 to €1,500.

The above offences pertain to cars taken ‘without the consent of the owner’, stolen cars effectively. Neither Section 112 nor 113 of the *Road Traffic Act* address what are known colloquially as ‘bought’ or ‘company’ cars, that is, cars purchased for minimal amounts from various sources for the purpose of engaging in driving displays similar to joy-riding. Such Section 41 of the *Road Traffic Act 1994* provides Gardaí with the power to stop and seize cars they believe to be driven by underage drivers. The one significant legislative change to be noted in this respect is the enactment of a legal provision to deal with ‘company’ cars under the *Road Traffic Act 2004*. Section 30 of that Act refers specifically to the ‘supply’ of vehicles to minors (‘by way of sale, hire, loan, gift’). Upon summary conviction for this offence, a person is subject to a maximum fine of €3,000 or a maximum prison term of six months or both. Those who had campaigned for a legal provision to counter the supply of ‘company’ cars to juveniles welcomed the Government’s accession to the need for such a provision, while expressing regret about what they viewed as the leniency of the penalties attaching to the offence and the continuing failure to ‘define the crime of joy-riding’ (Dáil Éireann, Volume 592, No. 2 – 10 November 2004).

One of the significant changes to be noted in the type of illegal driving among juveniles in recent years in the study area is the growing numbers of young people purchasing and driving motorbikes of all types and sizes. As mechanically propelled vehicles (MPVs), Gardaí point out that the drivers of all such bikes are obliged to comply with the same driving licence, tax and insurance requirements as those pertaining to cars. This is a point of some importance as it is likely that neither many of the young people purchasing these (miniature) motorbikes nor their parents are aware of the identical legal requirements that apply to all mechanically propelled bikes. Where bikes have been stolen or interfered with, the same range of offences available to Gardaí under Section 112 and 113 of the *Road Traffic Act* will also apply.

In addition to these very specific legislative provisions outlined above, Gardaí will, also of course, have recourse to the range of offences that pertain to motorists in general, e.g. speed, drink driving, dangerous driving, licence, insurance and road tax offences.

Much attention has been paid to the public and exhibitionist nature of joy-riding, and there is an important distinction to be drawn between legislative provisions as they apply to joy-riding displays taking place in the public and private domains. While offences under Section 112 and 113 of the *Road Traffic Act* remain offences irrespective of the domain in which the vehicles in question is being driven or stored, Gardaí point out that they do not have any powers in respect of ‘bought’ or ‘company’ cars or bikes being driven or stored in privately owned areas. The full panoply of offences available to the Gardaí in dealing with licensing, taxation, insurance and driving offences are not available to them in respect of cars or bikes being driven in privately owned areas.

PERSPECTIVES ON JOY-RIDING

The following section examines research conducted on joy-riding. We focus on four dimensions of this literature: findings relating to joy-riding as youth delinquency; measures to prevent joy-riding; the links between youth, disadvantage and gender; and the relationship between joy-riding and car culture more generally.

JOY-RIDING AS YOUTH DELINQUENCY

The term 'joy rider' remains contentious and many commentators have proposed that 'so-called joy-riders' be referred to in ways that capture the human costs associated with this activity – as 'death riders', 'grief riders', and 'murder riders' (see Farrington, 2000: 14-16).³ Others proclaim joy-riding to be 'aptly named, being rich in excitement and a dramatic break from the boredom of being wageless and wealthless in a consumer society' (Presdee 2000: 49). It is, of course, the emphasis on 'joy' that prompts the most outrage. As Corbett notes: 'there is not always joy associated with the activity and crashes are often associated with stolen vehicles' (Corbett 2003: 50). One study, for example, reports that 'joy-riders were between 47 and 200 times more likely than other drivers to become crash-involved' (cited in Corbett 2003: 50).

In considering the issue of vehicle theft, Corbett addresses the question of 'who does it?' (2003: 51). Establishing a comprehensive profile of joy-riders is inhibited by, among other factors, the absence of an offence specifically designated as 'joy-riding', and the sampling biases inherent in all studies of criminal behaviour (including the reliability of self-report data, and the issue of unreported crime). Notwithstanding such difficulties and qualifications, Corbett collated available information about the profile of joy-riders as it has emerged from a number of studies of young people's involvement with car crime in the UK and documented the following broad findings (Corbett 2003: 51-53).

Males were six times more likely than females to have ever stolen a car and more than four times more likely to have stolen *from* a car. Car theft is usually a group activity and there is the suggestion that female car thieves are more likely to be a member of the group perpetrating the crime than the instigator of the actual crime. Most car thieves embark on their criminal career at a relatively young age. One study found that almost half of its research sample had begun at either 14 or 15 years while another identified starting ages of as young as 10 years.

Many of those engaging in different categories of car theft share a common demographic profile characterised by a 'socially deprived home life, poverty, unemployment, underachievement and low aspirations located within a lower socio-economic environment... family involvement in car crime seems common...' Corbett describes this picture as 'fairly typical for young offenders of all kinds and reflects a bleak future with restricted opportunities' (2003: 53).

There is some disagreement about whether or not car theft is a specialist offence - a point of some significance in light of Wilkinson and Morgan's (1995) observation that 'if specialist TDA offenders can not be shown to exist, then in terms of 'treating' offenders at least, the thinking behind motor projects is generally flawed' (Groombridge, 1998; 2/24). Corbett suggests that 'career progression is common' and sets about charting such a progression from 'look out,' to passenger, to stealing a car's contents or parts for one's own use or sale, to direct theft of a car for joy-riding. Corbett describes such activities as potential 'developmental steps' towards other more sustained criminal activity. Light et al (1993) examined the 'careers' and perceptions of young men who engaged in car crime. Their research revealed varying positions

³Discussion about the most appropriate term is also evident in Dáil debates over recent years: 'many citizens and public representatives find the term offensive considering the amount of mayhem, suffering and death that have been caused by this criminal deviancy. Due to this many of us have, in the past, referred to this crime as death riding or grief riding... The term "joy-riding" does not feature in existing legislation and it is a phrase which should be avoided, given the suffering and loss that is associated with the practice' (Dáil Éireann, Volume 517, 4 April 2000). On another occasion, it was noted that: 'The media should cease calling this activity joy-riding. It is not joy-riding, it is murder-riding and it must be stopped' (Dáil Éireann, Volume 552, 24 April, 2002).

on the ‘specialism’ of car crime. In particular, they pointed to distinctions between ‘joy-riding’ and ‘performance driving’ (the latter being designated as the activity of the young).

Crime Prevention and ‘Motor Projects’

Crime prevention measures can be categorised under two distinct headings – situational and social. Situational measures focus on limiting opportunities for crime, including ‘target-hardening’ through the introduction of more secure locking mechanisms. Social crime prevention mechanisms focus more on the broader context of offending, and tend to address issues of motivation rather than opportunity. If the major initiative undertaken by the Priorswood Joy-riding Task Force may be designated as a social crime prevention measure, measures undertaken by individual agency members of the Task Force appear to accord very closely with the definition of ‘situational’ crime prevention measures outlined above.

The underlying premise of situational crime prevention measures is based on the view that people typically operate within a framework of rational choice, whereby a cost-benefit analysis underpins human action. Such research examines the use of rational-choice measures which specifically seek to reduce crime by reducing opportunities to commit it, particularly through the greater use of security/locks and other ‘anti-theft’ measures (such as immobilisers), as well as the provision of related ‘surveillance’ measures (such as more on-street lighting, CCTV, etc). Corbett (2003: 54) found that situational (opportunity reduction) measures enjoyed a greater degree of success than broader ‘social’ crime prevention measures aimed at reducing the motivation for the crime in the first instance.

In relation to joy-riding, the archetypal social crime prevention measure is the ‘motor project’. Groombridge (1998) notes the prevalence of this approach in the UK since the 1970s. Founded in 1986, the National Association of Motor Projects (NAMP) has a membership of approximately one hundred and twenty motor projects; these projects involve a range of initiatives involving young people and vehicles, including ‘vehicle maintenance, road safety, teaching driving skills, vehicle preparation, go-karting, off-road motor cycling or banger racing’ (Groombridge 1998: c1/23).

The NAMP locates the significance of the motor project in its ability to break the ‘offending cycle’ of young car thieves ‘by involving young offenders in worthwhile activities, teaching new skills, requiring them to address their offending and take responsibility for their actions. Projects also give them the opportunity to participate in activities which involve the excitement of controlled risk taking and competition’ – an opportunity, which it points out ‘has to be earned’ (1998: c1/24). Such programmes also reflect the fact that the employment aspirations of many joy-riders focused on ‘legitimate work involving cars’ (Light et al. 1993).

If there are many advocates for the diversionary and cost-benefit value of motor projects, they also have very vocal detractors who question the manner in which they appear to reward bad behaviour. These critics argue that these projects are ‘little short of lunacy... What must youngsters who obey the law think, some of whom would love to go on a high performance driving course but haven’t got the money?’ (*Carweek* 26 January 1994; cited in Groombridge 1998 c1/29). Proponents of motor projects respond with reference both to the circumstances within which young people drift into criminality and the savings which motor projects represent for the larger society when compared to the costs of custodial sentences and their limited impact on future offending behaviour. Nevertheless, because of the failure to conduct comprehensive evaluations of many motor projects, their impact remains uncertain.

In addition to formal criminal justice responses to joy-riding in terms of criminal charges and prosecutions, a range of other initiatives have been established to tackle joy-riding.⁴ One initiative emerged in Ronanstown in the early 1990s in response to high levels of joy-riding,

⁴ Artistic responses to joy-riding include the staging by a theatre group from Coventry of a play called *Car* in the Civic Theatre, Tallaght in 2000, and a video installation entitled *Joy* exhibited in the Temple Bar Gallery in Dublin in 2000 (Dunne 2000; Meany 2000).

crime and disorder. The scale of the problem provided the impetus for the establishment of the first Garda Youth Diversion Project, GRAFT, within the Ronanstown Youth Service in 1991. The Ronanstown Youth Project assumed responsibility for the management of the GRAFT Project and the employment of its coordinator thereafter. The project, which set about designing a programme appropriate to the scale and nature of the joy-riding problem, comprised a number of strands: collaboration with those already involved with joy-riders; approaches to the local authority about the construction of physical impediments to joy-riding and the redesign of aspects of estate layout conducive to joy-riding; and approaches to Gardaí about the importance of bringing the most persistent joy-riders before the courts. The GRAFT Project was also responsible for evolving a fourth and distinctive response to joy-riding in 1993 – a video programme for schools designed to reduce the status of joy-riders and joy-riding among young people, with a particular focus on young spectators to joy-riding incidents. The video was structured around (i) the re-enactment of a joy rider's court appearance; (ii) the death of a young child in a joy-riding incident; (iii) an interview with a mother whose four sons had been imprisoned for joy-riding; and (iv) an interview with a well-known joy rider now paralysed. It is described as having had an immediate and enduring effect on the area's young people. Despite a small number of 'joy-riding spats' in recent years, the problem has never returned to its previous heights. In order to deprive joy-riders of public notoriety and counter sensationalist media coverage of the area, the programme decided to 'block' and deny access to the media in the intervening years.

A further awareness-raising initiative has been developed in Donegal. Gardaí state that while joy-riding is not a major issue in Donegal, dangerous driving is. Some of the dangerous driving stems from young people travelling to Northern Ireland to purchase old – and often unroadworthy – cars in large numbers. As the sale of most of these cars occurs in another jurisdiction, Gardaí have no powers to prosecute the vendors and are instead left to deal with the manner in which young people drive these cars on the local roads. The Letterkenny area of Donegal has seen a significant increase in fatal collisions resulting in multiple fatalities among young people in recent years. Gardaí refer to such incidents as 'collisions' rather than 'accidents', as the former is judged to be a more accurate description of the crashes ensuing. In response to the immediacy of this problem, Letterkenny Gardaí produced a DVD programme in 2004 *Are you too young to die?*, and have now delivered the programme to 6,500 school children in the Donegal area. Gardaí stress the importance of couching the message within a local context immediately recognisable to the target young people. The DVD, which features clips of dangerous driving, serious injury, bereaved parents and sole survivors, uses images and 'emotional play' to evoke the maximum response in its young audience. Its screening is punctuated by strategic interventions and discussion questions by attending Gardaí. Gardaí claimed they were recording 'incredible responses' from both boys and girls to this DVD programme. Gardaí attribute the success of its DVD programme to a number of factors: the fact that the roads, towns and signs featured are immediately recognisable landmarks; the steps taken to relate the content of the DVD to the young person's own life at all times and the currency of the programme's content.

YOUTH, DISADVANTAGE AND GENDER

Disadvantage is persistently associated with joy-riding, and the activity is often considered the sole preserve of male working class youths. However early American research on car crime found that joy-riders came from a relatively more affluent class position than other 'delinquents'. This led to the formulation of joy-riders as a 'favoured group' (Wattenberg and Balistreri 1952, cited in Groombridge 1998: c2/1), although McCaghy et al.'s (1977) later research into the social profile of car thieves led them to reject this. The earliest British study (Gibbens 1958) also conceptualised joy-riding as the activity of a 'favoured group', although this view would also lose credibility in due course.

From his analysis of the early literature on joy-riding, Groombridge highlights what he judges to be the only unexpected finding: that joy-riding might be carried out by 'the less delinquent' (1998: c2/29). The weight of research now suggests that that situation no longer obtains – in general terms at least – and that the 'less delinquent' are no longer joy-riding, or at least joy-

riding in the criminal usage of that term. Tracing the link between disadvantage and joy-riding shifts the focus from identifying what distinguishes joy-riders from the rest of the population, to a focus on the socio-economic context within which young men engage in this behaviour. In the case of Britain, Campbell points out that all of the neighbourhoods that 'combusted' in the early 1990s were decimated by the socio-economic policies of Thatcherism. The spectacular joy-riding displays in Oxford in 1991 took place in a community (Blackbird Leys) that had seen within a single generation the eradication of a major tradition of employment, political alignment, income and identity for working class men.

In Ireland as elsewhere, males from working class backgrounds comprise the vast bulk of those who become involved with the criminal justice system, and most of those imprisoned share a common profile of economic disadvantage, low levels of educational attainment, and other related characteristics (Bacik et al. 1998; Kilcommons et al. 2004; O'Mahony 1997; NESF 2002). In addition, areas and communities characterised by disadvantage tend also to be characterised by significant levels of crime and disorder and by problematic relations with the police (Mulcahy and O' Mahony 2005). Fahey's (1999) study of local authority housing estates concluded that 'social disorder has the greatest impact on residents' quality of life, through direct experience of antisocial behaviour, a general loss of communal space and a sense of personal safety and negative labelling of estates in the wider community'. This finding is immediately complicated by the fact that many of the perpetrators of 'social disorder' 'can themselves be seen to be victims of wider circumstances'. McVerry highlighted the common background of joy-riders from 'identifiable, deprived housing estates, with inadequate facilities and services' and the ease with which potential joy-riders can be identified at an early age. He noted that joy-riding is a risk-laden activity, yet it confers no material gain, and many joy-riders seem indifferent to the range of available criminal justice penalties. His conclusion is stark: 'these are young people who live for the present because they see no future...Those involved in joy-riding feel that they, and their communities, have been abandoned' (McVerry 2003).

In addition to disadvantage, gender is a further prominent aspect of joy-riding. Simply put, most joy-riding is undertaken by young men, and accordingly 'masculinity issues' have been proposed as one means of accounting for 'the preponderance of male car crime of all kinds' (Corbett 2003: 11). Chapman (1994) notes 'the difficulties of growing up male in a deprived neighbourhood and establishing an appropriate masculine identity.' Many of the traditional routes to 'respectability' have been eroded by economic changes, as the unskilled jobs that could support a family have been decimated by economic restructuring and the advent of a 'flexible labour market'. Within one scenario, the young male may be understood to be simply seeking to establish a masculine identity appropriate to the specific deprived community and general car culture of which he is part. Within more extreme circumstances, however, 'where self-esteem is already in crisis and young offenders' identity as men is at stake, the pleasures of joy-riding and its cult status may lead to a fearlessness which can reach the point of being suicidal' (Campbell 1993, cited in Corbett, 2003: 58). In this way, joy-riding and other forms of crime may be seen as a means for the enactment of masculinity, insofar as 'toughness' becomes one means of obtaining respect and street credibility, and thereby securing a valid identity when other avenues to do so are closed off.

Explanations for the greater involvement of males in joy-riding also highlight the issue of risk (discussed further below). For instance, Campbell's observations about the spectacular joy-riding displays in Blackbird Leys, Oxford in 1991 suggests that men are more attracted to risk than women. Certainly, most depictions of masculinity valorise risk, while femininity is associated with being risk-averse. This position has been criticised by feminists and others who argue that the whole discourse on risk is 'essentially gendered' and that women are also and everyday 'confronting and negotiating different types of risk' which will never be recognised as such because ideas about what constitutes risk are filtered through a male lens (Chan & Rigakos, 2002 in Hayward, 2004: 164). If that is the case, then it raises the question of why males are drawn to the particular kinds of risk associated with joy-riding.

