Gang Affected Children: A Study Of Gang Affected Children And Family Support Interventions

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February 2018

Submitted to the University of Portsmouth in Partial Fulfilment of the

Professional Doctorate Degree in Criminal Justice

Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate to the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award

Word count: 50,855 (excluding appendices, acknowledgments, list tables).

Signed .................................................................Date 26th February 2018
Abstract

The gang issue has continued to be an increasing problem within the London area. Gangs have a significant negative impact on specific communities and this relates to the various crimes and the violence that are synonymous with gang activity. This issue is exacerbated by adult gang members specifically recruiting children to undertake criminal activities. The consequences have been an increase in the number of children that are entering the YJS for crimes which are categorised by professionals as gang related. These children are also at high risk of being victims of gang related violence. This doctoral thesis aimed to examine whether there was a difference in the offending rate between two groups of gang identified children; one group which received family focused intervention and a control group which received individualised child focused interventions. The study also focused on the parents of a selection of the gang affected children in order to examine their experiences and perception of family focused intervention. The study used both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data was collected from agencies management information systems. This study included a qualitative method and 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents who had received the family focused intervention. Both t-test and ANOVA were used to analyse the differences in the offending rates of the two groups. The study identified that there was a significant difference between the offending rates for those that received the family focused intervention to those that had not. It was also found that those parents who received family focused intervention perceived that the intervention was beneficial. It was notable that these parents did not identify their children as gang members but rather as victims of adult gang members’ exploitation. The research suggests that there is a need for professionals and agencies to review their categorisation of children as gang members and view these children primarily as victims of gang exploitation. This has practice implications as it would require altering the positioning of addressing gang affected children as a safeguarding concern as oppose to a criminal justice issue. The findings suggest that services should review the issue of children affected by gangs within the remit of safeguarding. The study strongly suggests that family focused interventions should be implemented with gang affected children and that families
should be viewed as a key variable in protecting children from adult gang members’ exploitation.
Acknowledgments

I am unable to specifically name and thank all the wonderful people that have supported me on this very challenging journey. I firstly thank the families who so kindly agreed to participate in this study and share their life stories with me. I also wish to thank my supervisor Dr Nathan Hall for his support.

I dedicate this to Cleanthe and Garfield Clarke, my parents who personify hard work, resilience and integrity, which provided me with the foundations to commence and complete this research. I mostly need to thank my beautiful and intelligent daughters, Dijon and Seniya for their incredible patience with me whilst I have undertaken this research.
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<td>BAME</td>
<td>Black Asian Minority Ethnic</td>
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<td>BME</td>
<td>Black Minority Ethnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>CJS</td>
<td>Criminal Justice System</td>
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<td>ETE</td>
<td>Education Training and Employment</td>
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<td>FFT</td>
<td>Functional Family Therapy</td>
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<td>HMIP</td>
<td>Her Majesty Inspectorate of Probation</td>
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<td>MOJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
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<td>MOPAC</td>
<td>Mayor Office for Policing and Crime</td>
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<td>MST</td>
<td>Multi-Systemic Therapy</td>
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<td>NCA</td>
<td>National Crime Agency</td>
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<td>NOMS</td>
<td>National Offender Management Service</td>
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<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
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<td>PNC</td>
<td>Police National Computer</td>
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<td>PRU</td>
<td>Pupil Referral Units</td>
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<td>SCR</td>
<td>Serious Case Reviews</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRU</td>
<td>Violence Reduction Unit</td>
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<td>YJB</td>
<td>Youth Justice Board</td>
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<td>YJS</td>
<td>Youth Justice System</td>
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<td>YOT</td>
<td>Youth Offending Team</td>
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Introduction

There is no doubt that the phenomenon of gangs consistently evokes wide ranging discussions within a variety of different arenas, not only within academia and criminal justice, but it is also frequently portrayed within the media. This is due to the impact that gangs have on communities, especially in relation to the significant fear that they instil and the levels of violence that have become synonymous with gang activity. The media coverage of gang activity has highlighted the growing numbers of gang related murders of children within inner city areas. In addition to the well documented levels of violence, there has been the more recent connection that gang activity has with modern slavery, child exploitation and in particular child sexual exploitation. The effects on communities have been considerable, and this has led to the topic being placed high on the agenda of politicians at both national and local levels. Gang activity is a powerful agenda for politicians because of the reaction this issue has on their prospective voters, as fear of crime is a key issue for communities. In response, numerous gang strategies have been formulated and included in election manifestos as politicians confidently assure the public that if implemented, these strategies will make communities safer.

There has also been significant research on gang activity, the consequences of their activity and the factors that increase individuals’ affiliation. Much of the research has been grounded in the North American experience; however there has been a growing body of research from the United Kingdom (Hallsworth & Young, 2004, 2013; Bennett & Holloway, 2004; Alleyne & Wood, 2014; Anderson, 2017). This research has provided additional understanding of the UK experience of gangs, their structure, function and how in some instances this has significant variation from the North American experience. These variances are influenced by the significant differences in the social, socio-economic, ethnic and historical factors which are present in different localities in the world.

This research aims not only to gain further understanding of gang characteristics but also to explore gang interventions. This thesis reviews the different models of interventions available with a specific focus on the effectiveness of family focused interventions for gang affected
children. This was investigated in terms of the possibilities for family interventions to assist children in desistance from the associated offending.

