

Observations on Underground Gun Markets

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Multi-City **Gun** Project

How do the **dangerous offenders** obtain their guns?

What regulations and enforcement practices are effective in **reducing their access**?

Research Methods:

- ATF gun **trace** data and other administrative data
- **Inmate** surveys
- **Ethnography**
- Cities: **Chicago**, LA, Boston, NYC, Baltimore, NO

Cook County Jail Survey

- Fall 2013
- Inmates awaiting trial, most with long records
- Selected by sheriff for gun and gang involvement
- 99 are interviewed
- Guarantee of anonymity
- Structured conversation with pro interviewer
- Asked about gun transactions in various ways

Offenders do not shop at gun stores

Proximate sources of guns to adults:

American public: 60% from gun stores

National prison survey: 10%

Gang members in Chicago (trace): 3%

Cook County Jail Survey: 3%

Gang guns are old

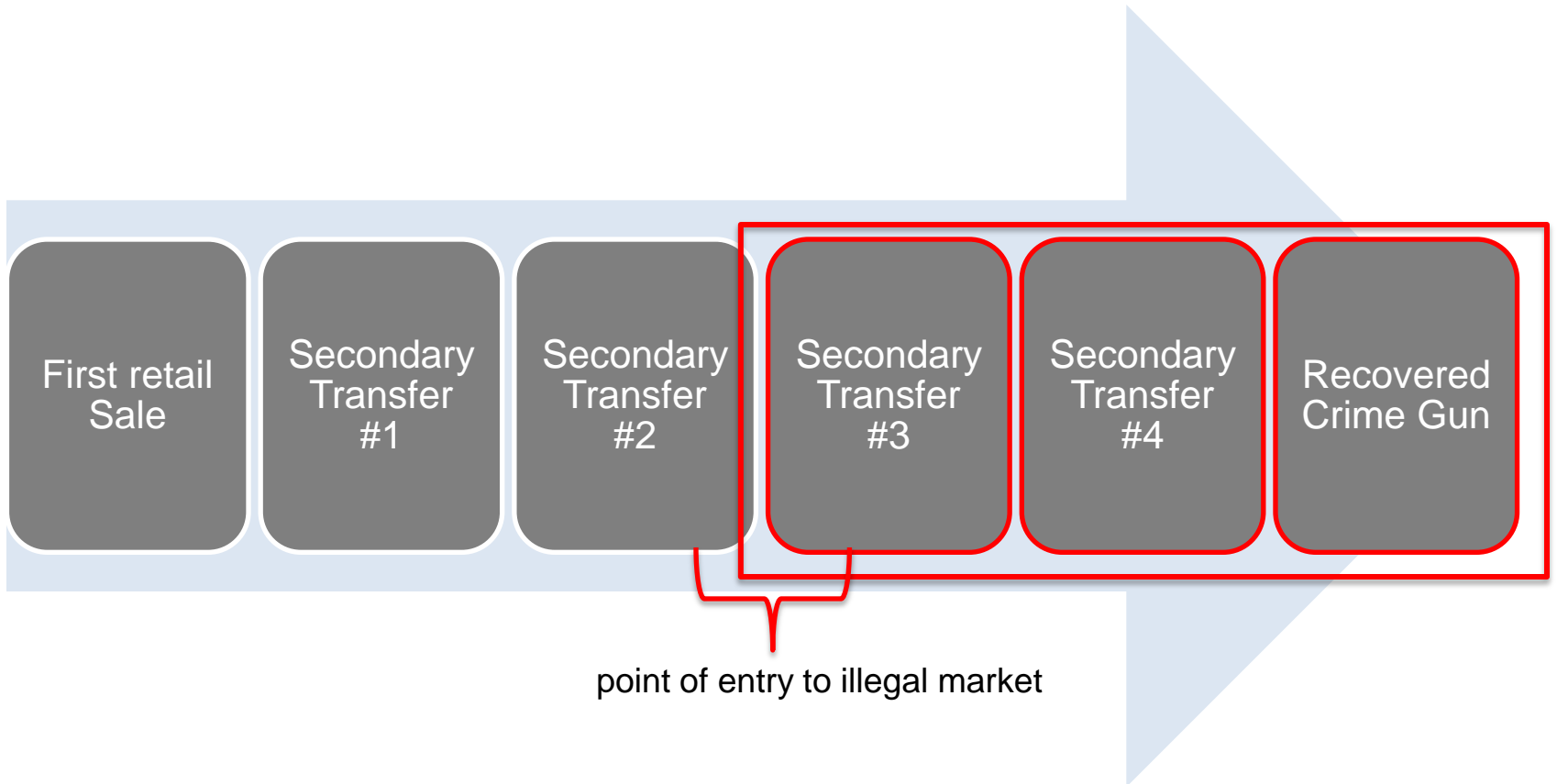
Chicago's recovered guns (trace data):

median **age** for gang members = **11.6** years

less than **2 years** old: **10%**

But **time to crime** is short: only a **few months**
from acquisition to use

Usually there are multiple transactions from first sale to recovery



Supply chain to criminal use

| Transaction | Data Source |
|---|--|
| First sale by dealer (FFL) (Possible straw purchase) | ATF Trace Data |
| Intermediate: Private and FFL sales Trafficking | Data not usually available Theft data (NCIC) Special investigation ATF Trace Data ATF investigations |
| Final transaction that arms offender | Offender interviews Social network analysis |

Trafficking into Chicago

Guns tend to flow **from** **unregulated** jurisdictions **to** **regulated** jurisdictions.

Chicago gang guns (from trace data):

Cook County 22.5%

Rest of Illinois 12%

Indiana 24%

Other states 42%

Intermediaries

Straw purchasers (ATF trace data)

15% of new guns in Chicago are first purchased by woman and then recovered from a man

Brokers (ethnography)

Small operators that are able to connect certain buyers with particular sources – for a price

Types of final transactions

Cook County Jail inmate survey:

60% of transactions were cash sale or trade

Other transactions: sharing, “holding,” gifts

Theft is rare as proximate source

Sources for final transactions

Cook County Jail inmate survey

Three-Quarters (**3/4**) of guns that inmates had access to before arrest were obtained from **social network**

Respondents who **sold** guns discussed risk-reduction strategies – **“know your customer”**

High/variable transactions costs

underground market for **guns** differs from **drug** markets:

Far **fewer** transactions

Little profit

In Chicago, **greater legal threat** to sellers

Result: Most transactions are within the sellers' **social network** to minimize risk

Hence access is **highly variable**

Some lessons

Regulations have **far-reaching effects** in Chicago

- **Prevent offenders** from buying in gun stores
- Underground gun **sellers** are keenly aware of legal risks, and adapt to them

Possible lessons for enforcement – **do more**

- Conduct **undercover buys** and ballistics
- **Investigate sources** of guns and prosecute