JOY-RIDING AND POPULAR CULTURE

In recent years, a body of literature has emerged within criminology that focuses on crime as a 'cultural' activity. This 'cultural criminology' perspective highlights the values, motivations and expectations associated with engaging in crime, and the cultural benefits that accrue to those involved – in terms of satisfaction, fun, excitement, status, and the relief of boredom. This perspective involves a shift away from any notion of the joy rider/delinquent/criminal as somehow distinct or pathological, to a focus on factors which make crime normal or pleasurable, and which highlight the 'risk-taking' and performative dimension of criminal and/or dangerous activities.

Several authors have highlighted the role that risk plays in this process. Lyng (1990), for instance, analyses voluntary risk-taking as 'edgework' and describes 'the archetypal edgework experience...[as] one in which the individual's failure to meet the challenge at hand will result in death, or at the very least, debilitating injury.' Lyng illustrates the concept with reference to dangerous and extreme sports and occupations where 'the threat of death or injury is ever present.' From this point of view, edgework is seen as 'a means of seizing control, a way of reacting against the 'unidentifiable forces that rob one of individual choice' (Lyng, 1990, in Hayward, 2004: 164). In contrast to the wealthy, who have numerous, exotic and expensive opportunities to pursue licit risk-laden activities, the 'poor' and the 'socially excluded' will neither be able to purchase such opportunities nor escape their social environment to do so. People in economically deprived communities seeking 'risk, hedonism and excitement' will choose 'alternative outlets' and must usually use a space known to and accessible to them. In this manner, 'the rundown estate or ghetto neighbourhood' becomes a 'performance zone' – a paradoxical space representing at once the powerlessness of that community but also the site on which its members seeks to transcend that powerlessness through 'displays of risk, excitement, masculinity and even carnivalesque pleasure' (Hayward, 2004: 165).

In seeking to understand what is often characterised as 'immoral, uncivilised, obscene and unfathomable social behaviour' (Presdee 2000: 8), Presdee proposes the concept of 'carnival' as 'the most appropriate frame within which to discuss the performance of excitement and transgression' (2000: 32). The concept of 'carnival' employed here celebrates festive excess, transgression, the upturning or reversal of dominant authority structures, and mockery of dominant values (2000: 38-9); in effect, the carnival is an opportunity to challenge, subvert or overturn dominant social mores. In this context, joy-riding – described by Spencer (1992) as 'a collective 'solution' for the boredom felt by young men' (in Groombridge, 1998: c2/5) – can be judged to display elements of classic carnival. It is motivated by pleasure and excitement as opposed to material gain. The pleasure derives from two factors – the proximity of danger from both the law and injury/death, and its oppositional status to the established order. The ultimate fate of cars taken for the purpose of joy-riding – fire and destruction – is understood to be a subversion of the car's commercial value, notwithstanding the joy-riders' celebration of its advertised and utility value. The taking and temporary possession of a product beyond the reach of those without financial means is viewed as an offence to the commercial and consumerist world. The staging of joy-riding displays in public streets involves temporarily taking control of the public domain. Identities of 'excitement and opposition' are constructed through these communal displays. And the activity is finally, of course, without any shred of official licence. It is a 'fragmented carnivalesque performance of defiance...containing the debris of performed dissent' (Presdee, 2000:50-1).

Hayward argues for the need to see the risk-taking behaviour of young men in local authority estate as cultural expression in a performance zone. He claims that 'many forms of crime frequently perpetrated within urban areas should be seen for exactly what they are: attempts to achieve a semblance of control' (2004: 165). Joy-riding is viewed in similar terms, as a particularly expressive (as opposed to functional) crime whose constituent elements offer participants a means of 'self-actualisation' and an enhanced sense of self in a socially deprived neighbourhood (Hayward, 2004:166).

On the one hand, there is the routinised alienation and boredom of everyday life – a world in which individuals find themselves over-controlled and yet without control. On the other hand, there are those activities which offer the possibility of excitement and control... It might be an unpalatable thought, but it is through such activities that individuals come alive. (Fenwick & Hayward, 2000 in Hayward 2004:166).

A number of studies have documented the ‘heightened emotional buzz of thieving and driving at speed’ (Light et al., 1993) and elicited statements to the effect that ‘nothing felt as good as stealing cars... only the effect of drugs compared’ (McCullough et al. 1990). Ó Cadhla, in one of the few Irish studies to focus on the perspectives of joy-riders, also argued that it involves the car as a product being ‘re-contextualised, de-commodified, abused or glorified in moments of intense performance’ (2001: 85). The local road, similarly, becomes a stage and a theatre for ‘ecstatic performances in stolen cars involving interaction between the drivers and the local community’ (2000: 84). For joy-riders, the activity is not understood as ‘anti-social’ behaviour – ‘the opposite is the case, it is a way of becoming socialised and a form of sociality, a way of spending time, establishing identity, opposing authority or having an ecstatic experience’ (2001: 89). He found that joy-riders described in vivid detail the experience of engaging Gardaí in a chase. The intentionally provocative nature of joy-riding highlights one of its distinctive features: ‘Far from being hidden, the behaviour is ‘done openly and conspicuously. It appears purposefully designed to attract and then defy the police...’ (2001: 90-1). What may have begun as ritual becomes resistance at the moment of police intervention. All in all, Ó Cadhla suggests that joy-riders are choosing ‘competitiveness over submission, visibility over invisibility, evocativeness over silence’ (2001: 92).

This cultural perspective also highlights a further aspect of joy-riding, specifically the cultural prominence of cars in modern society. As Corbett (2003: 11) notes, ‘the concept of car culture... provides the context in which car crime manifests’. We all now live in a more generalised joy-riding culture, in which images of crime and transgression have assumed a prominent role in car advertising (Hayward 2004: 171), and in which many people seek some level of emotional fulfilment through driving (Presdee 2000: 52). As a consequence, Groombridge argues that ‘car culture valorises the ownership and use of the car for pleasure; making joydrivers if not joy-riders of all car owners. Moreover, in theory and in practice it is difficult to separate out illegal joy-riding from other illegal car use and theft’ (1998:c1/16). As he puts it, joy-riding may well be a ‘characteristic of much ‘normal’ driving by the owners of vehicles’ (Groombridge, 1998, C2/14).

Ó Cadhla (2001: 80), for instance, notes the historical prominence in America of ‘cruising, street racing, hot rods and drag racing or, as Witzel and Bash (1997:18) put it, ‘hot rodders-turned-juvenile-delinquents’” as they are personified by characters such as James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ó Cadhla 2001). Jefferson (1992) also argued that joy-riding behaviour was closer to mainstream culture than was often realised. He defied ‘any (car driving) man reading this to deny he has never got a ‘buzz’ out of his high-speed driving, undertaking tricky manoeuvres involving a high degree of hand-eye co-ordination, overtaking etc’ (in Groombridge 1998: c2/6). Similarly, as the social profile of those ‘taking and driving’ becomes distilled to ‘young working class males’, Ó Cadhla noted that, ‘the term has developed marked class links that are underlined by a notion of the violation of private property’, while ‘high speeds, erratic or irregular driving in privately owned vehicles is seldom if ever called joy-riding’ (2001: 79).

In the Irish context, the general perception of Gardaí and others working in areas in which joy-riding was a routine occurrence in the 1980s and 1990s is that joy-riding does not exist on the same scale as it did in previous decades (discussed further in chapter 5). Nevertheless, in line with the above discussion, concern has emerged in recent years that the nature of joy-riding is changing, in light of the increasing prominence of what is termed ‘boy racing’, or ‘dangerous driving’ among young people. Notwithstanding difficulties over terminology, several interviewees suggested that this style of fast, dangerous and status-enhancing driving may supplant joy-riding as a more serious problem in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRIORSWOOD TASK FORCE ON JOY-RIDING

ORIGINS AND AIMS

The Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding stands as the only one its kind in Ireland. The Task Force was established in 1998 with one-off funding from the Department of Justice in response to the continuing problem of joy-riding in the Priorswood area. It arose following years of local community protest and complaint. The commissioning of a research report two years after coming together is commonly identified as a significant point of departure for the Task Force (Farrington 2000).

The vision of the Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding is 'to develop a more effective response to joy-riding in the Priorswood area (Clonsaugh, Moatview, Belcamp, Ferrycarrig & Darndale) through an inter-agency approach, combined with community involvement and a research based strategy' (Hannigan 2003). The Task Force concentrates on four operational goals: (i) to reduce joy-riding; (ii) to prevent involvement in joy-riding (iii) to end local encouragement of joy-riding; (iv) to raise community awareness of joy-riding.

MEMBERSHIP, RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

The main agencies involved in the Task Force are identified in the box below. The Priorswood Community Development Project (CDP) acts in an administrative capacity and is a founding member of the Task Force alongside An Garda Síochána and Dublin City Council. Dublin City Council's interest in joy-riding derives from the execution of its estate management function and the accompanying responsibility for the maintenance of its estates and the eradication of anti-social behaviour. The maintenance of a good quality of life on 'good quality estates' through the development of strong civic participation is an over-arching goal of the City Council and the local NGO's.

Active Organisations	Agency Perspective on Joy-riding
Dublin City Council	Estate Management & Anti Social Behaviour
An Garda Síochána	Criminal Behaviour and Community Safety
Priorswood CDP(Community Development Project)	Community Development and Safety
North East Drugs Task Force	Drugs, Anti-Social Behaviour & Crime
Northside Partnership	Local Development & Unemployed Youths
Probation and Welfare Service	Group Dimension of Criminal Activity
TravAct (Travelling Community Organisation)	Social Integration & Development
Wood-Dale Garda Diversion Project	Youth Diversion and Development
Darndale/Belcamp Youth Project	Community & Youth Development
Priorswood Youth Project	Community & Youth Development

In addition to the agencies listed above the Farrington Report (2001: 1) listed residents' associations, a local environmental group and 'other local residents, community workers and groups'. The absence of residents groups, particularly young residents is regarded as a major problem by statutory agencies and local community development organisations on the Task Force. Meanwhile, residents' organisations such as the Belcamp Estate Steering Committee have become vocal critics of the Task Force.

Throughout its period of funded operation, the Task Force has relied a great deal on the Priorswood CDP for resources such as office space, employment of staff and general administrative support. At the present, the Task Force is 'in between funding' and is postponing any major decision regarding its future until such issues have been resolved.

Research

The commission of the first major research report into joy-riding – *Joy-riding: A Local Response* – is regarded by the Task Force as a major achievement and was in the words of the author 'initiated with a view to developing a strategy to reduce the problem of joy-riding in the Priorswood area' (Farrington, 2001: 72). The decision to commission the report is described as an attempt to move the process on from a litany of complaints about joy-riding in the area, to one that would identify and seek to address the underlying cause of the problem.

The securing of funding and employment of staff

The securing of one-off funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is regarded as a significant milestone, allowing the Task Force to move from a discussion phase to the planning and implementation phase. The absence of a long-term funding commitment is regarded by the Task Force as a barrier to long-term planning and strategising. The receipt of funding per se however introduced a new dynamic into the Task Force. In the first instance, it required the task force to move into 'employer mode' – and in this respect it is seen as creating a tension between radicalism and practical action and ultimately acting as a barrier to community participation. The only other form of funding which was available to the Task Force came from the North East Drugs Task Force.

'Social' Crime Prevention Measures.

The engagement of the Task Force in the Engine Repair Programme situated in the local FAS Community Training Centre (CTC) constitutes its most notable 'social crime' prevention measure. Task Force interest in the development of a motor project came from a proposal in the Farrington report (2001: 78-81). The report noted that the development of an entirely new training programme or centre was not a realistic option but that it might prove possible to 'persuade another local centre to adapt its programme to cater for this area.' Consequentailly the neighbouring FAS Community Training Centre established a car maintenance project with a developmental ethos similar to that operating within the Ceim-ar-Ceim project in Limerick. Youth Workers on the Task Force played a key role by making a series of key referrals to the programme. In addition the Task Force employed a Support Worker to provide a wide range of additional supports and developmental educational courses to the programme's participants. The Support Worker offered a sustained challenge to the programme's participants about their previous joy-riding behaviour. The inclusion of a youth work approach to the joy-riding problem by the Task Force attracted additional assistance from the Local Drugs Task Force's Drug Education Section and support from youth workers in the Priorswood and Darndale/Belcamp Youth Projects. The withdrawal of the Support Worker from the engine repair programme brought to an end the involvement of the Task Force in the Engine Repair Programme. Although the role played by the Task Force in the development and delivery of the motor project is one which is highly valued, it is also regarded as draining virtually all the energy of the Task Force over a number of years.

'Situational' Crime Prevention Measures

In addition to the engine repair project the Task Force has initiated a series of situational measures. Dublin City Council have, during the lifetime of the Task Force, constructed a number of physical (or situational) impediments to joy-riding, such as ramps and chicanes on the area's roads, widened footpaths, and plinth walls to prevent joy-riders driving from green areas into housing estates. Dublin City Council and An Garda Síochána have made what both agencies consider to be a very important and strategic commitment to remove all stolen, abandoned and burnt-out cars from the area before 8am the following morning. They attribute the priority which both agencies now accord to the immediate removal of all such cars as

imperative to breaking the 'clear progression path to becoming an experienced joy-rider and car thief' (2001: 43).

TASK FORCE PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATURE OF JOY-RIDING

The precise nature of a young person's involvement in joy-riding can be usefully analysed by use of a continuum of joy-riding activity. At one end of the continuum there is passive involvement which begins with the everyday occurrences of exposure to 'burnt out cars' and 'flashing cars within the neighbourhood. For many children this progresses to becoming an audience member and 'keeping sketch' or 'watching out' for Gardaí. At the other end of the continuum, active involvement results in leaving the neighbourhood altogether to steal a car for the specific purpose of returning later to 'rally the car' or 'flash the car' at designated 'flashing points' in the local area. Active involvement generally begins locally by an individual getting into a 'robbed car' while it is being 'rallied' or 'flashed' by others, usually older boys.

The nature of involvement in joy-riding offers a lengthy time-span for social intervention which begins when a child is at the pre-teenage stage and extends until the child is 18 years of age. Joy-riding is predominantly a male boyhood activity which takes place between the ages of 12 to 18. It is therefore a major issue to be addressed by social workers, family support services and youth and community workers

Youth workers on the Task Force make the observation that young boys in the Priorswood area display a persistent and underlying preoccupation with cars and speed. Such a preoccupation is not an uncommon aspect of childhood. The global popularity of games such as *Crash Team Racing* and *Grand Theft Auto* for older boys, make console games the new toys of choice in millions of households across the world, and Ireland is no exception. For young males living in Priorswood however, an infatuation with fast cars develops in an environment where 'burnt out cars' and 'flashing cars' provide a routine real life urban backdrop. In addition for those who have gone on to realise a boyhood infatuation for 'flashing cars' the looming yet very real threat of 'a chase' and ultimately imprisonment accentuates the experience of joy-riding. The confinement in prison of a friend or family member for joy-riding related crimes can serve unintentionally to provoke younger boys in Priorswood to take on 'the mantle' of their elder brothers.

Every step taken on the path of joy-riding involvement is a deeply significant one. Boys in the younger age groups begin by 'rallying a car' that has been brought into the area. At this stage they have not yet progressed to venturing outside of the neighbourhood to 'rob cars'. Youth workers on the Task Force identify this as a key stage for social intervention which presents youth workers, social workers and other agencies with the stark challenge of identifying the individual child faced with the problem and offering a response. Youth and community workers are faced not only with the challenge of responding to needs of individual children but with the broader and more complex challenge of ensuring that groups of boys do not progress to the next and more serious level of involvement in joy-riding – leaving the neighbourhood specifically to steal cars for joy-riding or 'flashing'.

As the scale and nature of joy-riding changes, the Task Force is also being forced to consider its definition of what constitutes joy-riding. This point is made with particular reference to the problem of the growing number of 'robbed' motor bikes in the area. While bikes are easier to steal, it is also observed that some parents are buying motor bikes for their children. Ownership changes the dynamic of the problem where no theft is involved. Driving does not culminate abruptly in burnouts, and is therefore a more unremitting problem for neighbours. Irrespective of the manner in which bikes are being obtained, they are cited as testimony to the continuing preoccupation with speed and 'rallying.'

Motivation

The development of knowledge in relation to why joy-riding activity takes place is a central concern of the Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding. Two important observations have been made by the Task Force in this regard. First, 'taking a chase' from Gardai works as a motivation

for joy-riding rather than a deterrent. Second, individual notoriety is ranked by a 'joy-riders league table' which is observed to bring an accompanying sense of social status and enhanced sexual attractiveness.

Responsibility for what is understood to be an unparalleled degree of interest in joy-riding in the Priorswood/Darndale area is located ultimately by the Task Force with the family, through a deficit of parental authority and familial tradition of joy-riding. Gardaí also report that they are witnessing a clear generational pattern to joy-riding. In addition joy-riding is understood as a manifestation of disenchantment with life in the local area: as 'just another step' in young lives that are characterised by low self-esteem, an absence of any future prospects, and high risk activities such as alcohol and illegal drug use. In this context the attraction of large audiences through 'flashing' becomes a way of acquiring social status or 'social capital'. Some joy-riders are described as 'fantastically skilled' even within the Task Force.