The Back Story - The motivation for the research

Firstly, I outline the context within which this research was based and my personal motivation for conducting this study. I have over 25 years of experience of working with children and young people who were identified as “at-risk” or had contact with the Criminal Justice System (CJS); in both statutory and voluntary organisations. At the point of initiating this study, I was employed as a Senior Manager in a Youth Offending Service. I managed a team of practitioners within a Family focused Programme. The team worked intensively with families that were assessed to have multiple and complex needs which included antisocial and criminal behaviours. This programme had the specific remit of reducing the numbers of children entering the Youth Justice System (YJS). This model of working with families had been evaluated and found to positively impact on those families who received the intervention (White, 2008; Lloyd et al, 2011). This programme was conducted in an inner city borough in London, where there had been a long history of gang and serious youth violence. The borough had previously commissioned research into gang issues in the area and provided comprehensive findings and useful recommendations highlighted. Unfortunately this academic research had subsequently made little impact on either policy or practice, but was often referred to as a rationale for action to be undertaken by both professionals and community members.

It was recognised during this period that many of the families that were being referred to the programme had gang related issues (both as victims and perpetrators of gang activity). I had worked within several inner city boroughs that were well known for their gang activity. I was therefore surprised by the level of organisation and violence conducted by well-established gangs, as this locality was not widely known for this issue. The precipice of change occurred in the summer of 2010, when there had been increasing levels of serious youth violence which was predominantly categorised as gang related. This culminated when approximately thirty
children and young adults from one gang, who were masked and armed with an array of weapons, brazenly walked down local roads in search of a rival gang. This appeared to be a very visual representation that gangs possessed a lack of fear from police or enforcement agencies.

The community was understandably in uproar about what they perceived to be inactivity by the Local Authority, local politicians and enforcement services. In response the borough actively commenced a review of the problem and formulated a strategy. They reviewed several models and the strategy eventually employed was an amalgamation of the Family Intervention Programme and also informed by the Glasgow model from the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The VRU model adopted a public health approach to violence, whereby the unit attempted to diagnose the issue, examine the causes and solutions. These interventions were conducted in partnership with health, education, social work, housing and police (Williams et al, 2014).

The Family focused intervention programme is a challenging approach as its main focus was on working with children involved or affected by gangs. Much of the work within the Youth Justice remit focuses interventions with children and young people in exclusion to the significant adults in their lives. Family focused models however emphasise the importance of working with the whole family in a multi-agency format. There has been a major push for closer multiagency strategies as highlighted within Serious Case Reviews (SCR). SCR which are conducted under the Framework of Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards when a child dies or is seriously injured (S.13 of the Children Act, 1989). These SCR’s continuously highlight cases where an omission has been identified in services response. These omissions have often related to a lack of effective multi-agency partnership and communication (Sidebotham et al, 2016).

The gap between support and enforcement agencies has always been contentious, as one section of the partnership prioritises punitive sanctions and the other has an emphasis on the welfare of its clients. This division is created by different agencies having conflicting ideologies, strategies and practices. This is reinforced by competing claims to specialist knowledge and expertise (Sampson et al, 1988; Crawford & Jones, 1995; Tilley & Sidebottom, 2017) on how
best to address problems. This is exacerbated in times when there are limited funds and agencies are required to compete for limited resources, where measurable outcomes must quickly be evidenced. There has been a tendency for services to invest in evidence based practices as the outcomes have already being rigorously tested. This has resulted in organisations with larger infrastructures and established programmes dominating the market as these organisations have the ability to fund large scale evaluations. Under such conditions it makes it difficult to work creatively with these inherent tensions (Rutherford 1994:126). At the point of this research my service was negotiating this plethora of challenges; funding reductions, a focus on evidence based programmes and an increase in serious youth violence. This was a similar situation in many other London boroughs.

There has been significant research into gang membership, affiliation, activities and the risk factors that increase children’s propensity to join and remain in gangs. Research has identified some static variables in regards to gang formation such as age and gender (Loeber et al, 1993; Huff, 1998; Howell et al, 1999; Taylor et al, 2008; Pyrooz, 2014). Gangs are evolving structures that through necessity alter their modus operandi in order to evade enforcement measures; services are required to ensure that their strategies and interventions take this into account.

Researching crime and anti-social related behaviour, encounters resistance from those who we aim to study. The nature of criminality embodies the ethos of not discussing or disclosing activity to professionals which would be defined as a criminal offence and therefore result in a criminal justice outcome. Identifying children who are gang affected provides additional obstacles. In my experience of working in the YJS, parent/carers are reticent, unwilling or unable to perceive their own children within this stigmatising definition. It is difficult to convince a person of phenomena that has no clear criteria.

The process of criminality also includes the cat and mouse game, which occurs between offenders and the enforcement services. Throughout the duration of the research the way in which gangs’ functioned also evolved and changed. This was illustrated in the ways in which gangs presented themselves within communities. When I initially came to work within this area
of Youth Justice, gang members clearly identified themselves as gang members and this was reinforced by their clothing and markers, which included ‘tagging’ (graffiti) their territories. As a direct response to the active implementation of gang strategies, gang members became acutely aware that having clearly defined gang symbols was a hindrance to their structure and criminal gang activity. Clear gang identification assisted police in targeting these gang members. Gang members now modified the ways in which they operated and were no longer visibly identifiable and actively concealed that they were affiliated to a gang.