Task Force members also highlight the manner in which joy-riding is a public spectacle where all the crescendo of noise and the smell of burning rubber bring a thrilling mix of fear and exhilaration into young people's lives. In an area where young people can often be characterised by numbness and apathy, joy-riding incidents are observed to make young faces become animated with enjoyment and excitement which leads some members of the Task Force to observe ironically that 'there's something wonderful about that.' As an extremely high risk activity posing the very immediate threat of death, the low injury and fatality rate for joy-riders and other road users is considered 'amazing' by Task Force members. The fact that young joy-riders have been known to walk away from cars which have turned over several times gives rise to Task Force speculation about their particular mix of audacity, skill and nonchalance. The overriding conclusion into motivation however, is that it rests on a mix of familial circumstances and the distinctively communal and public nature of the crime. Paradoxically, despite the public appeal of joy-riding, its ultimate failure to lure joy-riders once they have passed the age of 18 and reached the age of criminal responsibility leads here to the strong and obvious conclusion that it is a habitual rather than an addictive practice from which joy-riders desist as they get older.

Joy-riding, Boy-racing and 'Lunatic-driving'

A very strong distinction is drawn here between joy-riding and 'boy racing' by the Task Force. The Gardaí also commonly refer to 'lunatic driving' by young adult males which has become a nationwide problem from Donegal to Waterford. 'Lunatic driving' takes place on the open road by young adult males holding all the required documentation for legal driving and presents society and the Gardaí with a less confined and ultimately more widespread and socially threatening challenge than joy-riding. Boy racing is a separate phenomenon where young males invest significant amounts of money and time into reconditioning second-hand cars. Boy racing shares some of the social aspects of joy-riding, albeit through conspicuous consumption rather than performance. The organisation of an agreed boundary between audience and joy-riders at designated 'flashing points' makes joy-riding a more communally experienced phenomenon than either 'lunatic driving' or 'boy-racing', and evidently a less fatal one than 'lunatic driving'.

JOY-RIDING AND OTHER LOCAL SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Task Force members observe a range of detrimental social impacts caused by joy-riding including: fear, intimidation, sleep deprivation, and increasing incidents of public disorder. Joy-riding also triggers negative impacts on public health generally and on individuals' 'sense of well-being'. Particular concerns in this respect are raised by the Task Force in relation to men's traditionally depicted role of protecting their families. Members of the Task Force consider that given the heightened potential for violence between males, men in the community are less inclined to intercede than women and perhaps males feel more powerless than their female partners. It is in such a vulnerable context that some men, perhaps another category of men, are attracted to group vigilantism and marches on alleged offenders' houses. Gardaí advocate the development of 'impact statements' for presentation in courts to help establish the criminal nature of joy-riding activity.

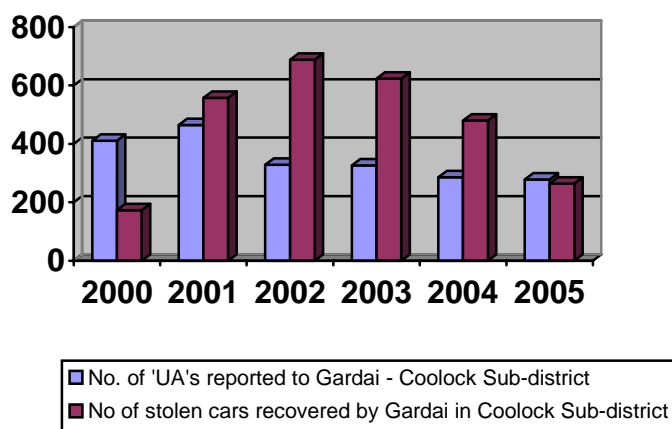
Despite this self-evident significance, joy-riding is generally understood to be ‘well down the league table’ in the range of problems confronting the Priorswood community. The disproportionate focus on joy-riding is attributed to its high media profile and the visible and frightening nature of the activity. The issues presented below are identified by the Task Force as major social problems requiring a statutory response beyond their remit.

- Problem	- Understanding
- <i>Alcohol</i>	<i>endemic alcohol abuse and high levels of depression in the community</i>
- <i>Drugs</i>	<i>Endemic cannabis use among young people. Extensive ecstasy and cocaine use. Some intravenous cocaine use. prevalent heroin use- methadone use.</i>
- <i>Anti-social behaviour</i>	<i>Drug dealing, major crime and intimidation – all linked closely to joy-riding</i>
- <i>Crime in general</i>	<i>Brings additional disturbance</i>
- <i>Fear & Personal Safety</i>	<i>Inhibiting factor in people lives</i>
- <i>Families in Crisis/Family Support</i>	<i>Regarded as core issue</i>
- <i>Relative Poverty and Deprivation</i>	<i>Relative Material Deprivation thrown into sharp relief by surrounding affluence</i>
- <i>Early School leaving and Unemployment</i>	<i>Issues need to be tackled across educational cycle – especially primary and pre-primary</i>

MEASURES OF JOY-RIDING AND JOY-RIDING-RELATED ACTIVITY

Analysis of the extent of joy-riding in Priorswood in 2000 led Farrington to conclude that ‘the number of cars recovered in the area and reports on the frequency of incidents by people with good local knowledge [provide] the best indicators of the frequency of joy-riding incidents’ (2001: 25). In the absence of definitive measures of joy-riding, this report accordingly takes its starting point from available data in relation to cars stolen, recovered and removed from the area. Figure 1 below presents longitudinal data on the number of cars reported stolen and the number of stolen cars recovered.

Figure1: Cars reported stolen and stolen cars recovered, Coolock Garda Sub-district 2000-05.



Source: An Garda Síochána

Analysis of the data in Figure 1 shows that since 2001, the number of *cars reported stolen* within the Coolock Garda Sub-district has decreased annually – from 465 in 2001 to 329 in 2002, 327 in 2003, 286 in 2004 and 278 in 2005⁵. As such the 2005 figures represents a 32 % reduction in the number of cars stolen over figures for 2000.

The number of stolen cars recovered by Gardaí within the Coolock Sub-district rose from 173 in 2000 to 688 in 2002, before falling to 624 in 2003, 480 in 2004 and 264 in 2005. The trend from 2000-05, therefore, reveals a 53 % decrease in the *stolen cars recovered* over that period. Nevertheless, since the peak year of 2002, there has been a decrease of over 62 %.

Significantly, 2005 is the first year since 2000 that the number of stolen cars recovered in the Coolock Sub-district will not have exceeded the number of cars stolen within the area. As such, it represents a major reversal of the trend evident in the years between 2001-04 in which Garda figures indicate that a large numbers of cars stolen elsewhere were taken into Coolock-sub district and recovered there by the Gardaí.

The pattern in relation to the number of abandoned and burnt out cars removed by Dublin City Council from the Priorswood area are shown in Figure 2 below. In the years since 2000 the pattern has been more varied than in the case of the stolen cars. While the number of cars removed has never returned to its high of 243 in 2000, there is considerable variation from year to year.

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
243	150	120	124	201	154

Source: Dublin City Council Abandoned Vehicles Unit

In relation to the number of cars seized by Gardaí within the Coolock sub-district under Section 41 of the Road Traffic Act (see Figure 3, below), it appears that there has been a steady decline since 2002, although estimated figures for 2005 suggests this may have levelled out. Nevertheless, between 2002-04, there was a 34 % reduction in the number of cars seized by the Gardaí.

2002	2003	2004	2005
416	365	269	<i>273* (159 as of July 2005)</i>

Source: An Garda Síochána

The cars seized under Section 41 are usually ‘bought’ (or what young people refer to as ‘company’) cars. The Gardaí suggest that these ‘cheap’ cars will remain available to young people until the supply of pre-NCT cars has ‘dried up.’ They believe that while joy-riding levels may increase from time to time, it is unlikely to return to its previous heights because improved security systems in newer cars pose a major obstacle to would-be joy-riders. Relatedly, Gardaí note that they do not have any available data in relation to the prosecution of those supplying cars to minors under Section 30 of the Road Traffic Act, as the use of fictitious vendor names on car sales forms often thwarts prosecution.

While awaiting the demise of the ‘bought’ or ‘company’ car, Gardaí are witnessing an upsurge in the juvenile use of another type of vehicle – miniature mechanised bikes – often by pre-teen boys. Owing to the very young age of such boys, Gardaí choose to caution all such juveniles

⁵ The figure of 278 is the projected yearly total for 2005 based on early monthly averages.

and there are accordingly no available figures to indicate the prevalence of this new type of juvenile driving. As they believe that such bikes are mostly being purchased by the parents, the vendor is committing no offence. And despite any danger posed to the child or anyone in the vicinity, the driving of such miniature bikes in privately owned areas does not constitute an offence.

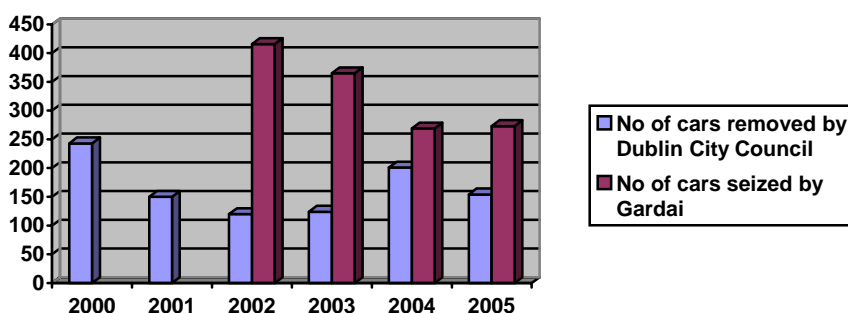
Decreasing Levels of Joy-Riding

As indicated above, the statutory agencies involved in the Task Force point to three useful indicators which signal the diminishing scale of the problem. First, Garda members note a dramatic decrease in joy-riding activity and estimate that today only 20 boys are involved locally. This represents a 50 % decline since 2001, when Farrington (2001: 45) estimated that a hard core of 40 people were involved in joy-riding. Second, as discussed above, data supplied by An Garda Síochána indicates that car theft and car recovery figures have declined significantly in the years since 2001. Thirdly the removal of burnt out cars by Dublin City Council, although variable over the years, is currently at one of its lower points.

NGO members of the Task Force however can offer three equally important observations which qualify the statutory measurement of the joy-riding problem in Priorswood. First, the current low level of joy-riding can be analysed more cautiously as part of an established seasonal pattern of ‘peaks and troughs’. Second, joy-riding or what young people call ‘flashing cars’ has not disappear altogether, but has moved to different locations within the area.⁶ Third, the nature of the problem has partly changed and while there has been a decrease in the number of ‘robbed cars’ in the area, there has been a huge increase in the number of ‘robbed’ motor bikes.

These debates aside, the Task Force members are united in the belief that present-day joy-riding is less frequent and is characterised by a lower degree of organisation than previously was the case. The available data – cars reported stolen, stolen cars recovered, cars removed, and cars seized – support this view, and strongly indicate that since the establishment of the Task Force on Joy-riding in Priorswood the problem of joy-riding activity has decreased. It has by no means, however, gone away, and joy-riding and ‘burnt out cars’ still present a huge situational and social challenge to the community and to the statutory agencies involved. For example, as Figure 3 demonstrates, the scale of the problem remains considerable, with the total numbers of cars seized, recovered, and removed amounting to more than 600 cars per annum.

Figure 3.



The number of people charged with the offences of ‘Unauthorised Taking’ and ‘Interference’ provides one possible indicator of the scale of the joy-riding problem in the Priorswood area. Previously, however, it has been suggested that this category of data is less valuable than the data already discussed above (the number of cars stolen, recovered and removed), on the basis that it is the frequency with which a given individual engages in joy-riding activity that is important, not the simple fact of whether s/he had ever engaged in joy-riding or been caught so

⁶ Joy-riding activity is now, for example, regularly observed in the Stardust Memorial Park, Coolock.

engaged (Farrington 2001: 25). The figures supplied in Figure 4 below are recorded in respect of charges brought against both juveniles and adults under Section 112 of the Road Traffic Act over the past three years.

Figure 4	2003	2004	2005
No. charged under Section 112 RTA	44	52	34*

In 2003, Gardaí charged 44 people with either ‘Unauthorised taking’ or ‘Unauthorised carriage’ under Section 112 of the Road Traffic Act. In 2004, that figure rose by 18 % to 52. Estimates for 2005 suggest the number of people arrested have dipped sharply (an estimated 23 % on 2003 figures).

The adoption of a more proactive approach by Dublin City Council in relation to anti-social behaviour is understood to be a key factor in the decreased incidence of joy-riding. The provisions of the Housing Misc. Provisions Act 1997 are regarded as a very ‘powerful mechanism’ for tackling the problem. Once fully apprehended, the threat of eviction is regarded by the Task Force as ‘a most powerful deterrent.’ The very fact of being under investigation for anti-social behaviour removes tenants’ eligibility for tenant purchase schemes, housing transfers and housing refurbishments. The decision by Dublin City Council to relocate some of its offices into the community and the recent installation of CCTV cameras in the Darndale area are all also regarded as significant factors in the reduction of joy-riding, as is the Garda policy on not ‘chasing’ joy-riders. Improved prosperity in the area and the fact that joy-riders are ‘growing out’ of joy-riding and moving into employment are regarded as generally important, as is the very concrete deterrent of greater security devices in cars. In addition the Task Force’s involvement in the CTC’s engine repair programme and youth work generally may have had an important ‘ripple effect’ among would-be joy-riders. A more cautious analysis includes the observation that some of the main offenders are in prison and their release could spark resurgences in joy-riding activity.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TASK FORCE APPROACH

The maintenance of an inter-agency forum on joy-riding is identified by all members as one of the most significant outcomes of the Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding. Otherwise Task Force members are at variance in their attitudes as to what constitutes success. The Gardaí for example place a strong emphasis on reducing the number of stolen cars recovered or reported. Dublin City Council places a strong emphasis on social inclusion and situational measures. By contrast the primary evaluation criterion for youth and community workers is the level of engagement by young people in the delivery of youth, education and training services.

The reduction in stolen cars and situational improvements are cited by the Gardaí as an immediate endorsement of the Task Force approach. In addition there is a consensus that the Task Force has been an important catalyst for sustaining a working relationship between statutory agencies – the Gardaí and Dublin City Council – and local NGO’s. The establishment of cross-community understanding of the issue of joy-riding has also helped to forge positive working relationships between neighbouring community-based projects. The viability of current proposals to develop a regional youth service for the larger area is cited as testimony to the increase in social capital and participation that has been in part a consequence of Task Force activity.

Some NGO’s on the Task Force are concerned that statutory agencies are overly positive about the impact of the Task Force. They also question whether situational measures (ramps, chicanes, etc.) are exercising a punitive effect on the wider community, particularly in the absence of any meaningful residential representation. This raises a broader question for the NGOs as to whether the activities undertaken by the statutory agencies – specifically Dublin City Council and An Garda Síochána – would have taken place in the absence of a Task Force approach – in effect, whether the Task Force was necessary at all. In response to this, the statutory agencies claim there is no doubt that the Task Force approach gave added synergy to their activities.

Task Force Weaknesses

The participation of local residents was regarded as a prerequisite to the successful functioning of the Task Force. Two possible explanations for the reluctance of local residents groups to engage with the Task Force were offered: first, people approve of joy-riding, or second, they are afraid to speak out against it. The 'intimidation factor' is understood to be significant. Task Force members including the Gardaí observe that many adults come out and cheer joy-riders. Although Gardaí may not receive a single phone call of complaint about it, a joy-riding incident might nevertheless command an 'audience of between three and four hundred people'. In the absence of witnesses however, Gardaí run the risk of losing cases taken on forensics alone. Dublin City Council encounters similar difficulties in obtaining the evidence necessary to process community complaints about anti-social behaviour.

While 'drugs work' has exerted a concerted response from residents, this has never been the case for joy-riding. Joy-riding is not viewed as impacting on family and community life in the same way as heroin addiction. In its simplest expression you can't 'treat' joy-riding in the same manner as heroin addiction. Unlike the heroin problem, joy-riding is not seen as 'a crime against the community.' In addition the area has sustained surprisingly few deaths from joy-riding in contrast to the large numbers lost through drugs. The many Local Drugs Task Forces established across the city and country are contrasted with the sole Task Force on Joy-riding established in Priorswood, which has since its inception operated in isolation from other areas.

The significance of the non-participation of residents on the task-force should not be underestimated and remains the most significant obstacle confronting the Task Force whatever its shape or nature, giving it a sense that the local community have either 'closed its doors' on the problem or withdrawn to 'the opposition camp. This posed difficulties for NGO staff, particularly when the content of public meetings was 'rough hard stuff [for employees] to be hearing'.

Following the publication of the Farrington report, the Task Force appears to have concentrated much of its attention on the engine programme (and its twelve participants) to the exclusion of other proposals and recommendations made within the report. The accompanying failure to develop other responses or to adopt a more analytical approach or move the issue onto a larger policy stage is also described as a disappointment.

Community Policing & Public Housing Policy

NGO members of the Task Force argue that while the community of Priorswood and Darndale has consistently asked for a Garda station and more Garda patrols in the area, this has never happened. However, Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers have established greater contacts within the community and more recently Community Gardaí have been patrolling the area on push-bikes. Three extra Gardaí were specifically assigned as community Gardaí for a minimum period of 2 years. Each Garda covers up to 35 miles in a shift and the bicycles not only provide mobility but also proximity. This policy is designed to give greater visibility and stability to community policing in the area.