Professionals became aware that gang members were discussing what actions agencies and the police were employing within the borough. As such, these individuals in response were establishing their own strategies to distance themselves from these agencies. Gangs were still area based due to historical and structural necessities, but the primary motivator had changed and was now financial gain. A police officer aptly referred to them as a ‘collective of drug dealers’ rather than gang members. This research did not specifically focus on the historical bases of gang structures within the borough. It was however noted that there were some significant events which determined gang affiliation for children, such as the murder of prominent gang members. Children appeared to have little knowledge of why they were in conflict with other rival gangs apart from the fact that they lived within another area or had issues relating to drug dealing.

The issue of postcode gangs was still a prominent feature of gangs within the borough. It was necessary in the YOT I worked in, that all children who accessed the service were asked whether they were at risk in specific areas within the borough. A significant number of children stated that they were at risk and were unable to travel freely outside of the areas that they lived. Children often had to negotiate being questioned by gang members about where they came from; this questioning actually related to establishing whether they were in their rightful territory. It should not be assumed that all children who lived within these areas would be affected by gangs. From my experience these children had either protective factors in their lives which insulated them from gangs or they had incorporated alternative strategies. These
included socialising with gang members, so that they are known by the group, feel safe within their own locality, but not engaging within the criminal element of the gangs.

**Significance of the research**

The rationale for conducting this research was based on the premise that although there is a significant body of gang research, there appears to be less in relation to the specific interventions. The gap in knowledge particularly pertained to interventions which directly reduce children’s involvement in gang activity. There is reference to community based interventions or community mobilisation (Thurman et al, 1996; Spergel et al, 2007; Kim-Ju et al, 2008) and ensuring that the community’s voice is central to the strategies that are implemented. What is unclear is what constitutes community involvement and what the direct impact on individuals is from this ‘mobilisation’ (Maguire & Gordon, 2015). There is an assumption that gangs form within areas where the residents have a commonality. This enables the people in the area to be defined as a specific community; implying they are a homogenous group. The profile of many areas in London is rapidly changing, with the creation of new housing developments which are a mixture of Registered Social Housing and privately owned homes. This has occurred due to housing strategies which stipulate that new build properties should have a percentage of social housing included (HM Government, 2017). This was in an effort to create more diverse communities. The social issues for particular sections of the community have not evaporated, but what was evident was that those with more financial means were more vocal about the need to address issues which have been long standing within these communities.

Some community programmes identified parental involvement as an integral element. These community strategies particularly make reference to mothers having a significant impact on changing the behaviour of children within their communities. There appears to be a hesitance to include fathers within these discussions and their involvement within the gang’s arena primarily refers to them when highlighting risk factors (Thornberry, 1993; Murray, 1996;
Augustyn et al, 2017). It will be further explored in this research whether this relates to assumptions that are made about particular ethnic groups and their family structures.

There appears to be a tendency for these community groups to be led by Black Minority Ethnic (BME) mothers who have tragically lost a child to gang violence, such as Mothers Against Violence (MAV). This approach is in line with the propositions that it is beneficial to work with, recruit staff and volunteers from BME communities (Page, Whitting & Mclean 2007; Anderson, 2017). This reduces negative perceptions of practitioners and is a better platform to build relationships between services and communities. This research acknowledges the importance of considering whether the interventions that are provided are relevant, responsive and culturally appropriate to those identified as gang members and their families.

There has been a particular focus on reducing the risk factors for gang affected children and this has been particularly directed at preventative interventions. This includes working with the younger siblings of gang members before they are initiated into gangs. Preventative interventions for children have a tendency to be grounded in a supporting welfare ethos. Such child centred interventions are led by the aim of ensuring that practitioners do not ‘lose sight of the needs and views of the child’ (HM Government, 2015). The rhetoric is dramatically different in relation to those that are gang affiliated, even though it is accepted that many of those drawn into this world are children and young adults. The focal point and strategies refer to enforcement measures ‘which delivers swift and sure justice to deter and incapacitate the most harmful gang members’ (MOPAC, 2014:7). This raises numerous complexities and dilemmas for gang interventions, as children who are gang affiliated are often both perpetrators and victims of gang violence. The research discusses the complexities of addressing the needs of those offenders who are also simultaneously victims.

Working with the whole family has seen a sea change in Youth Justice Interventions as many services are structured to work with an individual’s needs. Whole family work has increasingly been recognised as important in addressing the needs of children. This has been reflected in
the areas of children in statutory care. There has been an acknowledgment that children within statutory care have disproportionately lower outcomes than other children. 1% of children in England were in care (Department of Education, 2012) however of this group 30% of boys and 44% of girls have received a custodial disposal were described as ‘Looked After Children’ (Murray, 2012). The criminal justice process, especially in relation to custody is an expensive resource. Sustaining the family unit is a more efficient and cost effective strategy where children are not assessed as at risk directly from their parents/carers in the home. This would be the position for the majority of gang affected children, where the risk predominately originates from peers and in the community. Within the welfare spectrum, where concerns are identified with children, families are usually central to the interventions offered; be that at a safeguarding or a preventative threshold. However, within the gang arena, the whole family approach has been limited and the focus has been dominated by how families increase the risk factors.

Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) interventions are informed by the risk factors paradigm which focuses on individualised interventions. This study therefore explores whether families can be a supportive and protective factor in interventions in gang affected communities. It is noted that most gang research refers to the same risk factors for criminal behaviour and gang affiliation in children (Farrington et al 1999; Jolliffe, 2017). This is relevant to this research as the assessments and interventions were conducted within the framework of the YJS and these are based on the risk factor paradigm.

Interventions conducted within a Youth Justice Service framework are based on the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) with the specific aim of preventing offending. The principal aim of YOTs is to work with children who are subject to Court Orders. Preventative work with children who are identified as at risk of offending has been curtailed in recent years due to diminishing funding and resources. It could be argued that the focus and ethos of the YJS has been directed more towards a punitive, rather than welfare orientated structure. Historically there was an increase in the numbers of children who entered the YJS (Howard League, 2005:22). With the
increased numbers of children coming into contact with the YJS there was a shift in policy. This resulted in decreasing numbers of children especially in relation to the levels of children in custody in the last 10 years (Youth Justice Board, 2015). There was an increase in the number of first time entrants (FTEs) between 2003 and 2007 which peaked at 110,784 first time entrants to the criminal justice system. There was subsequently a dramatic year on year fall when in 2015 there was a total of 20,544 first time entrants (MOJ, 2017). This change in levels of children within the youth justice system was also reflected within the custodial cohort. In 2008, 6720 young people were sentenced to custodial sentences compared to 1600 young people in 2017 (YJB, 2018). This has been affected by additional out of court disposals for low gravity offences. It is difficult to fully assess whether the reduction in children within the CJS is due to a reduction in offending, or merely that some offences are no longer counted within these statistic.

There has been continuous scrutiny on YOT interventions and there has been mixed evaluations on their effectiveness since their inception. The MOJ (2010) concluded that practitioners in Youth Justice Services were unclear which interventions had the most impact in reducing offending amongst children. It was recommended that there be an increase in the evaluation and use of evidence based interventions. A high percentage of interventions in YOTs are not evidence-based or robustly evaluated (MOJ, 2013; Fraser et al 2018). Services and programmes are often instigated as a response to identified needs and also public pressure on Local Authorities and politicians. In order to address their duty of care to their residents and under legislative requirements, such as the Children’s Act (2003, 2014) and guidelines (Working together to safeguard children, 2015 & 2018), interventions are speedily implemented. This is especially evident where local data have identified increases in serious youth violence.

I had noted that historically the majority of interventions that were conducted with children who were subject to court orders, practitioners had little engagement with their parent/carers. From my discussions with staff the justification fell into two camps:
1) Where workers assessed that the parents were doing everything that they could and the child was ‘difficult’, ‘rebellious’, and ‘defiant’. This meant that workers assessed that the work they conducted needed to be focused on the child. This decision did not take into consideration that parents can appear to engage with services as a strategy to ensure that professionals withdraw interventions from families; meaning that parents are falsely compliant (Stanton & Todd, 1981; Wilkins & Whittaker, 2017).

2) Where the workers assessed that the parenting was ‘deficient’, parent/carers were ‘resistant to engagement’, and practitioners felt that they had no levers to make them engage. It was therefore assessed that contact with families would be ineffective and in such cases the practitioners worked solely with the child.

The result of both scenarios was that practitioners within YOTs engagement primarily with children and their families were peripheral to the interventions provided. It should be noted that practitioners within YOTs have entered the field to work with children and much of the training that they would have undertaken is focused on offending behaviour interventions for the child. There appears to be insufficient focus on challenging parents or providing additional strategies to consolidate the work conducted with their child. I noted during my practice that there is a clear power dynamic with practitioners and children. There are direct consequences of their non-compliance for children who are subject to court orders. This is not the position with parents/carers. Practitioners require additional and different skills to be able to effectively engage with individuals where the power imbalance is not as prominent.

This research also addresses the implications for practitioners who conduct whole family working practices, as within many services the interventions are conducted by practitioners that have limited contact with parents. Generally, the interventions provided by YOTs may be effective, however it could be argued that it is difficult for children to sustain this learning when placed directly back into the same home environment, where parents/carers haven’t been provided with the skills to sustain the learning that their child has obtained during their YOT intervention. It could be suggested that there is a lack of recognition by the youth justice and
practitioners of the role of parents/carers to make an impact on children's ability to desist from further offending. Children have responsibilities for their offending behaviour but less consideration had been given to the factors that could be sustaining their gang affiliation. These factors could include structural elements that are outside of their direct control and are solely the domain of the parents.

There is an understanding that conducting whole family interventions may raise many obstacles for practitioners. Parents and carers are often resistant to having practitioners invade their lives and feel that their children’s offending behaviour should not reflect on them as parents. This is reinforced if they have other children who have not been affected by gangs. If family focused interventions were found to be effective, it may require a change in the way that services are divided in the statutory sectors; between adult and children's services.

These complexities provided a valuable research opportunity for practitioner focused research to study a subject at close proximity and experience its evolution. There was however a plethora of obstacles whilst anticipating undertaking this piece of research within my own work environment. I had an intuitive belief that a model of intervention which engaged with the whole family as opposed to focusing on the child in isolation made ‘sense’. I therefore had a strong urge to test the hypothesis.