Otherwise discussion of the effectiveness of the overall criminal justice response is considered redundant in light of more fundamental concerns about the level of policing in the area. In addition the judiciary is currently described as indifferent to the impact that joy-riding and 'hard-line joy riders' have on the host communities. Gardaí advocacy of impact statements is in this context an attempt to secure greater recognition for the negative consequences of joy-riding. Gardaí insist, however, that where it is appropriate their preference is for community service over imprisonment, and there is considerable scepticism within the Task Force about the deterrent effect of a prison sentence. Prison is described by some as a facility that can offer the company of friends, gym facilities, a criminal education and, for those in for 'long stretches', a proper education. A sentence is described as 'a badge of honour' as opposed to something to be feared.

In relation to the proposed introduction of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) the attention of Task Force members turned to the question of resources and those required to implement the range of legislation already in place. In essence the Gardaí welcome the inter-agency Task Force approach. General concerns are also expressed about the intensifying relationship between the criminal justice system and the administration of housing policy, particularly in public housing estates. Specific concerns relate to the manner in which evictions under the provisions of the Housing Misc. Provisions Act 1997 are impacting on the most vulnerable families in the absence of adequate family support systems. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's) and Good Behaviour Orders for children aged 10-14 if introduced as amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill 2004 could see the link between the administration of housing policy and the criminal justice system intensified with the emphasis in criminal justice rather than family support.

The Task Force can offer five main observations for a more effective response to joy-riding. Firstly there is general agreement that the most appropriate response to joy-riding is one of prevention and diversion as opposed to 'after the fact' measures. Secondly it is maintained that an individual response should be possible for each young person involved, particularly if the numbers involved are as low as Gardaí estimate. The recently established Social Inclusion Initiative for families in danger of eviction in Darndale is cited as a good example of a 'tailored response'. Thirdly there is, however, considerable caution about the low numbers reported and the fact that such numbers exclude, in any case, the significantly larger numbers with a more marginal involvement in joy-riding. Therefore in relation to the broader problem of changing young people's attitudes to joy-riding it is suggested that younger siblings and other family members may prove receptive to preventative education presentation in schools for example by Gardaí and others, and that school children may act as the catalyst for changing attitudes within their communities. Fourthly the demand of residents to secure a greater Garda presence in the area, preferably on the beat and stationed in a local Gardaí station, is acknowledged as an outstanding concern. Finally, Task Force members suggest looking outside of the provisions of the criminal justice system to the operation of community restorative justice programmes community-based non-violent ways of responding to joy-riding.

There is wide recognition within the Task Force of the need for greater and greater 'compensatory measures' within the community. The most appropriate response to joy-riding is accordingly located in the provision of education and family support programmes that build community capacity and improve 'life chances.' It is suggested that intensive work with families would yield only positive outcomes – including a radically altered community fabric whereby families and communities would 'break free' of the negative self image which has plagued the area, and reclaim and celebrate their communities. In seeking to achieve such an outcome, it is suggested that 'you couldn't put enough compensatory supports' into the area. The above is posed as a very positive alternative to any shift towards a more punitive approach adopted in relation to so-called 'problem families.'

A similar consideration to the 'compensatory approach' is that the most appropriate response to joy-riding would look behind the public display and behaviour of joy-riders to consider what precisely is signified by this very high-risk behaviour in the first instance. The decision to joyride is posited as the decision of a young person who has placed a very low value on his life. It is widely acknowledged that official responses have not been developed to address this aspect of the problem, and that responses such as ASBO's or GBO's may work to damage young peoples' self-esteem rather than enhance it positively. The Social Intervention Project in Darndale is however, considered by Dublin City Council to be step in the right direction. The Darndale Social Intervention Project is an inter-agency attempt to address the complexity of anti-social behaviour within a family support framework and as such represents an important component of the Priorswood response to the problem of joy-riding. The Social Intervention Project involves the Area Housing Managers, Social Workers in the employ of the North Eastern Area Health Board, and the Springboard Family Support Initiative, a community based early intervention programme to support vulnerable families. The Social Intervention Project adopts a *case conference* approach to families and young people facing difficulties, for example

under the Housing Misc. Provisions Act 1997. A case conference approach is adopted where a young person is faced with an 'excluding order' from the family home, because neither the State nor the family are disposed to make young people homeless. The Task Force was acutely aware that youth diversion and youth intervention projects were aimed primarily at children at risk or more euphemistically 'bad kids'. The view that such individuals are 'rewarded' with diversionary activities and holidays by youth projects is not confined to the Task Force and it reflects the targeted and residual nature of youth services in Ireland which are designed primarily to meet the needs of children at risk, early school leavers and labour market entrants. In keeping with a residual approach to the organisation of welfare some members suggested that Positive Incentive Supplements should be considered for areas where the risk of delinquency is high. Positive Incentives Supplements are payments awarded to children who do not get into trouble or who stay out of trouble following a warning. Such considerations all stem from an underlying anti-poverty emphasis within the Task Force. Such an emphasis finds resonance in the work of Norris and Kearns (2003) and Norris and O'Connell, C (2002) whose findings place a similar emphasis on anti-poverty initiatives and on the increasing role of local government and county development boards as well as other social housing providers in the delivery of social inclusion measures.

The Future of the Task Force

While there is a degree of variance about the extent to which the Task Force has successfully executed its brief, a number of arguments are advanced for its disbandment. Firstly there are concerns that the very existence of The Task Force on Joy-riding attracts negative media attention to the area in the wake of each and every joy-riding incident, irrespective of the location of that incident. In essence the Gardaí welcome the inter-agency approach whereas others express a sense of futility in seeking to maintain the momentum of the Task Force. Generally it is accepted that the Task Force has proven itself to be a good forum and its continued existence is warranted by the importance of maintaining a preventative focus on an activity which continues to exert a very strong attraction for joy-riders and 'youngsters on the fringes' of joy-riding. It is also generally recognised however that individual agencies or professionals who have been effective in addressing joy-riding will be effective independently of the Task Force. This position is accompanied by the view that the Task Force might prove more effective if reconstituted on a larger stage with a policy brief. It is suggested that some kind of committee with a brief specific to joy-riding and car crime might be more appropriate locally. There is a body of experience and expertise to be harnessed from the work of the Task Force that should prove to be an important resource in addressing any future joy-riding activity either within or without the area in question. If there is general agreement that the Task Force as it is currently constituted does not have a future, there would appear to be almost universal support for a new broader based community forum. The success of such a forum would, however, be contingent on engaging and maintaining residents' interest.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

This chapter presents and analyses the views of 26 young people (ranging from 11 to 23 years of age) who participated in the research. These individuals were contacted through a number of youth-related projects operating in the Priorswood area, as well as through other informal contacts, and the interviews were conducted in various group settings (eight in all). Some potential interviewees decided not to participate after the nature of the research was explained to them. Nevertheless, the 26 people who were interviewed spoke at length about the dynamics of joy-riding, issues of motivation and involvement/non-involvement, the social nature of joy-riding, and its impact on community life in Priorswood. Research into joy-riding is also, by definition, research into the nature of young people's lives in areas where joy-riding occurs, and so we begin our discussion on that broad issue.

GROWING UP IN PRIORSWOOD

As discussed earlier, Priorswood is by all relevant indices a severely disadvantaged area. The experience of growing up in Priorswood echoes this, and all of the young people interviewed expressed serious concerns about the quality of life in the area. Much of their commentary described the area as 'a dump', particularly in terms of its visual appearance: 'papers all over the place, broken bottles, burnt cars, motorbikes.' Others described it as 'a kip' that is 'not a place for kids at all...syringes in the corner of the square and fires burnt everywhere and cans and all thrown all over the place...cars burnt out outside your front door...glass, everything.'

Several young people highlighted the negative reputation attached to the area. They criticised what they viewed as inappropriately negative media coverage it received, and expressed anger and hurt at what they found were blanket assumptions made about its residents. One young girl stated that: 'Some people that don't live in this area are giving us names.' A girl from Darndale described how 'I get slagged where I go to school [and] get called the Darndalian Alien.' Similarly, a girl from Belcamp described being called a 'Smelcamper' from 'Smelcamp.' A young man also recalled a common response when people found out he lived in Darndale: 'The first thing they say is 'he's a scumbag, he's from Darndale.' I hate that. They don't even know me.' One young girl noted that the area was unremarkable insofar as it reflected the problems generally associated with disadvantaged areas 'because what happens here happens in most areas...the likes of Ballymun, Tallaght, Ballyfermot, Clondalkin – it's all the same...Most of the places are even worse than Darndale and Belcamp...there's nothing new about here.'

While disadvantage and the negative reputation of the area are key factors which shape the perceptions of local young people, the interviewees nevertheless recognised that this situation was not static, and that differences existed between different localities. For instance, young people from both Darndale and Belcamp noted that Belcamp is severely lacking in the shops and amenities which are to be found in Darndale. Also, the New Life Centre⁷ in Darndale has come to constitute a very important part in the lives of some young people. One young man describes 'when I was growing up, there was nothing to do. I used to hang around the walls... and then this [New Life Centre] came... It'd make you do stuff, it'd make you do other stuff... fishing and all...but other than that...you might as well do something and the only thing they have to do is joyride.'

Some of their concerns about the area distinguished between its reputation and the reality of living there. According to one boy: 'it's not a good looking place, but it's a good place.' Others noted the improvements that followed on the demolition of the old shopping area that had been a focal point for joy-riding and drug dealing. A group of girls pointed to the area's strong

⁷ The Centre offers a range of activities – working with younger children, youth projects, youth clubs, ice hockey, pool, foosball, football, fishing, swimming, meetings with new people and holidays away.

community spirit: 'Everyone knows everyone...Not a lot of people would do things on you...There's only a few bad families...but otherwise it's as you say 'community spirit'...when you see the gangs in Darndale you don't be afraid because you kind of know them and they wouldn't go near you.' Another girl stated that: 'Anything could happen to us and our neighbours and friends that live near us would look after us.'

Nevertheless, for most of the interviewees, their early teenage years were 'brutal, nothing to do, standing around the road all day, you have to make your own fun... nothing at all to do, bored out of your head, the only thing we had was the club [run by the Priorswood Youth Project].' Other boys, younger in age, described the 'good' things about growing up in Darndale: 'loads of friends...playing football and loads of people to play football with...all the clubs and projects around.' Some boys noted that once they emerged from their early teenage years, the place was 'a bleeding dump' that held nothing for them. The attitude to their lives in the areas is summed up by the older joy-riders:

It's a bit of kip, it's still home at the end of the day, it looks like a bomb hit the place, it's like the Bronx. There's nothing for us to do, it's boring, there's nothing to do besides football – you can't have a horse, a bike, you can't have anything at all. Everyone in the Corporation, they just want you to sit in your gaff all day doing nothing, What do you think we do when we walk out of here? All you can do is drink, take drugs and joy-ride and that's bleedin' it. If you have a horse they take it off you, if you have a bike they take it off you – there's nothing to do, we can't get jobs.

THE ELEMENTS OF JOY-RIDING

While joy-riding is often portrayed in one-dimensional terms as the simple activity of dangerous driving, our interviews with young people and the vocabulary they use suggest that the actual activity is nuanced in several key respects. Those involved tended to refer to 'rallying a car' and occasionally 'running amok in a car'. Younger boys stated they would often note the arrival of a joy-rider with the simple announcement that 'there's a car out', or a 'robbed car'. This appeared to be the position of most young people – 'no one says 'joy-riding'... 'there's a car out' – that's it.' They also noted that the term 'joy-riding' was more like to be used by politicians or other authority figures, and by people not from the area. 'Flashing' is the term most commonly used to refer to joy-riding activity, and, as we discuss below, the term is especially revealing of the 'public' and 'performative' dimensions of joy-riding (and perhaps also, the gender dimension). *Flashing* comprises rallying, pulling 'handbrakers', doing 360s, wheel spins – 'everything that they do in rally cars.' *Rallying* is also used to refer to the type of driving that takes place on a track or off-road, driving over ramps, doing wheel spins, and other 'flashing' activities. *Bugs*, slang for car alarms, present an unwelcome barrier to the joy rider.

The Choice of Car

For those involved in joy-riding, the choice of car reflects a basic consideration of whether to buy a car or steal one: 'There's no point in buying a car if you're going to wreck it... Sometimes you don't just go off and just rob a smelly old car, sometimes you go off and get a proper car with alloys and all and take the alloys all off and take CD players out and sell them.' Wheels are then put on the car which is taken to the field. If electing to 'rob' a car, pre-1996 Mitsubishi and Honda Civics were the most popular choice of car. Car vintage was in part dictated by the art of the possible in light of the more advanced car security available from the mid 1990s: '94s, 92s. You can't go for the 98s or anything...the most you can go for is '96, '97...because they're bugged...the alarms would just go off.' Older boys however suggested 'any Jap car, Civics, Lancers, Gallants, MX5s or BMWs'.

Where money was available, boys might 'chip in' to raise amounts in the region of €60, €80 and €100 to purchase 'company' cars. Regardless of source, such cars are not hard to obtain: 'they're only 'dirt boxes' that last you about two hours anyway, maybe a day or two if you're lucky.'

From the moment that it comes into the area “flying down the road, pulling handbrakers”, the lifecycle of the stolen/bought car is described in the following manner:

It flies in, gives a beep or two, pulls a few handbrakers and just rallies then. And people just start throwing stones and smashing the windows and all... It stops, everyone searches it. Someone else comes in and rallies it. The clutch goes, burn it or the Garda or someone comes in...Unless if they have it for ages on the road they just bring it on the field and rally it.

Cars aren't automatically burnt on their first night in the area, but 'say if I flew in in a car and did a handbraker and the clutch fell out of it, then it'd be burned and searched.'

It just gets made shit of, basically... if they're going to try to make money, they'd bring it into a field, take the wheels of it, take the radio off it... if not, just bring it back, flash it and leave it there.

Young people confirm that others are waiting to drive the cars after they have been abandoned by their original drivers. “Say one driver gets it - goes off spots a car, and some of the others that do get into robbed cars will be there, and the young fella gets out of the car, and one of them probably get into it.” Older boys who actively joy-ride confirmed this observation about 'starting out' rallying “You'd just jump in and cruise around with them, a few months as a passenger, then they'd jump out and you'd try to drive and the car would be jumping up and down”.

One joy-rider observed “I've been watching robbed cars all my life – it's on every bleeding corner.” Close proximity to joy-riding throughout their teenage years allows another group with no involvement with joy-riding to describe the full gamut of involvement with cars - “taking them, robbing them, slashing them, burning them, getting in them or selling them... and if they can't get the car, they smash it up.”

There are pragmatic reasons for concluding joy-riding displays with a ritual burning: if the car has ceased to function, it has lost its use value; fires destroy any finger print evidence left in the car; the decision to burn the car may simply provide a source of heat on a winter's night; or it might also be burnt for “the fun of it – haha' like.”

Motorbikes are an increasingly prominent aspect of joy-riding:

It's not only cars, it's bikes as well. It's mainly cars, just rob them and just drive around then, rally around them. Motorbikes, big bikes, 600's, CVRs, mopeds – anything at all...If you know someone who has a van, you go out in the van, rob loads of bikes and just load the bikes up...

INVOLVEMENT AND NON-INVOLVEMENT

In terms of the factors associated with people's involvement in joy-riding, several points may be made. First, in a community which some young people felt has become synonymous with joy-riding, it is important to note that many young people have no involvement in joy-riding whatsoever: 'What's the point in going out and robbing other people's car, other people's stuff? A girl also noted that: 'We're all different... We don't all joyride. We don't all take drugs and sit on the streets and drink. We are good people... We do want futures. We don't just want to sit around doing nothing.'

Second, for those who do become involved in joy-riding, this can occur at a very young age. Their involvement dated from the age of 11 and 12 when they had ridden in cars driven by their older brother or their 'older brother's mate.' At the age of 12, one respondent 'now' described himself as a good driver. Others testify to the very young age of joy-riders;

Kids around this area and they're only about 12, 13 and they're robbing cars and some of them actually driving around can barely even look over the steering wheel. I seen it one time in the Darndale Park and your man came down and smashed straight into the wall. He could have killed himself, he couldn't even drive the car..."

For those involved in joy-riding it is regarded as an endemic activity - "Every kid around - its not kids - its older lads aged 17-18 - about 50 - 60 - anyone who gets car - there's just three different gangs - do you know what I mean?"

Third, joy-riding is a heavily gendered activity, and, in terms of the driving of cars, is almost exclusively confined to males. Some female interviewees claimed they had occasionally seen girls both drive and "go off robbing." However, for the most part it was agreed that girls' involvement is generally confined to the role of audience. "You just do... just hear them flashing... for a bit of excitement and everyone else is going to be around...to see them taking chase off the Garda and all... Yeah, it is exciting." In speculating as to why it is a predominantly male experience the younger boys suggested that "young ones probably don't have the guts to take the car." One of the older boys when asked about the involvement of girls stated highlighted the passive nature of female involvement "you just pick them up somewhere along the line - you just bring them of somewhere by yourself." The suggestion was that "Flashing" and "Rallying" were exclusively male group activities.