**Research Aim and Objective**
This research aims to investigate whether family focused interventions are more effective than individualised child focused interventions in reducing the behavioural characteristics of gang affected children. Research surrounding children’s criminogenic factors often refers to the importance of family dynamics. This includes the strong protective factors that a family can have in reducing offending behaviour and their association with pro-criminal peers. This research proposes that implementing gang interventions which are family focused can assist in sustaining outcomes. It suggests that family-focused interventions actively consider the structural factors that involve components which only parents can facilitate or change.
The specific research objectives are:

- To describe the demographic and the behavioural characteristics of gang affected children within this study
- To outline the demographic characteristics of gang affected children in the study who were exposed to individualised child focused interventions and family focused interventions
- To compare the characteristics of gang affected children who were exposed to individual child focused interventions with the behavioural characteristics of gang affected children who were exposed to family focused interventions.
- To examine how the parents of gang affected children who were exposed to family focused interventions perceive the experience of the intervention and experience of having a child identified as gang affected.

This data will be collated from YOTs; therefore all children included have already come into contact with the CJS.

**Methodology**

Within the fields of gangs and family work it is difficult to isolate the elements that actually created the end impact. With this dilemma in mind this research firstly takes into consideration the methodological design and whether the intervention was measurable and replicable, and secondly whether the intervention had a measurable impact. As a practitioner I feel that research should directly influence practices and provide practitioners not only with wider knowledge but also with additional strategies to address the complex needs of the children and families they work with. This research therefore investigated whether family interventions with children positively impacts (illustrating a reduction in offending) on their gang activity and affiliation. In addition interviews were conducted with families to obtain their views on the impact of the interventions especially in relation to what they perceived the outcomes of the interventions were for them.
Overview of the chapters

This study is presented in 7 sections. In the introduction, I have outlined the aim of the research, my position within this research and my motivation for conducting this study.

Chapter 1: The first section primarily reviews the conceptual framework surrounding this research area. This chapter outlines the literature surrounding gang definitions and the measurements of gang activity. This includes the formation and structure of gangs both within a historical and contemporary context. This chapter also explore the various theories that underpin gang research and identifies risk and protective factors that have been found to impact on gang affiliation such as school, families, peers, and age. This includes the impact of socio-economic and demographic variables.

Chapter 2: This chapter reviews the structure of YOTs and their role in providing interventions to children who are gang affected. An outline of the theoretical principles of risk based and desistance theories that underpin YOTs is presented. Both supportive and enforcement interventions utilised with gang affected children are explored. The chapter also reviews family focused interventions and their effectiveness when addressing the needs of children. I further evaluate this methodology when addressing the criminogenic attributes of children. There is a particular focus on the systemic model and how this can be related to the gang structure. The chapter concludes with the review of the different elements that need to be considered when interventions are provided in a mandated or voluntary capacity.

Chapter 3: This chapter conveys the methodology utilised within this research, with a particular focus on the rationale for the various methodological choices. It details the method of selection for the sample population within the quantitative section (both the control and intervention groups). The selection of participants within the qualitative section of the research is also described. The method of analysis is explained and the findings of the research outlined. I also outline the methodological difficulties encountered and how these were omitted or reduced.
Chapters 4 & 5: These chapters present the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative sections of the research. Significant findings in relation to offending characteristics by gang affected children are highlighted. The perception and views of parents is also documented within these chapters.

Chapter 6: Within the discussion and conclusion a summary of the findings and the impact and influence that these results can have on further research studies is presented. There is a particular focus on how these findings can advance the practices of professionals within the fields of YJS. This conclusion will take into account the limitations of this study and how future studies can advance this position.

Conclusion
The introduction has outlined the context within which this research was based. This has included my position within the research as a professional within the YJS. The motivation for conducting this study has been outlined in relation to the growing number of children who are affected by gang activity and my experience of the impact of these increasing numbers. This research was a journey of negotiating complex organisational structures which involved differing professional models of work, multiple and complex needs of families and an evolving model of gang activity. The significance of the study was outlined in terms of the limited research which has specifically explored the use of family focused interventions within a YOT context for children affected by gang. The framework for the methodology has been introduced and the thesis structure and chapter content illustrated.
Chapter 1:

Understanding the Gang

This chapter aims to illustrate the background and developments into the research of gangs. This will incorporate both theoretical and practice issues. The review of the literature will outline the impact that gang activities have on communities and the diversity of risk factors which influence gang membership. This will primarily be focused in a United Kingdom (UK) context.

Gang activity within UK inner cities has increasingly become a high profile issue for many areas of society. The most prominent product of this exposure has been the substantial media coverage that this topic has reaped. The media presentation of the gang phenomena has been very salacious and appealing (Miller, 1992; Thompson et al, 2000; Esbensen & Tusinski, 2007; Howell, 2007; Gravel et al, 2018) however the majority of this presentation has been based on fiction and innuendo. The media has dubiously presented an array of crimes as gang related. This has been particularly prevalent in high profile murder cases, where the link between gang activity and crime has exceedingly tenuous connections. There was the tragic murder of 7 year old Toni-Ann Byfield in 2003, where the media declared that she was ‘the youngest victim of gangland murder’ (Daily Mail, 2003). It subsequently became unclear whether the murder was principally motivated as a drug robbery or gang related offence. There has been a tendency in the media to amalgamate offending trends with gang activity if the perpetrators and crimes possess certain characteristics. These characteristics tend to include being a young man, being from an ethnic minority background (especially from the Black community), involving drugs related criminality which occurs in inner city setting.

The media reports have attempted to combine societal concerns pertaining to social cohesion with gangs. This was evident in the media report of a rise in Muslim young men joining gangs (Guardian, 2008) which had the seductive dimension that journalism appears unable to resist (Tita et al, 2007). The prevalence of public interest in gang activity has seeped into the social
media sphere through the formation of Google gang maps. This level of publicity firmly establishes the notoriety of gangs and additionally portrays gangs as an endemic constituent of our society. This form of social media enables the general public to identify where gangs are operating and this consequently negatively profiles particular neighbourhoods.

The media has particularly focused on the increasing level of deaths, which have been defined as gang related. There is understandably societal concern that the majority of the victims of these tragic murders have been children and young adults. Society has further struggled with the concept that the perpetrators of these heinous crimes are predominately other children and young adults. This fortifies the stance that there is a deep rooted failing in our communities and society as a whole when we are unable to protect our children. This failure is additionally reinforced when the offenders are children, as this affirms the fear of ‘mankind’s essential illness’ (Golding, 1954).

There is a sense of discomfort in recognising that children commit deviant behaviour, especially when this behaviour is violent. The study into the offending of children and young adults must take into account the notion that rules are created by enforcement agencies, but that deviance is created by society (Becker, 1974; Wilkins, 2013). The social norms surrounding deviant behaviour are not static and critically are influenced by external attributes including time, politics and media climate (Goode, & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Pitchard & Huges, 1997; Hall, 2012; Goode, 2015). The perception of serious youth and gang violence invokes considerable levels of fear within the wider community. The gang phenomena has been highly politicised with the general public’s fear of crime utilised in election manifestos, as politicians pledge to purge communities of serious youth violence. The consequence has been the implementation of increasingly punitive approaches to crime (Farrall et al, 2010). There is no 'gang offence' but rather a set of attributes that are commonly believed to be associated with the criminality of this group. There has been the implementation of the civil gang injunction in response to this gap in enforcement measures. This tool utilised by enforcement services is further discussed later in this chapter.
Defining the Terminological Scope

Who is a child, who is a young person?

The study of gang membership and gang interventions encompasses a vast remit. It is necessary to delineate the scope and elucidate the terminology as this is not standardised across previous research studies. This research specifically reviews gangs in the context of children and young people; therefore clarification is required on what these terms constitute. Many Children’s Services fluctuate between the use of the term ‘children’ and ‘young people’. It is often ambiguous about which ages these terms explicitly refer to. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a ‘child’ as ‘anyone under the age of 18 years old’ (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). This definition aligns with the legal parameters in the UK, but omits to account for the wide ranging developmental differences of those featured under this banner. The General Medical Council (2017) provides differentiation on these terms and ‘children’ are described as younger children, who lack the maturity and understanding required to make decisions on their own. Alternatively ‘young people’ are defined as older children, who are more able to make their own decisions. The United Nations (2013) categories ‘youth’ as those age 15 years to 24 years, however there has been a tendency not to clearly stipulate the age demarcation between younger and older children.

For the purposes of this study the term ‘children’ as defined by the UN convention will be employed, as this specifically relates to those individuals who are under 18 years old. It will be highlighted later that many studies have blurred the definition of young people to also include young adults up to the age of 24 years. In this study the term child/children will relate to children from 10 years old. This age has been selected as it corresponds with the UK’s age of criminal responsibility as stipulated under the Crime and Disorder Act (1998). It is from this age that children are culpable for offences that they commit and can be made subject to criminal court orders. This study recognises that the 10 – 17 years old age range encompasses a broad spectrum of developmental capacities but has been chosen as it corresponds with key UK Youth
Justice Services remit. This is also a period of time where children still legally require consent from an adult.

**Who and what is a gang?**

Defining a gang has been one of the key stumbling blocks in the study of gangs. There are several terms utilised when referring to those who are affected by gang activity, which have included gang affiliated, associated, or group offender. The terms criminals, offenders, troublesome youth, and delinquent youths are also synonymous with those involved in gangs (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Young et al, 2007; Bannister et al, 2010; Cloward, & Ohlin, 2013). It is not possible to neatly compartmentalise children who are involved in gangs into one single term which fully encompasses their experiences or reality. In order to capture the diversity of those involved in gang activity the term ‘gang affected’ will be employed throughout the research. This takes into account that children who are involved in gang related offending are often equally at high risk of being victims of serious youth violence and exploitation. It is difficult to neatly segregate offender and victim when researching gang activity (Taylor et al, 2008; Melde et al, 2009; Pyrooz, et al 2014).

There have been numerous proposed definitions for gangs and these have evolved over time. This has been in response to the changing structure and function of gangs. Earlier studies into gangs by Thrasher (1927:144) defined gangs as:

‘interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict and characterized by meeting face to face.............. involving conflict and planning. The behaviour develops a tradition, ............ and attachment to local territory’. p144

Moore (1990) elaborated on earlier definitions and reported that for a group to be categorised as a gang they required specific components. The definition placed an emphasis on self-classification, the dynamics of the group and its ability to sustain its structure. Moore’s definition included the following criteria:
1. That the group defines itself as a gang,
2. That it included unsupervised individuals who are socialised by each other,
3. That the group has the capacity to reproduce itself by recruiting younger members for the purpose of performing functions, such as providing respect and conducting activities dictated by older members.