Fourth, levels of involvement in joy-riding vary greatly, both in terms of the level and the frequency of individuals' involvement. An interview with a group of older boys who were actively involved in Joy-riding revealed a high frequency level and that joy-riding took place "all day, you'd go out at 8.00 o'clock in the morning". While others had never been involved and neither had their friends. Some stated that they might watch. Another stated that he had never been involved in joy-riding - "no, not at all" - although he admitted he had 'sat into cars' once or twice. One interviewee explained that instead of joy-riding his teenage years had been spent "at the end of the road" with "nothing at all to do."

MOTIVATION, RISKS AND DANGER

Despite the controversy associated with the term 'joy', it is clear that pleasure and exhilaration are key elements in choosing to joyride. As one young boy put it: 'It's good all over like, bikes, car, everything.' For those currently involved in joy-riding, the thrill and excitement associated with it feature prominently in the accounts they give. They repeatedly spoke of the 'the laugh', 'the speed' and the 'buzz out of it'. Some of them became very animated as they described the pleasure they derived from joy-riding: 'I like watching robbing cars' and 'looking at them flashing up and down the road... It's good the way they pull handbrakers and promotionals and power spins... and then they go onto the field and wreck the field and all, it's good the way they do jumps and all.'

Many of the young people interviewed made a direct link between the increase in joy-riding and the local authority's policy of apprehending and removing horses kept in the area. As one joy rider observed: 'Everyone around our place used to have horses, You'd see 10 or 20 horses on the field and then when the horses went, they all just started standing around drinking and going off robbing cars... and then the coppers wonder why they were robbing cars. But they're the ones helping 'the pound' take the horses.' Young people involved in joy-riding considered these two issues closely related, and they were sharply critical of the failure of Gardaí to make the connection between the taking of their horses and the increase in levels of joy-riding.

The immediate pleasures associated with joy-riding stand in stark contrast with the ongoing boredom that most young people spoke of. The sense of achievement obtained from joy-riding also contrasted with the youths' shared belief that the future held no sense of promise. Several girls interviewed stated that they would encourage boys to "go off and rob a car and come back and give us a bit of enjoyment." They also described the progression from alcohol and drugs to joy-riding in a single evening - "if they're after being sitting there drinking, I'd say, a few bags of coke or whatever they're up to... they're not going to sit in the middle of a field bored out of

their face, 'lets go for a walk, there's a nice little car...' jump into a car, turn the sounds full blast and shoot down the road and take a chase if they have to." Interviewees also linked this sense of boredom with the compulsive manner in which some youths engaged in joy-riding: 'Some people used to rob two, three cars a day. They'd go off rob a car, park it, go back out, rob another car... And then they'd all get the drink that night and start running amok in cars.'

Certainly, consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs is a feature of much joy-riding, although this depends on various factors. For instance, one young joy rider stated that 'The likes of us we don't smoke hash or anything. We drink, but not when driving.' Alcohol can be accessed with greater ease than drugs, and most interviewees claimed that the former was more likely to feature in joy-riding than the latter: 'Drink mostly... probably a bit of hash. I wouldn't say they go off robbing cars out of their heads – on drink probably, but not on anything else. After being drinking, they get hyped up to drive a car. So they just carry on drinking while they have the car.' For the older boys use of drugs appear to be more frequent – 'Sometimes when you are out of it you do E's or coke or whatever – not heroin' – although this may well reflect features of youth culture more generally, rather than anything related to joy-riding specifically.

In some quarters, involvement in joy-riding carries a high status, although this is highly dependent on peer group values. One joy rider reported that 'some people slag you if you don't joyride' and 'start to call you a windbag.' As a consequence, involvement in joy-riding can confer greater popularity on individuals. The status attached to joy-riding is also evident in the fact that joy-riders offered opinions as to who were the best drivers in the area, something also done by the older males now at some remove from joy-riding. The issue of status is itself linked to the skills associated with joy-riding. Driving in this manner is understood to be a highly skilled activity and joy-riding encompasses features that require additional skills, such as 'not bouncing off paths' when undertaking dangerous manoeuvres. The taking of cars is also understood to be a skilled activity in terms of: 'see how fast you can do it...different cars, different times...some people get them in five seconds.'

The skills of joy-riders are recognised by others not directly involved in joy-riding. Some interviewees describe encouraging others to take cars "for something to lighten up the day." This understanding is shared by some girls who describe knowing "who's who when they're out robbing cars – see who can flash it best, see who can take a better chase off the Garda, whatever, who has the better car and all that." Some refer to joy-riders with a degree of respect, even admiration: 'They tried it. They had the bottle to go off and do it. They have the bottle to go off and rob cars and don't care whether they get nicked or not.'

There is a widespread recognition of the dangers associated with joy-riding. One young man describes the manner in which joy-riders drove through the area:

"You know the way the revs... skidding... how fast they turn the corner, because they don't just turn a corner as normal, they'd be hooring around a corner – 50, 60 miles an hour... beeping a horn... sometimes even hitting the Ring Road... going at over a 100 mph over all the ramps."

Yet, despite the risks involved, none of the current or former joy-riders interviewed expressed any fear in respect of personal injury. One did acknowledge the possible danger to others: 'You'd be thinking about that, you'd just make sure to keep your eyes open.' Another noted that 'there's more fear of getting caught if a Guard turns up behind you – you just turn up the radio, ah fuck him.' Otherwise, concern about danger is generally conspicuous for its absence:

you don't be thinking about that when you're in the car, you just see everyone cheering, tunes going. We know people who have been hurt, we know dead joy-riders – a fella I used to be with.

Ultimately, the dangers associated with joy-riding are submerged beneath an ritualistic emphasis on public expressions of defiance: 'Do you know when someone dies and they are a joy-rider, you rob a car and you flash it at their funeral, a fast car, a fast car.'

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF JOY-RIDING

Many instances of joy-riding occur on thoroughfares or situations devoid of onlookers. In such cases, it may be considered a private or secretive activity. However, as noted above, much joy-riding is, at its heart, a social activity in which the location and timing of the activity occurs with a view to attracting and entertaining an audience.

The social dimension of joy-riding is fully evident in the importance given to the choice of location. Some locations are chosen specifically for their high visibility and their accessibility to an audience, while the very fact that joy-riders bring cars back to their own area also demonstrates that considerable value is attached to the respect and recognition given by one's peers: they 'flash them up and down – they want to let everyone know what car they got.' In bringing the car back to their own community, joy-riders are also seeking to protect themselves from any encroachment by the police. The known location provides joy-riders with the optimum position from which to view and evade any approaching Gardaí.

The choice of location is, of course, complex. Some interviewees reported that joy-riding incidents take place 'everywhere' and 'anywhere' in the area: 'They'll go into a cul de sac, do two or three flashes, handbrakes, whatever, go into another cul de sac, do the same, go back around – right around the area, do them up and down the road, go down to Darndale... wherever they see a gang of people, that's where they'll do it... just go in do a flash and blow off.' Moreover, joy-riders from other areas also use Priorswood as an area to drive: 'They're from all over the place, they probably just come in here.' While this is not the only area in which joy-riders drive, it seems clear that joy-riders return repeatedly to the same sites to stage their driving displays: 'there'd be certain roads where it'd be better, where they can pick up speed and do handbrake turns, where there'd be a lot of room for them.' Rallying, of course, taking place in the fields. An older joy-rider explained:

We have our own little road at the back where no houses are and the cars get rallied up and down there, and the kids are up - well the people who are watching are up there - they are up on a mad bank they are well away – the birds are well away – they're not in any danger – its only the people who are in the cars that are in danger. That's only in Darndale there's one road that there are no houses say and there's just like a lane where we can rally the cars – and whoever is not in the car can stand up in the field and watches it. Then there's the schemes where the houses are, that's wherever up the road. It's a flashing spot.

Estimates of audience size range from 50 to 100, the majority of whom are young. Whereas older boys would once have joined the streams of boys en route to joy-riding displays, they now claim significantly less interest: 'If it happened outside my door, I'd look out but I wouldn't run all the way down to have a look at it.'

While joy-riding may take place at all times of the day, it appears to be chiefly a night-time activity. Two calendar dates are selected as occasions for particularly intensive joy-riding activity – Halloween and New Years Night. Some judge Halloween to be the single biggest joy-riding occasion in the year, as a festive occasion when many young people are out 'trick or treating' and joy-riders 'let it rip.' One young person recalled when a robbed car formed the centrepiece of the Halloween bonfire. Others describe the frenzy of previous New Years Nights when as many as thirteen cars were to be found in the area.

The social dimension of joy-riding is also reflected in periods of intensive joy-riding activity related to organised competitions as opposed to calendar events: 'There was a time there when they had a challenge between Belcamp and Darndale to see who can rob the most cars in a month...Hundreds of cars being robbed, you could see cars in tens coming in.' Another

interviewee highlighted ‘challenges between Bunnratty and Darndale – whoever gets the most cars...different gangs from the same area.’

As noted above, the role of the audience is a significant dimension to joy-riding, and the excitement of joy-riding is generally shared among the young people who gather to watch driving displays. For some young people, the arrival of a car is a highlight of their day. One young boy described himself and his peers as ‘mad for the cars... cars are coming in every night... It’s good looking at them.’ Throughout the area, a joyridden car functions as a clarion call summoning an audience – ‘loads, fifty, sixty people, it depends on who’s around’ – to assemble:

It’s like Leisureland...they just appear, the word just comes, it just goes around everyone... and they all come to see it...cause when they see people running, they know there’s something going on...or else you’ll know someone who’s running and they’ll tell you ‘there’s a robbed car’ or ‘there’s a car’ and they tell you where.

Even late at night, some joy-riding displays generate an audience:

Everybody comes out of their houses at 4 in the morning just to watch them... There’s young fellas over on the park road do have their video cameras out... watching them taking chase... and that’s why the people with the video camera say ‘go off and get a good car’... and they bring back ‘top of the range’ cars and just flash them up and down.

In addition to watching the ‘flashing’, the audience may only witness confrontations between joy-riders and the police. Sometimes, the audience may become directly involved in that confrontation: ‘They could all be little gangs over the road drinking...next of all they hear the car...And they’d all go around and look at the car and then the Garda come in and they all probably start throwing bricks at the Garda. Mad it is.’ Overall, as one young boy noted, being part of the audience enabled him and his peers to participate in the excitement of this ritual driving: ‘It’s good like, everyone just likes watching, it’s good, it gets you excited.’

JOY-RIDERS AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

For very young joy-riders, joy-riding is not judged to be anti-social: ‘not for us, but probably for the aul ones’ such as parents and others older residents. Separate groups of joy-riders and non-joy-riders highlighted what they viewed as an unending litany of complaint made against them to Dublin City Council: when they had horses in the field, there were complaints; when they rode their bikes up and down the field, there were complaints. As one joy rider put it, it gets to the stage where ‘you can’t have anything.’ A youth not involved in joy-riding stated that: ‘It’s wrong, but like we still go and watch it...because there’s nothing else to do.’

Nevertheless, for those actively involved in joy-riding, being apprehended by the police and processed by the criminal justice system is an occupational hazard and a real possibility. Despite the ultimate possibility of some form of custodial disposition, the very young joy-riders interviewed as part of this research exhibited a rather innocent and ambivalent curiosity about prison. One stated that: ‘I’d like to spend about three nights – just to see what it was like...see how strict it was.’ This understanding of prison was informed by a view that it may even have some positive aspects. One youngster has seen people ‘going in strung out, really skinny and they come out real fat and they stay away from the drugs then’, while another young boy reportedly had a cousin in prison who ‘liked it.’ Older boys exhibited a greater awareness of the negative consequences of being convicted. One noted that: ‘I’ve been up to prison to see my friends that have been caught for joy-riding – you wouldn’t like to be locked up, nobody would like to be locked up.’ Another expressed a similar view: ‘My brother’s lockup for up years [locked up for years?] – it won’t happen to me...Nobody wants to be locked up, nobody likes it.’

While most of those we interviewed considered the threat of a custodial sentence a reasonably remote possibility, they had much more definite opinions about the police. Some of this reflected the manner in which the police impinged on joy-riding – either through their presence bringing a joy-riding episode to an end, or else through the further excitement that joy-riders derived from being chased by the police or that onlookers derived from confronting the police. As one young boy stated:

They rally them first, and then when they think the Garda is going to come in... some of them don't get out, they love it too much, they just stay in it until the Garda come...and then the Garda come, we all lift up bricks.

A young joy rider also described his response to the arrival of the Gardaí.

If I saw the Garda coming up onto the field, I wouldn't stop, I'd just take the chase... I just go through the gap... and if they couldn't go up onto the field, we'd just go beside them and laugh at them... you'd have to just for the laugh...you just fly off and put the bike somewhere... and change your top.

Beyond this joy-riding-related contact, the vast majority of the encounters the interviewees had with the Gardaí were negative. Some boys described instances of misconduct and violence by the police, and only one boy described a positive and reasoned encounter with a garda (involving a juvenile liaison officer whose specific role was to divert the youth away from becoming formally involved with the criminal justice system).

Much of the criticism these youths made of the police reflected a view that the police were an oppressive entity that unnecessarily impinged on their everyday lives. One described: 'hanging around [because] there is nothing to do. We'd be just standing there and they'd be over to us, bothering us, asking us what we were doing, standing around and all...We're only out socialising, having a yap.' Another claimed that 'you get charged over standing on roads nowadays.' Others were dismissive of the Gardaí, describing them as 'useless, never rely on them ever... they just don't care.'

Most young interviewees simply reported having no contact whatsoever with Gardaí. A group of youths recalled one occasion on which they had seen Gardaí walking around the area, and they: 'laughed at it because it's so rare, it never happens – you laugh at it because it never happens.' They also expressed reluctance to report incidents to the police because they 'don't want to be a rat', and slow police response times led them to believe that 'they're wouldn't be any point' in calling them. Young people also describe what they perceive to be a very lax and impotent police response to joy-riding incidents: 'If I heard a robbed car, it's just like 'oh, there's a robbed car' and you wouldn't run around the corner. You'd just walk around the corner because you know the Guards won't be there for ages, and even if they do come in, they'll still joyride in front of them and the Garda will just sit there and won't do anything... Sometimes there does be cars out there for an hour and more and nothing.' They consider the police to be apprehensive and fearful when confronted with such displays: 'The Garda do be afraid... There was often times I'd seen two robbed cars... and the Garda came in. The car came down after the Garda and the Garda flew out and didn't come back in.'

In a detailed response to the Morris Tribunal Report and the Garda Síochána Bill, Peter McVerry S.J. argued that the relationship between the Gardaí and local communities in working class suburbs was problematic and in these areas confidence in the Gardaí had waned, particularly among the group whom the Gardaí are most likely to encounter, young males. McVerry criticised the Bill for its 'failure to establish community structures.' To some extent, these criticisms are accommodated within the subsequent Garda Síochána Act. Nevertheless, our research clearly demonstrates the strong need for the institutionalisation of a dialogue

between young people themselves (particularly young males), their interest groups, and the Gardaí, at a local community level⁸.

Overall, the young people interviewed for this report expressed a strong sense of vulnerability in a physical environment which was open and permeable to all. They were aware that residents in wealthier areas install gates and intercoms, creating what they called 'lock-ins', but they recognised that this expensive option was not available to them: 'they're all big millionaires houses, this is a council estate, what do you expect?' They expressed anger at Dublin City Council's perceived inaction over what is 'their property at the end of the day': 'They should be taking their fingers out, doing a bit of work as well, because we're sitting here taking all the grief.' They also criticised what they perceived as the Gardaí's failure to provide adequate policing and protection in the area: 'If the robbed cars are always going to be there, the danger is always going to be there...'

CONCERNS OVER DRUGS AND DRUG TREATMENT SERVICES

While joy-riding is, as one young man put it, 'a bad thing, obviously,' many of those interviewed, argued that the issue is eclipsed by the area's drug problem: 'Drugs are ten times worse, tenfold. Cocaine is everywhere.' They held the common view that, unlike heroin, cocaine has come to be socially acceptable. 'Everyone does it... and before you know it, it's ruining lives... Everywhere you see is just drugs, drugs, drugs... everyone's at it.' Some young girls added that for them 'the addicts and the pushers' constitute the area's most important problem, not joy-riding, and they noted the damage that 'junkies' are inflicting on the area. 'They go to the clinics and then they bring all their friends back...and throw their methadone bottles around... and the needles on the road where the kids are.' Other girls noted the problems associated with 'all addicts coming around getting their drugs, it doesn't even have to be parks, anywhere at all, they're banging gear up on back of buses.' Antipathy towards heroin addiction is shared by joy-riders and non-riders alike: 'the stuff'd melt you.'

The view that local drug treatment centres are attracting non-resident addicts and their friends to the locality, and that methadone bottles distributed in clinics are being discarded casually, is a commonly held one. Such observations suggest that national and locally co-ordinated policy initiatives to tackle the drugs crisis and provide local treatment alternatives have failed to engage the active support of young people, and have underestimated the perceived costs to an area from housing such clinics.

JOY-RIDING AND COMMUNITY CONFLICT

While joy-riding brings considerable excitement into the lives of many young people in the Priorswood area – whether as drivers or as audience – it has huge implications for the community in which it takes place, particularly when it repeatedly occurs in a particular locale. Many residents consider that joy-riding is a blight on their community, bringing real danger and lasting disrepute to their area. Even young people with a degree of sympathy for joy-riders expressed the concern that 'they're driving them up and down roads where children do be.' As a young girl put it:

A stop is going to have to come to it at the end of the day... because someone is going to be killed because they are a bit much now. One of the kids could just be... over the road and he could come in and 'bang' – dead – and then the person that'd be joy-riding would be dead after him.

As residents of the area themselves, joy-riders are aware of this level of concern, hostility and antagonism, and so their activities are conditioned by this awareness. For instance, one joy rider noted that: 'You don't rob from your own area, well not from people you know.'

⁸ Peter McVerry SJ (2004) 'Morris Tribunal Report and the Garda Síochána Bill 2004', *Working Notes* (Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice), Issue 49 (November).

In previous years (mainly during the 1990s), residents and community activists embarked on a high-profile policy of marching on the homes of individuals suspected of joy-riding. This was considered more intrusive and intimidating than any other measure, and joy-riders expressed relief at its passing: 'No, that all stopped years ago...It's more frightening for everybody at the end of the day.'

Young people described a variety of more recent local attempts to deal with or deter joy-riding activity (although the majority of the young people encountered did not appear to have any knowledge of the Task Force). One young boy noted that 'Most times some people try to stop the cars', while another stated that adults will 'tell them to get out of the car and go away, they'll ring the police, and they stand there until the police comes.' On some occasions local mothers took to the streets and occupied sites where joy-riding displays took place:

Remember before when all the women, all the ma's, put the pillars up at the muck hill [a local joy-riding site] and they all sat on each pillar...and protested so the cars couldn't get up the muck hill...all the women sat there and it stopped for a couple of weeks.

The youths we interviewed were deeply critical of residents who called the police, and one joy rider described his standard response to this as: 'get in your window, you bleeding rat.' Other joy-riders also singled out such residents for strong criticism: 'Rats – people who call the Garda – aul ones, all the nannies – let everyone know that they are a rat. You'd be against them for being rats. We are not doing anything to them, you know what I mean.'

DESISTANCE, AND AN END TO JOY-RIDING

While joy-riding features prominently in the lives of young people in Priorswood, as drivers and audience, their views on how it might be ended are mixed and hesitant. There is scepticism that a custodial sentence deters potential joy-riders: 'I'd say when you do get locked up... some of them just get a fright and don't do it again, and there again some of them just keep going.' Another noted that: 'I know loads of lads who have come out of prison and they haven't copped on yet'. This uncertainty reflects the diverse trajectories that joy-riders follow as they move out of their late teens: 'Some people that were joy-riders are robbing banks now. They're loaded now and they all sell drugs. And everyone changes and everyone goes their separate ways. Some people do get on the straight and narrow and get a job...a mixed bag really.' There is a sense that joy-riding is inevitable, even after specific joy-riders have been prevented from doing so: 'Nothing can stop them unless they're put away in prison, but then there's always going to be people after them and after them.'

Some suggested that joy-riders might desist from their activities if they were given an opportunity to do 'something to do with cars'. One older joy-rider expressed a desire to help organise an annual festival. Others believed that the transition to adulthood and its related responsibilities was the factor most likely to end a joy-rider's activities. One person suggested that 'sometimes if they have kids, they can stop for the kids... but that's very rare.' An older joy rider also linked desistance from joy-riding with having a family: 'When would you stop joy-riding? When you have kids, when you have a bird and all that.' Such observations portray joy-riders as aspiring to exactly the same future as many of their non-joy-riding peers, evident in the aspirations of one young joy rider: 'get on with my life, and when I'm 18, buy a car and get a job.' Moreover, the fact that these joy-riders spoke about getting jobs as carpenters, bricklayers, scaffolders and plumbers, also suggests that many of them viewed themselves as regular and productive members of society, in contrast to their media portrayal as pathological outsiders.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON JOY-RIDING AND THE TASK FORCE

INTRODUCTION

“I would describe Darndale as an island, it is circled by a road, it tends to be brothers and sisters from large families who would have grown up locally. Belcamp sits between Darndale and Moatview, it has very much the same social class mix of people but they don't want to belong to Darndale. Moatview would be seen locally as quite tough, even lesser than Darndale by the residents. There is a sense that 'Darndale gets everything' But Darndale is over thirty years old, the oldest of the four, it has a lot of active community people and they've been fighting for what they have got. Clonsaugh is mainly made up of purchased housing and they wouldn't consider themselves connected to any of those places at all further down the line. A lot of them came from Darndale and from Coolock. But I suppose if people make the effort, if they've worked and taken on a mortgage - they feel like they're making a step higher In their heads, its very segregated but people actually mix from one to the other and somebody can have a sister here and sister there, but segregated in terms of services.”

The above quote typically reflects an overarching theme that despite a strong sense of neighbourliness, the Priorswood area is, in an era of overall prosperity, also strongly characterised by an intensification of economic and social divisions. The notion of a community divided is developed by one resident who argues that in the long term, the outcome of social division will be a fractured community in which neighbourly relationships will be gone. Social stratification is seen as an ongoing process, the direction of which can be gathered from the number of “people putting houses up for sale and all you hear is 'I'm getting off this estate'. And that's when it will be like the £5,000 [surrender grant] years ago. The people that had the money were able to walk out... If you go back to that, who are you bringing in”. A strong sense of crisis and frustration was evident throughout the interviews.

This chapter presents and analyses the views of nine people resident or working in the Priorswood area (none of whom are members of the Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding). These individuals were contacted through a variety of local contacts, and includes three people who work locally in the field of social intervention. Three of the interviewees also belonged to Belcamp Estate Steering Committee (BESC) which has offered a sustained critique of the Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding throughout its period of establishment.

JOY-RIDING AS A SITUATIONAL PROBLEM

The above description of Darndale as an island encircled by roads locates the introduction of situational measures, such as ramps and chicanes, within wider residential concerns in relation to public planning. Residents who are housed in close proximity to a 'flashing spot' suffer a type of second order social exclusion in isolation from their neighbours because 'there's only certain areas where they joyride, so no, it doesn't affect a whole community. Joy-riders concentrate on a particular road or corner, it doesn't relocate. In Darndale, they would have certain spots because there is a road going around it. There are only two entry points into the estate. The Garda have to come all the way around but you can see them. So by the time the Garda would have got around, they have well got them spotted... Often they'd wait til the last minute [to go], the Garda don't tend to be much of a deterrent because 9 times out of 10 they wouldn't come, wouldn't get out of the car. They'd look and drive off.' A pervasive sense of corralled abandonment creates a jaundiced view of Gardaí and Dublin City Council operations. This view of the Gardaí is summed up succinctly by another resident when asked to describe the area: 'It's a kip...there's no law and order. People do what they like. The law doesn't function in here. They come in to pick up the bodies on a Monday... It just doesn't work. The system doesn't work here.'

Residential concern with wider public planning issues is again evident in the following observation that ‘the layout of this estate [Belcamp] is ideal if you’re trying to make your escape from the Guards. A lot of people will drive around elsewhere but will come into this area finally “to ditch” the car - it is unbelievable number of cars burnt out in this area.’ Situational solutions to the joy-riding problem such as ramps are viewed in the local community as a major nuisance, although one that is endured with some tolerance because ‘it’s good for traffic calming for children playing out on the road.’ However one resident summed up the overall attitude: ‘I think that ramps are irrelevant to joy-riders’. Another resident also noted the nuisance associated with ramps: ‘have you ever tried driving around the whole Dublin 17? You’d spend your whole life going up and down ramps.’ Another resident remarked in relation to ramps ‘they don’t deter joy-riders, they do calm traffic and they are unsightly. So no they don’t work.’ Overall, while residents acknowledge that ramps calm traffic, they also consider them a price to pay aesthetically and environmentally.

A final observation in terms of the scale of the ‘situational problem’ rather than the ‘situational response’ was offered in relation to the seasonal nature of joy-riding activity and the two highlights of the joy-riding calendar – Halloween and Christmas: ‘If you look up here at this area...the whole place is lit up all the time from as soon as it gets dark to about 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning...and coming up to Christmas, talking about fireworks in both cases.’ The ‘holidays’ present ever-increasing opportunities for consumption and in this instance the new fashion of decorating the outside of individual houses with seasonal lighting is seen as exacerbating an already dire situation of street lighting providing the floodlights for joy-riders. In relation to the seasonal impact on the situational nature of the problem another resident confirmed: ‘winter times are definitely more popular than summer’. Others noted that joy-riding now takes place later and later at night: ‘years ago it would have been earlier, say 9ish, now it tends to be later – 9, 10, 11, and through the night.’ Despite claiming that that joy-riding has become an ‘all night’ activity, residents also cautioned that there is no set time ‘for them anymore’ and that joy-riding can occur around any time of day.

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Residents confirm the Task Force view that the numbers involved in joy-riding are not great. They do, however, caution against underestimating this figure: ‘don’t be under any misapprehensions; you’re talking about small numbers in each estate. You’ve got 6 estates [Darndale, Belcamp, Moatview, Clonshaugh, Fairfield, Ferriggarrig, Bonnybrook] on top of each other. Put the numbers together, it makes a fairly big number, especially if they’re all in your area on the one night, and that’s the way they operate.’ In other words from a residential perspective, joy-riding involves large gatherings of children from several estates involved in ‘flashing robbed cars’. The conservative estimate is 20 joy-riders with an audience of several times that number outside residents’ homes.

Residents described the situation in summer 2005 as ‘fairly slack at the moment’ but there was a categorical rejection of any statutory or Task Force claim of a significant reduction: ‘they’re not talking about Darndale, Belcamp, Moatview, then...there has been a bit of reduction in the Darndale area [but it is] restricted to one [named] area... the cars wind up in the park where they’re burned out and then toppled into the pond’. Residents also pointed out that ‘prior to last Christmas, you’re talking about 2, 3 cars a night, every night.’ The reliability of these views seems to be enhanced by the similarity between residents’ and joy-riders’ descriptions of the same events. For example, both joy-riders and residents made reference to a competition in the previous year where boys from different estates tried to see which gang could rob the most cars in one night. In a similar manner, residents made reference to the funeral arrangements of a joy-rider: ‘we heard that as a mark of respect they were going to congregate outside Darndale Church – 30/40 of them...we heard, informed the Guards and were able to stop most of them.’ For joy-riders the only way of showing respect to their deceased friend meant arranging a defiant display of joy-riding at the funeral. The untimely death of a young boy therefore served to deepen social dissonance, forcing some local residents to work with the Gardaí to prevent the funeral becoming yet another facet in the public spectacle of joy-riding.

OTHER SOCIAL PROBLEMS

By contrast with members of the Task Force, residents did not view joy-riding as 'way down the league table' of social problems. On the contrary, residents argue that joy-riding remains a major blight on their lives and on the local landscape. One resident stated categorically that joy-riding was the 'third' most important social issue: 'Third. The more important issues are drugs and alcoholism. That's right across the population (not just young people).' The distribution and consumption of illegal drugs was regarded as a highly deplorable yet blatantly visible aspect of the local economy:

There are well known spots where people stand and sell all day. There are well known houses that sell. And yet, it seems to be like a licensed business, you can carry on and do it... There isn't an aged population here. The adults here tend to be 30s, 40s, a few into their 50s, 60s. Hash would be seen to be commonplace and no one would see any problem with the smoking of hash. And then there would be an awful lot of adults who would be taking anti-depressants... Maybe the system is overburdened. There's not much counselling done anymore. Kind of turn up every month and receive your prescription.

Here, the reference to anti-depressant prescription drugs was made in respect of both men and women, while the term 'turn up every month' relates to methadone maintenance programmes. Alcohol is also considered a 'huge' problem for children as well as adults. Depression is regarded as a major social issue which is directly related to the endemic scale of alcohol use, prescribed drug use, methadone maintenance and illegal drug use:

depression – depression is big... and people don't even know they're depressed Darndale is an island. It's surrounded by a road and rarely has new people move into it... It breeds despair around itself. If I live here and so do my sisters and kids and I don't really mix anywhere else, the only view I have of the world is our one shared view. If I don't get on the bus and go to town, if I only get on the bus and go as far as Northside [Shopping Centre] or Tesco...

While illegal drugs emerged as the unanimous first choice of all concerned as the worst problem facing the area, some residents stated that 'violence' now challenges alcohol for second place: 'There's a lot more violence, now. Years ago you might get a brick through your window. People are actually coming now with a hammer or a baseball bat, barefaced, it doesn't have to be in the darkness of the night, it could happen in the daytime as well... It's after festering a more violent nature in the people that own the car.' Interviewees claimed that joy-riding provokes violent reactions from residents against joy-riders, arising from the 'frustration of seeing a young fella in a different car everyday and then one day he's in yours – and violence erupts.' The link between violence and the distribution and consumption of illegal drugs, particularly cocaine, was also emphasised throughout the interviews with residents. Residents argued that they 'warned police that it was coming – that crack cocaine was here.' Residents spoke about the debt which young people were getting into because of cocaine and asserted that 'a lot of young people are now selling cocaine also.' There was an overarching link between illegal drug dealing and a new all pervasive atmosphere of violence: 'Violence is very, very prevalent in the area... that wouldn't necessarily be all [linked] to the joy-riding, most of that would be [linked] to the drugs – in particular, coke.'

Residents link a societal disregard for joy-riding to an escalation in violence and to the emergence of endemic depression, habitual alcohol use and addiction to illegal and prescription drugs. Residents make a strong link between an escalation in the nature of joy-riding activity with an escalation in violence, drug use and similar trends in the broader culture.

Yes, absolutely. The joy-riders now are definitely taking more risks in what they're doing. It is definitely more dangerous and it's more destructive. Years ago they would have joy-ridden in a car and then they would have left it. Now they drive them at lampposts to knock them down, they drive them at walls to damage them. They would burn them out right up against the side of your house where years ago they would never have done that. The fumes are horrendous. The windows would have to be closed but even with vents in them, the smell is in the house but then you're suffering from the dirt of the burnt out cars because its not cleaned up properly so you're walking burned oil and tar and filth into your house... The burnt car will be removed but what's left there is left there. I've had cars burnt out outside my gate, and then can't park my own car in the garden and can wait for up to two days to have the car removed

THE IMPACT OF JOY-RIDING

As the above section indicates, joy-riding impacts in a negative and consequential manner on the quality of life of local residents. While experiences of joy-riding were a common feature of residents' interviews, the specific impact it had on individuals varied considerably. One resident described how she felt compelled to abandon her home after many years of incessant harassment:

I lived in a lovely spot in Darndale where the joy-riding was prolific. What I would find about joy-riding is that it comes in spates, you could have it for a week or you could have it for three months. But when it starts, it starts until it finishes and you're never quite sure which it is. It tends to be a certain age group of children. It tends to be 13 to 16, 17 age group and it tends to be a small number... It would be two or three that would be at it... they would do the main joy-riding and then when they're finished, others get out - they're learning the craft as they say, up and down in it. You get absolutely no response from the Garda... You'd be lucky if the phone was answered in Coolock Garda Station... No response. The odd occasion, the very rare occasion would you get a response to it. The week my eldest child was doing his Leaving Cert... I suffered a stolen car outside my house... at 11 o'clock at night, at 3 o'clock in the morning and again at 5 o'clock in the morning for the entire week. And, as much as we tried I could get no response from the Guards or Dublin City Council in relation to the area in which they were joy-riding. And to this day, that area is still not blocked off from joy-riders.

This interviewee also noted the manner in which these events affected her son's leaving certificate examinations:

We were all awake for hours on end. By the end of the week we were so physically tired from it that our muscles hurt. He sat his exams but they would have impacted severely on how well he did in them. DCC [Dublin City Council] would have said we'll put boulders there or we can't get a JCB to put them back in place etc. but what was there was not sufficient to keep them out and is still not sufficient to keep them out, and it only really affected two houses so there wasn't enough of a voice to get them to do anything about it. The cameras have gone in so it's going a little quieter, but it's moved over to Coolock instead - to Bunratty [by the park].

This account in particular, gives an indication into the gravity of the decline in well-being, the lasting negative impact on the life chances of local children. It also highlights the scale of disruption to home life which impacts negatively on paid work performance and on unpaid parenting in the home.

"Health, if you're working - [which some people think you shouldn't be if you live in these areas], and quite a lot of people are actually - you cannot get to sleep at 4 o'clock in the morning because of screeching tyres, people shouting and roaring and over-revving of engines and sirens and what have you....That's the parents' side of it... and they've got to get up the following morning and go to work. And then the

mother has to bring the children past debris of last night's festivities – burnt out cars like shit all over the place, tyre marks, you name it... they have to walk past that bringing their kids to school. This makes an imprint on your idea on where you live... the walls are covered with 'Garda scum'... burnt out cars, your da is going out wrecked... So there's a lot of impacts... And then of course there's the financials of it all – the cost of policing it, the cost of clearing it up, the damage that's done to Corporation property... how do you quantify all of that?"