The Centre for Social Justice (2009:21) proposed an alternative definition which provided a clearer set of criteria and were more reflective of the UK experience of gangs. They define a gang as:

‘A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other, similar gangs’

The above definition does not fully encapsulate the gang structures and functions within the research sites as gangs have become less street-based. This however is the definition that was used within the research sites and the definition that is widely referred to in the Ending Gangs and Youth Violence guidance (HM Government, 2011) and Government policies on gangs (O’Connor & Waddell, 2015) that are the reference point for YOTs.

Hallsworth and Young (2004) also specified that the group must possess the minimal characteristic of:

1) A name,
2) A propensity to inflict violence and engage in crime,
3) Violence and delinquency that performs a functional role in promoting group identity and solidarity.
There have been many attempts to redefine gangs; however some of the criteria included have presented clear limitations. The Centre for Social Justice (2009) proposed that a gang can be a group of 3 or more people who associated together. It is reasonable to question whether a group of merely three individuals can constitute a functioning structure, and therefore be considered a gang. There is the continued difficulty in the aspiration to establish a definition of gangs which incorporates all versions, formats and structures of known gangs. Where this is attempted it results in definitions that are all encompassing, but provide minimal clarity about whether a group is a gang or just a group of individuals that socialise together. Gangs due to their criminality possess negative connotations, and there is a justifiable concern that many children could be included within these broader definitions and hence erroneously be classified as gang members.

There have been moves towards definitions which place more emphasis on gang member’s self-identification. It is suggested that gangs should retain characteristics that enable its members to be identified by others as a gang member (Densely, 2014; Home Office, 2015). In Densley’s (2014) study, gang memberships centered on the perception of the gang members themselves, rather than using agency classification. Gang members were defined as individuals who identified themselves as such and possessed the additional prerequisite that their perception of membership was corroborated by other gang members.

Gang membership is not a generic role within these structures and there are several subsections identified which correspond with the varying level of participation of those who engage in gang activity. There is demarcation between those that are defined as core members, or associates, and ‘wannabees’ (Winfree et al, 1992; Dukes et al, 1997; Esbensen et al, 2001; Pitts, 2014). There are numerous terms that are used for these categories (i.e. Youngers, soldiers, elders etc.). These can generally be grouped into 3 categories (fringe, core, and senior members of the gang). The age of those involved in gangs play an important part in designating where individuals are assigned within the gang structure. Younger gang members primarily possess the lower ranked roles in the gang hierarchical structure. Katz (2003) highlighted that
there are different levels of involvement within gangs which commences with the ‘wannabee’; these are individuals who are considered to be on the fringes of gangs, working towards becoming more strongly affiliated. ‘Associates’ are those that are linked and engage with known gang members and this can be illustrated through their presence in gang pictures or videos. Densley (2014) stipulates that these prospective gang members actively offended with core gang individuals, but did not recognise themselves as gang members.

Gang ‘members’ are core affiliates and commit criminal acts for the specific aim of maintaining the gang structure which can include conducting gang retaliations. These gang members also engage in financially motivated criminal activities, which typically encompass illegal drug distribution. There is a general consensus that there are different functional roles within the gang and that within these structures there is an eagerness by the members to progress up the gang hierarchy (Bullock & Tillet, 2002; Pitts, 2007). When proactive police enforcement has taken place and influential gang members are in custody, this assists the gang functionality. This provides the opportunity for lower ranked gang members to escalate the hierarchical structure. It has been argued that the importance of gang hierarchy is predominately a perception of practitioners and that gang members only view these as loose structures (Windle & Briggs, 2015; Disley & Liddle, 2016)

The lack of clarity on gang definitions has a significant impact on the measurability of gangs and there is a need for external measures to be incorporated in defining these groups. Spergel (1995:41) asserts that gangs are ‘Part of a criminal organisation that must be attached through an efficient gang tracking and identification system’. The formulations of these statistics have centred on the interpretation of available definitions. This has become a circular process as these definitions influence the measurement of gang crime (Maxson & Klein, 1990). Maxson & Klein (1990) further assert that inconsistencies in these definitions occur across different organisations. Consequently, it is difficult to be confident that all agencies are consistently measuring or reporting the same phenomena. This reduces the ability to generalise the findings from one gang study to another or one area to another locality.
The element of criminality has been a stable construct of gangs. It should be noted that there are those that oppose this position and assert that gang membership is not always synonymous with offending (Ralph et al, 2009). The motivation for initiation and sustained membership is more complex than just a simple variable of criminality. Gangs are also able to accommodate numerous functioning stages, where the principle objective of the gang differs. Densley (2014) identified that gangs can operate at a variety of stages and these are described as:

- **Recreational stage** - where gangs are born out of familial connections like friendships formed in local community settings such as schools and religious establishments.
- **Criminal stage** - where gangs are rebellious and involved in ‘exciting’ activities which include conducting criminal activities and establishing reputations whereby other individuals fear the gang.
- **Governance stage** - where the gang has more formalised structures in order to undertake criminal activity and closer reflects organised criminal networks. This can involve investing criminal proceedings into legitimate businesses.