The financial cost of joy-riding to the Gardaí and to Dublin City Council is a recurring residential research issue. Dublin City Council estimate the average cost per month for removing abandoned cars from the Priorswood area at €1,200. The costs to the local Gardaí Síochána are somewhere in the region of €5,000 per month for recovering stolen cars. There are also other considerable related costs: damage to garda vehicles arising from being rammed by joy-riders or from disturbances associated with joy-riding (Gardaí claimed that one police vehicle had received 400 separate dents from stones thrown at it). In addition there are the physical costs of injuries to Gardaí. Other indirect costs include the diversion of Garda resources from dealing with other forms of crime.

A further point to arise from these interviews, however obvious, is that joy-riding is experienced differentially within the same neighbourhood: for many residents it is highly placed in the league table of social problems, while for others it is at the top of the table. The following quote demonstrates the impact of joy-riding on a family housed in close proximity to a 'flashing point' or location of joy-riding activity.

"There's many a day I often felt depressed inside my house by joy-riding. There's only certain areas where they joy-ride, so no, it doesn't affect a whole community. Joy-riders concentrate on a particular road or corner, it doesn't relocate. In Darndale, they would have certain spots because there is a road going around it. There are only two entry points into the estate. The Garda have to come all the way around but you can see them. So by the time the Garda would have got around, they have well got them spotted... Often they'd wait til the last minute [to go], the Garda don't tend to be much of a deterrent because 9 times out of 10 they wouldn't come, they wouldn't get out of the car. They'd look and drive off."

Joy-riding is therefore experienced primarily as a problem of household location within a housing estate. It is experienced as an aspect of community level disadvantage or what Fahey (1998) refers to as 'second order social exclusion'. Fahey argues that the social segregation and social organisation of low income families has resulted in large clusters of people now living in socially depressed housing. The negative mental outcomes of housing low income families close to a 'flashing spot' can therefore in this context be taken as a given, and any review of any housing policy should attend to whether families with small children are being housed in close proximity to a known 'flashing spot'. For most residents, however, the problem of joy-riding experienced is in terms of spatial and/or environmental concerns. For example, one young father describes the impact of joy-riding on parenting:

If I'm in a park with my son... playing football or something, next minute a robbed car comes in, that's the whole fun ruined, straight into the house... it's all ruined for the day.

Parents in general live in a state of constant alert for the safety of young children, all of whom must be taken inside 'the minute you hear a wheel.' A teenage resident described the environmental situation in Darndale Park and the surrounding area in the following manner: 'It's in bits... anywhere you go, you see burnt cars, even sometimes when we do be playing football matches... we go down to our pitch and have to call off the match over a robbed car in the middle of the pitch.' Another interviewee described joy-riding as 'a scourge': 'It's a scourge if it disturbs you from your sleep, it's a scourge if it happens during the middle of the day and the kids are out on the road and you have to go look for them.'

MOTIVATION, PARTICIPATION AND SOCIALISATION

Residents' understandings of the motivation behind joy-riding do not lay much store on the notion of 'rational choice'. On the contrary, residents argue that joy-riding is best understood in terms of socialisation, as something which some children grow into over time:

Joy-riding hasn't just been something they've taken on as something to give them a buzz or entertain themselves. Some of them would have come from very dysfunctional families, some of them would have been drug users, and they certainly would all have abused hash and alcohol and would have been wayward from 8, 10 years of age.... Most of them would have been out of school very early – maybe 12ish, they're on the streets. They start at 9, kind of 10 getting into maybe an old leftover car that's of no use, won't really go very far, they have to hone their skills and learn how to drive. So it's the same age profile all along: 13-17... At 6, 7 and 8 they do [have a normal childhood]. At even 11 and 12, they still have some, but it's going because if they look at their peers at 13, 14, 15, 16 they're using drugs, they're getting drunk and they're not in school And that's very widespread. And even if they're still in school, they're using drugs or getting drunk.

Residents differentiate between three stages of motivational development for joy-riding activity which can be separated into three different age groups from: 8-11 (national school), from 12-15 (junior certificate level), and from 16 upwards (leaving certificate level). A strong focus on early school leaving and labour market entrants within Irish youth policy leaves younger school-children with little out-of-school support. Residents identify the age at which children make the transition from national school to secondary school (10-13) as an especially crucial time in terms of the provision of out-of-school support, social intervention and youth work.

Residents note that socialisation into joy-riding does not occur strictly within families, but instead arises from the broader role of the 'audience', which includes children and adults. The following quote reflects this view that adults in the community provide joy-riders with an appreciative audience and thereby a degree of public legitimacy:

Everyone comes out to watch it... Every door opens...We have a couple of very good drivers who'd be doing handbrake turns and wheelies... and skidding around – controlled skids... but we have some of them who aren't so skilful...who have inflicted damage on walls, railings etc. I'd put a lot of it down to the people who go out and cheer them on – the adults in the crowd... It's the adults who go out and make it a spectator sport because the children won't see anything wrong if it's the adults in the crowd with them.

Joy-riding can therefore in some ways be understood in terms of competition, reflected in an obsession with 'league tables' of drivers who are known to their audiences. It feeds on a contemporary social predisposition with a *quest for excitement*⁹ which presents a competitive challenge to mainstream passive 'action' entertainment on the television. The nature of the attraction of joy-riding as an invidious spectator activity is evident in the following quote

I was watching 'the Bill' on telly last week and I actually thought the sirens and the chase were on my telly... and next of all I saw loads [of people] running down. I went out to see what was happening. The car had jumped over and got stuck and the one had ran and the police had chased and caught one of them... and I looked p the road and down the road and the cars – even the cars on the main road - were all stopped... mad. I went back in to watch the Bill and I thought 'holy fuck' cos I

⁹ The 'quest for excitement' is commonly associated with sporting activity and the violence sometimes associated with it, and with extreme sports and has now become a more widespread concern of social theory see Dunning and Elias et al.

looked around and you could nearly feel the excitement and I thought ‘Jesus there’s more excitement out here than watching my telly.’ It was like a scene from the Bill and I went back in and the Bill was boring compared to what was going on...

Such an observation supports the view that joy-riding is ‘aptly named’, being rich in excitement and a dramatic break from the boredom of being wage-less and wealth-less. For others, however, the excitement associated with joy-riding required a strategic household response: ‘we always had a policy in our house that you weren’t allowed to look at them because that only eggs them on if they have a crowd.’ Such a response demands a combination of parental confidence and children’s compliance which is not readily available to every family:

I have an 11 year old as soon as he hears a robbed car, he’s up onto the field here... He thinks it’s cool – the sound of a robbed car. He doesn’t realise the dangers... It’s not only him, it’s about 20 kids. They all run out of their houses, they could be in the middle of eating their dinner and they hear a car and they’re out. And it’s very hard to keep kids away from that kind of activity. They want to watch. They think it’s cool them pulling hand-brakes, sparks coming out of the back. There was a car here at the weekend – three wheels it was driving on and the smell of it burning and the kids were ‘oh, I wonder where it is?’

This quote, from an individual who in the past had actively campaigned against joy-riding, illustrates how joy-riding works to divide families, neighbours and communities, and the strain of maintaining the dynamics of family life when confronted by joy-riding.¹⁰ As with all considerations of joy-riding, the issue of audience participation is complex and cannot be reduced to an endemic quest for excitement shared by children and adults alike. The following quote differentiates between the eager children at the front and the more reticent parents ‘in their gardens’ who not surprisingly are dutifully carrying out their role as guardians under hazardous circumstances:

It’s a young audience up close, because if they were on a roadway, they would go onto a green area to watch it. Some adults would stand in their gardens, but they mightn’t be able to see the car, they might stand there to see their children. Some adults might watch it.

Another interviewee stressed the level of long-term family organisation required to live with the spectacle of joy-riding without conforming to its inducement. When asked if children were tempted to go out and watch, she replied: ‘No, they were brought up with a very definite message and regime in relation to joy-riding.’

ASSESSMENTS OF THE TASK FORCE ON JOY-RIDING

Criticism of the Task-Force on Joy-riding includes a general dissatisfaction with research reports, which are characterised as indecipherable and too weighty for general consumption: ‘make it as short as possible...6-8 pages – put a cover on it...self-explanatory as you read it. It’s the only way our community is going to take notice.’ A similar view of research reports is conveyed in the following quote ‘As far as we’re concerned, it was a waste of time.... All it gives you is statistics, it doesn’t come up with any answers, it doesn’t attempt to resolve the problem.’ For another interviewee, the establishment of the Task Force itself was a disappointment in terms of participation:

¹⁰ The pressures of maintaining the dynamics of family life and the destabilization of collective family gatherings such as meal-times in consumer societies are discussed in some depth by Higgs, P (1998) Risk, Governmentality and the re-conceptualisation of citizenship in *Modernity, Medicine and Health – Medical Sociology Towards 2000*, by Scambler, P and Higgs P, London: Routledge

We got involved because we were marching on the streets, and we were tackling it and we were doing something... we went to the meetings and we got fed up... we'd be sitting there – 'waffle, waffle'... What's happening about the cars?... We'd be saying 'what's actually happening about what's happening on the ground?' And all we ever got was 'that's not what we're here for.' We got it all the time. So we really got pissed off and said there's no point in being there if you're just going to be a talk shop and we took to the street on several occasions and they never came out to march with us.

Residents came away from meetings with the Task Force with the impression that their perspective was not being heard:

We thought it [The Task Force] would listen for the first time, that everyone could have their grievance and then start to address it... didn't happen... It doesn't have a future if it continues as it is... The whole format would have to change... They would have to listen to residents because quite simply... if I wanted to know what was happening in the area, the first people I would go to are sitting right there in front of me [two residents who left the Task Force because they felt that they weren't being listened to]. They need to be listened to.

Other residents were more sceptical about the Task Force from the outset: 'We didn't decide not to [join]. We were never members. On the first meeting with them, we discussed their methodology and we didn't agree with it. And they never contacted us after that.' Despite these different reasons for disengaging with the Task Force, the overall feeling conveyed by residents is one of not being heard. In addition some residents questioned whether the Task Force has been active in the interim: 'We're aware of the lack of work of the Joy-riding Task Force. We've asked for reports and didn't receive them...the Task Force has never attended RAPID meetings. RAPID has also asked for documentation, representation, etc. the Task Force has never appeared.'

The broad conclusion from these interviews with residents is that they considered the Task Force 'a total waste of time... totally negligible effect.' They did not view the car maintenance programme as effective; in fact, many regarded it as counterproductive. Again and again, the theme of 'not being heard' emerged from the interviews: 'that's not here for discussion – when we tried to discuss the previous night's joy-riding... we felt no one was listening and three locals walked straight out...it's like all of them, it flittered into a talking shop of control and power.' This frustration was also evident in relation to the Task Force's research initiatives: 'They gave us a report... Now they've told us they're going to commission another report... Yeah, two great activities', and 'just sounds like parking it to me.'

PENALTIES, POLICING AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Overall residents' attitudes towards joy-riders showed a high level of empathy and tolerance balanced with an intense sense of anger and frustration. A history of local joy-related accidents and fatalities, including the notorious death of a young child, were at the forefront of this collective memory of joy-riding's impact on the area. Within such an immediate context one interviewee claimed that 'we're rewarding them too much. And they're becoming big heroes... And we have to blame a lot on the adults as well because they come out to watch.' Another interviewee stated that: 'most groups set up now are for those at risk but everyone living in the community is at risk... they're at risk from drugs, they're at risk from trying to survive and I think that would be a concern that we would have now and they don't get challenged the way they should be.' The belief that 'everyone living in the community is at risk' reflects a sense of acute deprivation. Even when some residents stated their vehement opposition to joy-riding, there was a high degree of sympathy with families facing eviction for anti-social behaviour 'and the consequences then when it goes so far is that the family get threatened with losing their home'.

Concerns about joy-riding also arise within a context of scepticism of police intentions and effectiveness:

I would have major concerns because... if it's a thing that the police walk in here with a gansey load of ASBOs in his pocket that he wants to hand out, the spectators as well as the joy-riders are the ones that are going to get these simply because they give a bit of lip to the police. The police don't have a good association with any of the young people here because we don't have police here, we don't have a community policeman here, we don't have a local policeman here. We have policemen who are more often seen here dragging someone out of their home rather than patrolling the beat. And when they did have community police, the perception is that it was to note what they saw happening, to call it in – as opposed to intervene, apprehend, arrest. That is not community policing.

The concept of a benign policing strategy was emphasised over and over in the residents' interviews: 'we don't have police we can associate with that you can say hello to or good morning to... We see them when they're coming in on business only. In actual fact they have thumped some of the boys and that again is resented. They come in here heavy-handed, mob-handed.' Demand for a strong but benign Gardaí presence is echoed in the following complaint: 'First of all, policing around this area is minimal. If you live in an area where people don't vote, you don't get much pressure put on you. If there's joy-riding in Darndale and people try to ring and either get through or don't get through but there's very little done about it. But if there's joy-riding in Clare Hall [a more affluent area] there will be a response – because if you don't respond, I'll be on to my TD.' Residents recalled a previous attempt at community policing 'when they ran the pilot project in here, they could hardly move around the place for offers of tea and continual interruptions and I mean in a good way. So they ran that as a PR or whatever for a number of weeks and then that fizzled out and we're back to where we are now. It's an "us and them" environment that we live in.' Accordingly, residents noted that any meaningful policing initiative would have to be a long-term and sustained one.¹¹

Some residents saw a need for greater powers of social control and welcomed the debate about anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) as having the potential to act as a form of benign social intervention:

if applied properly they [ASBOs] would be of great benefit to a young lad. It would be of great benefit to the family. If he knows that he has to do this and do that... And there's no criminal record after the ASBO if you have done your best, end of story... I know myself boys and girls are determined to do what they want to do, they're going to do it. But there are lots who if given a chance to go – but you have to have someplace to put them – but they will draw back from the joy-riding and the drugs or whatever it is – bad company, underage drinking... once they know they're going to end up with a criminal record.

In contrast with this, one interviewee wondered if the advent of anti-social behaviour orders and new local authority powers to evict families under the *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act* would actually result in greater homelessness: 'I think it's also forcing some mothers to take out barring orders leading to homelessness... One of the bits and pieces that we have to be very aware of is that Dublin City Council are not entitled to tell you to get your child off your premises. If you put your child out on the street – say for argument's sake, he's 17, where's he going to go? Anyone who houses that young fella is legally responsible. None of the Health Board hostels will take under 18s and you can't on the direction of DCC put a child on the street... but they're telling you if you want to keep your house, you'd better do this or do that.'

¹¹ The new initiative of community policing using bicycle patrols is in some ways designed to meet such criticism. Each garda involved was assigned to this role for a two year period.

Social Intervention and the Motor Project

One interview offered a particularly jaundiced view of the motor project arguing that it encouraged re-offending: 'they feed them up and train them how to get the car operational when it breaks down so they can go out and joyride some more... it's a joke in the area.' In addition there was criticism of a perceived emphasis on the personal development of the joy-riders rather than on the social consequences of their joy-riding activity. This criticism held that the type of holistic training provided on the motor repair programme was too far removed from the social reality of life in Priorswood:

They [the engine repair programme] were talking about hill walking. What planet are we on? The answer is there's a hard core there who are allowed to gain and establish some celebrity through their activities. The sexy celebrity part of that should be squashed. And the way to do that is to get them out of circulation... They strut their stuff here the following day. That's when they get up at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon having terrorised the area all night... They know the rest all know who they are, so they're cock of the walk. So if they're not around, that's not as glamorous as it used to be... if they're taken out, legitimately.

However, even the most vociferous critics of joy-riding and official responses to it are cautious about punitive custodial approaches and the introduction of anti-social behaviour orders. One argued that:

We would support them but only in desperation, because as far as we're concerned there's enough laws there, that we don't need new ones. But we'd rather be able to talk to people and talk them out of doing things than actually have to lock them up. I know locking people up isn't the answer to the problem but it does solve immediate problems for an awful lot of people. It [ASBO's] smacks of a little bit of gimmickry really. And it's already under serious flak in the UK so what's the big rush to import something that hasn't even proved itself in another jurisdiction. And we already have most of their laws anyway... We have wall to wall legislation and no implementation. If Dublin City Council enforced their very comprehensive legislation with the help of Guards and the assistance of sympathetic and sensible judiciary, we wouldn't need all this.

In an area of high density public housing provision where housing policy and policing policy are increasingly intertwined (Mulcahy and O'Mahony 2005), residents are cautious about the implications of such an anti-social behaviour regime. Some expressed a strong sense of empathy toward families who might suffer because of the behaviour of one family member:

If members of your family are anti-social, all the rest of the family are branded with it, that's a major problem...there are examples of people barred from their own homes through the legal process. But then don't always stay away - lots of parents in this area actually terrorised by their own kids - grown men coming into me crying because their son is getting out of jail, coming back into the house and can't get him out of the house and they're actually involved in anti-social behaviour, drugs and the like and they've been actually threatened by Dublin Corporation.

The complexity of the issues is not lost on local community activists whose views highlight the breadth of opinion, anger and frustration that exists at the persistence of the joy-riding in their area.

PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

Inter-Agency Effectiveness

Despite strong criticism of the Task Force allied to a depth of local knowledge, there were no easy answers forthcoming in relation to resolving the problem. Overall, residents argued that ‘all we can do is keep harping on the subject but until you get all the agencies with responsibility together to hammer out a real programme that’s not full of bullshit... We have to sit down, and they have to listen to the people of the area... Have to get all the agencies with a responsibility involved.’ Halloween and Christmas remain times of major problems ‘when you can forget about any kind of Garda presence.’

Situational Design rather than Situational Obstacles

There was widespread agreement that the exhibitionist nature of joy-riding needs to be addressed. The nature of joy-riding locally however was seen to be strongly influenced by the situational nature of the local estates: ‘I think that the design of street roads should be different... the contributing factor is that even if the Garda did appear they have no chance of catching them... Roads should be narrowed and angled so they can’t do wheel spins... If they actually widened out pathways...reclaim pathways on which kids could play hopscotch.’

The problem with this proposal is that there a minimum standards for roads, and in areas like Marino in north Dublin where the roads are narrow residents experience problems with garbage removal and access generally.

Dublin City Council have encountered a range of opinions among residents regarding infill housing and whether cul de sacs should be used to ‘design out’ joy-riding, as these may create inconvenience with regard to access to schools, church, shops and bus stops. A current Action Plan for the lands between old Belcamp Lane and the N32 includes proposals for Belcamp Lane, likely to entail a major upgrade. Clearly Dublin City Council and residents have to engage at a greater level than currently is the case in participatory dialogue not only in relation to house design, but also into the design of residential road systems and public spaces.

Youth Services

Residents expressed a general concern that an emphasis on anti-social behaviour orders could fail to address the vulnerability of all young people – not only joy-riders but spectators also:

it’s going to get out of hand. If there’s anything to be done at all it will have to be constructive. This place is crying out for youth services. They need drop-in centres, they need someplace that can occupy them... The young lad on the street who is not into anything [bad] needs to be able to access whatever services are there as well.

Residents referred to amenities that have shut down and stressed the importance of paying particular attention to the 13-16 year olds who are not catered for by many of the existing policy initiatives:

they don’t belong anywhere. There are 1000s of kids in the area. They’re building a youth service with fancy offices etc. But where are the things that young people have asked for during a meeting with all the young people in the area – a cyber café, an auto project, a horse project – none of which transpired. They’re lost between 13 to 16... there’s nothing for them. We had a young fella walk in to know how could he get on the woodwork project, and before we even had time to say anything to him the other fella said ‘you’ve no fucking charges’, and it was wrong like.

Interviewees expressed strong criticism that the needs of young people in Ireland – at a time of unparalleled national wealth – social services and recreational services are only perceived to be available for ‘children at risk’ (or specific categories of risk). This raises questions concerning the development of national social care, social development and recreational infrastructures for children and young teenagers. In addition, such services should be streamlined to coincide with

other events in the life cycle of children, such as the transition from primary to secondary school.

Horses

Young people's interest in equine activities is strongly evident locally. Earlier in this report we noted this interest, but here we emphasise just how culturally embedded this interest in horses has become, because it is an interest which is generally depicted as anomalous or 'out of the ordinary'. Interviews confirmed that far from being culturally anomalous, 'kids were mad into horses... most of the kids had horses and it was illegal because we hadn't got fields... we tried to get a project set up, the community was fully behind it.. but they weren't able to get premises etc. most of those kids when the horses were taken, they took to joy-riding because the love or the passion that was for the horse and that was gone away.' Future policy proposals should consider ways of addressing this interest in the care of animals that seems prominent among children generally, and particularly so in the case of young urban males.

Family Support

At a time when policy-makers are increasingly placing an emphasis on CCTV surveillance and the introduction of local anti-social behaviour administrative regimes, residents expressed a need for parent participation 'which is not there for them. If you want your children to do things, you have to encourage them... There are some children which are drawn into activities through school... Or there's the New Life Centre – like an old fashioned youth club and they love it.'

There were concerns that centres such as the New Life Centre are not adequately advertised and that parents see it 'as a way of getting rid of their children for an hour or two as opposed to something that is very good for their children.' Residents argued that low parental participation in young people's activities is a key factor in the 'kids' perception that there is nothing. At 6, 7 and 8 they do [have a childhood]. At even 11 and 12, they still have some, but its going because if they look at their peers at 13, 14, 15, 16 they're using drugs, they're getting drunk and they're not in school. And that's very widespread. And even if they're still in school, they're using drugs or getting drunk.'

It is within such a context that the arguments for family support, youth services, inter-agency approaches are made. One of the strengths of area-based approaches is to make services available to the most vulnerable by making them universally available to all, thereby preventing the development of stigma in relation to service access. The over-targeting of those designated 'bad kids' – exacerbated through the implementation of anti-social behaviour orders – may serve to undermine the development of a universal services available to all families and children.

Residents share the Gardaí's view that joy-riding and petty crime are not the results of rational choice decisions, but reflect issues of development and socialisation: they are activities that young people grow into. Serious criminals tend not to develop such an orientation later in life but instead emerge from early exposure to and minor involvement in petty crime. Gardaí observations suggest that some families have three generations of criminal convictions behind them. Joy-riding for some can be part of a developmental process in the direction towards more serious involvement in crime, while for others it will fizzle out and the young men involved have been observed to settle down and raise families. One such former joy-rider was described as: 'you wouldn't ever think he'd been in trouble'. The fact that many joy-riders desist from such an overriding obsession as they enter adulthood is a fact which is generally overlooked, but remains hugely significant.

CHAPTER SIX:

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 The Future of the Task Force

The Task Force has been a success in terms of reducing the level of joy-riding in the Priorswood area. It is possible that some of the Garda and local authority activities contributing to this would have occurred anyway had the Task Force not been in operation, but Task Force members unanimously agreed that the multi-agency partnership approach underpinning it had been a vital spur in developing and implementing co-ordinated approaches to the problem. Nevertheless, while levels of joy-riding are now considerably less than those of five years ago, joy-riding continues to be a major problem in the area. Local residents also raise serious criticisms of the Task Force, both in relation to the impact of Task Force activities, and to their perception that it has neither accommodated their views nor addressed their concerns. Moreover, since the establishment of the Task Force in 1998 there has been a pronounced shift in policy strategies towards public housing management and community policing, developments that to some extent have superseded the Task Force's remit.

In light of these factors, and given ongoing uncertainties regarding its future resources, we recommend that the Task Force be discontinued, and that in its place a community policing/safety forum be established, modelled on existing successful initiatives such as *Safer Ballymun*, and consistent with the legislative provisions of the *Garda Síochána Act 2005*. Joy-riding would continue to feature in its deliberations and activities, but its broader remit of community safety might be a more inclusive and productive way of addressing crime, disorder and marginalisation in the area, of which joy-riding is only one component, albeit a hugely significant one.

2 Coordinated Joy-riding-Intervention Network

The Priorswood Task Force on Joy-riding has suffered through its isolation from other initiatives to address joy-riding. Furthermore, its status as the only such Task Force has given it an unwanted prominence in joy-riding debates nationally, despite the occurrence of joy-riding in numerous urban centres. We recommend that a new national forum be established, comprising a network of organisations concerned with joy-riding. This would greatly facilitate the sharing of information and best practice – both through newsletters, etc, as well as through organised activities such as conferences and workshops – and would provide scope for developing coordinated approaches to joy-riding across Ireland. We recommend that the establishment of such a network would benefit greatly from the organisation of a conference dedicated to the task and that Priorswood Task-Force on Joy-riding could organise such a conference as part of its winding down activities.

3 Local Authority Audits and Judicial Impact Statements

Joy-riding has an enormous cost for local residents and for the agencies involved in dealing with it. While some of this is readily apparent, other dimensions of its impact are not. We believe that measuring the costs of joy-riding would establish the severity of the problem, and serve as the basis for allocating due resources to address it. Accordingly, we recommend that an audit of the broad economic and social costs associated with joy-riding be undertaken, to ensure that adequate resources are provided to address it. Such an audit would serve two purposes: first, it would facilitate budgeting for local authorities and the Gardaí Síochána; and second, it would facilitate the development of joy-riding impact statements for the judiciary.

4 National Evaluation of Motor Projects & other Social Intervention Measures

We recommend that a sustained evaluation of the motor project in Priorswood and other motor projects be undertaken. While there is significant local concern that the Priorswood motor project simply serves as a training course for further joy-riding, motor projects remain a core feature of programmes to curtail joy-riding and a comprehensive assessment of their implementation and effect would enhance efforts to address joy-riding more generally.

5 Local Forum

Joy-riding is a hugely individualistic activity in some ways, but it is a hugely social activity in others. Much joy-riding occurs in ways and in places that attract and accommodate spectators. While watching joy-riding as an audience member is one way of gradually becoming more involved in joy-riding, being watched is itself part of the attraction of joy-riding. The passive involvement of spectators is an important element of joy-riding, and measures to address joy-riding should also address the role of the audience. As such, we recommend that a forum be established specifically for the purpose of developing local dialogue on these issues. Whether this takes place under the auspices of the Task Force, its successor agency, or any other body, the aim of the forum would be to air local views on the nature and impact of joy-riding generally, including the passive role of the audience which is nevertheless so central to joy-riding. The forum could also consider other issues which might be relevant to joyriding, but which do not feature prominently in policy responses to it. For example, young people persistently link the local authorities' efforts to remove horses from the area with an increase in joy-riding. Although most local authority action in this regard occurred some years ago, accounts of horses continue to feature prominently in local youth culture. This forum could enable young people to raise their concerns on this matter in a more sustained way that could then, in turn, feed back into the policy process more generally.

6 Crime and Marginalisation

Our research confirms the key links between crime and marginalisation. While there are a number of factors which shape the level of joy-riding which occurs, we believe no full account of joy-riding can avoid the fact that the area in which it is most concentrated is one of the most deprived areas in Dublin. Recent criminal justice initiatives to address crime and disorder – particularly that associated with young males – has focused on punitive rather than preventative dimensions of the problem (even though restorative justice schemes and other measures, have been provided for in the *Children's Act* for a number of years). While a reliance on such measures reinforces public opinion that joy-riders are outcasts who are inherently dangerous, the interviews reported here suggest that joy-riders often share many of the same dreams found among the public at large: a home, a family, a decent job. Moreover, such measures often serve to individualise a problem which has a clear social/structural component. We note that while preventative measures are often politically unpopular in the short term, they are likely in the longer term to prove more cost-effective in terms of financial expenditure, and more successful in terms of addressing the nature, causes and impact of such behaviour. On that basis, and given the material conditions of Priorswood and similar areas, we recommend that job training and job provision – especially for young men – be given the highest priority. We also strongly recommend that youth diversion measures and recreational facilities for young people are developed independently of labour market concerns and that the focus of such measures specifically includes younger children and teenagers.

7 Mental Health and Spatial Deprivation

Related to the above recommendation, some residents also make a strong link between what they view as society's disregard for joy-riding, an escalation in crime and violence, and the emergence of endemic depression, habitual alcohol use and addiction to illegal and prescription drugs. These concerns are raised in a social context where young people themselves are increasingly aware that public understandings of joy-riding and other social problems often focus on dysfunctional or vulnerable families. The outlook for many young people in Priorswood – economic disadvantage, the social consequences of this including endemic mental ill-health, a physical landscape characterised by blank empty environments, and a public sphere they perceive to be remorselessly focussed on targeting 'anti-social behaviour' – is bleak in the extreme, and partly explains why a limited number of young men in poor urban communities engage in an activity as life threatening as joy-riding. This aspect of the research suggests a very grave situation, albeit one derived from a limited number of interviews related to the specific subject of joy-riding. We recommend at the very least that these public health issues merit further research and we return to them in the final recommendation below.

8 Social Inclusion, Safety and Family Support

Related to the above, life on large-scale labyrinthine public housing estates often brings a sense of physical vulnerability and insecurity. This was particularly evident in our interviews with teenagers who compared the openness of council estates unfavourably with the security afforded by gated private residencies, and more visibly policed retail areas of town centres. A feeling of personal safety was considered a luxury not afforded to individuals living in council estates where joy-riders were free to come and go as they pleased. This sense of being ‘at risk’ was strongly associated with a sense of comparative social disadvantage. We recommend, therefore, that in the absence of a Task Force on Joy-riding, the joy-riding issue be considered within a concerted approach by local government and local development agencies, and the RAPID programme, and that this be done within a wider context of developing local anti-poverty and social inclusion measures. We further recommend the development of a strong institutional link between the community policing/safety forum and social inclusion initiatives and family support initiatives such as the Springboard family support initiative and the Darndale Social Intervention Project. Continued statutory recognition and engagement with the work of old fashioned youth clubs such as the New Life Centre and community development and outreach projects is also a key recommendation.

9 Miniaturised Bikes and Consumer Awareness

Joy-riders and others confirm that levels of car security are an important factor in the dynamics of joy-riding. While improvements in car security have contributed to the reduced numbers of cars stolen, in some ways this has merely displaced ‘driving displays’ in other directions. Some joy-riding – perhaps only a small amount of it – now involves burglaries undertaken specifically with a view to obtaining the keys necessary to steal some modern cars. Other forms of joy-riding increasingly rely on cars bought for small sums of money, while motor bikes also appear to be playing an increasing prominent role in joy-riding. These shifts have blurred still further the relationship between joy-riding and other forms of dangerous driving. Given the increasing prominence of bikes and ‘mini-motos’ within joy-riding culture, we recommend that the relevant organisations, including consumer organisations, engage in an awareness-raising campaign, both in terms of driver safety, but also to ensure that the owners are aware of the legal requirements concerning their use.

10 Dangerous Driving, Public Infrastructure Planning and Media Reporting

Much of our report has been written against a backdrop of increased public debate about the level of dangerous driving on Irish roads, and its consequences for public safety. We believe that joy-riding and other forms of dangerous driving can be understood as part of a continuum of responses to the increased prominence of cars in modern society. Our society is profoundly shaped by car culture, and many of the dominant social values – wealth accumulation, consumption, individualism, immediacy and excitement, risk-laden behaviour – feature prominently both in joy-riding and in what our interviewees referred to as ‘lunatic driving’. While joy-riding is a huge social problem in specific areas, the dangerous driving of legally-owned cars constitutes a problem nationwide. Common to all these interlocking debates is the behaviour of young men in cars, whether in the case of joy-riders where they are cast as ‘threatening outsiders’, or in the case of ‘lunatic drivers’ where they (and/or their passengers) are often cast as ‘tragic insiders’ cut down in their prime. Often this latter driving takes place in the early hours of the morning, and crashes arising from it occur where no other cars are involved or when traffic is light. The deaths and injuries that result to drivers, passengers and others constitute a major social, legal, and health problem in modern Ireland. While joy-riding is predominantly experienced as an urban problem, other forms of dangerous driving are associated with rural Ireland, and suggest an urgent need for, among other things, an adequate rural transport infrastructure which can safely meet the needs of young people in Ireland.

Housing is a central feature of these broader issues of car culture in modern Ireland. Whether it is public housing estates in relation to joy-riding or ‘one off’ housing in relation to rural areas of Ireland, both require a serious concerted level of inquiry and debate with regard to public infrastructure planning. Media reporting of tragedies on Ireland’s roads should also extend beyond the immediacy of specific events, and consider the broader issues of young men’s

behaviour, society's attitudes to this, and housing and transport infrastructures in rural and urban Ireland. Educational, preventative and enforcement aspects of any future road safety strategies will require not only adequate resources but also adequate recognition of the complex and changing relationship between road safety and people's living and working environments.

11 Housing Management

Joy-riding or 'flashing robbed cars' is an activity which is almost exclusively confined to public housing estates. Joy-riding can therefore be partially understood as a problem which has to be addressed from a public housing management perspective. This, however, is complicated by the fact that the Priorswood catchment area contains a mix of predominantly public housing estates in close proximity to private housing estates, and that public housing estates contain a significant number of privately purchased houses. Within such a complex mix of housing tenure, joy-riding presents a major challenge to local authority housing management. The complexity of the housing management challenge is in future likely to increase in a policy context of Section V of the *Planning Act (2005)* which locates partial responsibility for the delivery of social and affordable housing with private developers. We recommend therefore that joy-riding be a central consideration of local authority housing management strategies, albeit in a changing social housing environment where the private and the voluntary sector are playing an increasing role in provision and management.

12 Future Research

While joy-riding is a dangerous, costly, and damaging activity, it is also a temporary activity. Joy-riders tend to grow out of this behaviour, and while some undoubtedly go on to engage in other forms of crime, others desist from crime altogether. Joy-riding is therefore, a habitual activity rather than – as it is often characterised in popular debates – an addictive one. Some of the children we interviewed however were as young as twelve and thirteen and were already habitual users of alcohol and marijuana and unlikely to desist from such usage in adulthood. In this respect, the study of joy-riding activity can usefully inform debates in relation to risk, habitual behaviour, social and economic disadvantage and the promotion of social and public health, particularly in relation to young men. Further research should therefore address not only the factors associated with the people's gradual socialisation into joy-riding, but also the conditions associated with their desistance from it, as well as the factors associated with the some individuals' subsequent engagement in other forms of crime.

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The Nature and Impact of Joy-Riding in Priorswood.

A Report to the Priorswood Task-Force on Joyriding

Authors Michael Rush, Paula Brudell & Aogán Mulcahy

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