An Organised Crime Network is defined as a structure that is planned and coordinated around the process of conducting serious crime. These groups work together and consist of a durable core of key individuals, included in these structures are subordinates, specialists, and other more transient members, plus an extended network of associates (NCA, 2017). Gangs are evolving organised systems which reflect distinctive operating differences from those established earlier in history to more recently formed gangs. Aldridge et al (2008) describes gangs as messy social networks, it is further highlighted that the search for one unanimous and universal statement on gangs across all contexts maybe a fruitless endeavor (Densley, 2014).
Identification of gang members

The identification of gang members has been a thorny issue as there has been no clear consensus on a definition of gangs itself. This definition barrier additionally translates to the inconsistencies in the identification of what constitutes a gang member. Professionals themselves appear to have struggled with even the terminology, this has been evident in the ways that agencies name this phenomena. The National Probation Service refers to these individuals as ‘group offenders’ (Choak & Goodman, 2011). This term places more prominence on the act of committing the criminal activity within groups. There are limitations in such a definition as it can incorporate group crimes which should sit outside of this sphere of activity. The profile of UK children perpetrating offences in large groups is not a common occurrence, with the exception of the London Riots in 2011. The media attempted to correlate these events with gang activity but it was subsequently highlighted that the majority of those involved were not identified as gang members (MoJ, 2013). It could be viewed that gangs committing offences in large recognisable groups would be incredibly foolhardy, as this would directly draw unwanted attention to themselves and the criminal activities in which they partake.

The confusion over terminology places police officers and agencies in a position of having to label gang members and gang crimes according to their own preferences and ideas of what constitutes a gang member. This results in a lack of a clear set of criteria that has been agreed to by the multi-agency partnership (Curry, Ball & Becker, 1996). It could be such differences in both methodology and theory which leads to crime reduction partnerships reporting low confidence that their collective work has contributed to a measurable reduction in crime (Ellis et al, 2007). There have been definitions which have offered more useable criteria, but the strength of these definitions has been heavily dependent on the locality and time period in which they have been proposed. As gangs evolve the definitions become defunct.

Data regarding gang incidents can inform knowledge, but surveys or official reporting systems do not capture the complexities or subtleties of gang realities. In particular, official records have been criticised for being incomplete, inaccurate, conflicting and incapable of adequately
representing the fluid nature of gang activities and membership (Meehan, 2000; Katz, 2003; Hughes, 2005). The relationship between gang membership and crime is reported to be robust and this has been consistent regardless of time of the study, methodology, design and sample (Miller, 1975; Howell, 1997; Rodgers, 2003, 2006; Jones, 2009; White, 2013). The police are a key contributor in this debate as they hold the majority of data on criminal activity be that both convictions and intelligence. Police data and analysis heavily dictates who is subsequently characterised as gang members, enforced against and where enforcement resources are deployed (Fritsch et al, 1999; Esbensen, 2001; Katz 2003). Spergel (1995) has questioned the police’s ability to reliably identify individuals within gangs. This was further reinforced when Spergel (1995) found that police lists still included individuals that were no longer actively participating in gang activity. Police identification processes for gang members incorporated factors such as types of offending and associations, but there is little evidence in the research regarding how individuals are removed from such lists. Enforcement agencies have suggested that the number of gangs and gang members have increased (Miller, 2001; Disley & Liddle, 2016). This could be less about the issue of gangs increasing but more as a consequence of individuals inappropriately remaining on these lists. The data does not fully take into consideration the dynamic nature of gangs and therefore inflates the numbers of gang members being identified at any one point. It was found that gang members stay on enforcement agency lists from between 1-5 years dependent on their assessed status (Katz, 2003).

It is argued that the police do not necessarily document individuals as members because of their behaviour, but rather according to their own ideas and beliefs about gang members which is documented on systems (Crew, 1997; Fraser et al, 2014). Within arrest records, it was found that gang members were responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime (Bobrowski, 1988; Thornberry 1998; Thornberry et al, 2003 Pyrooz et al, 2014, 2015; Esbensen et al, 2009). It should be noted that Bobrowski (1988) refers to arrest and not convictions data, therefore these findings could be a consequence of gang members being more actively targeted by the police (Kennedy, 2009; Ralph et al 2009). These alleged offences may not satisfy the criminal
justice threshold, it should not be assumed that these individuals were subsequently found guilty of a crime.

The use of such data is problematic when some individuals are prematurely or falsely labelled solely on identification processes which include where they live, whom they associate with, what they look like and what they wear. It would be easy for individuals to be wrongly identified especially where the gangs are ‘postcode’ determined, as children who live in these areas are at risk of being labelled gang members by virtue of where they reside. The labelling of children as gang members is correlated to negative outcomes. McAra & McVie (2007) proposes that system contact with the YJS in itself becomes a criminogenic factor. This was based on the longitudinal findings of the Edinburgh study in 2001, which found that the strongest predictor of being charged for an offence was primarily having previous police charges. The study further highlighted that police discriminated against certain categories of individuals, specifically boys and disadvantaged children. Disadvantaged children included those that due to family circumstances are under the care of the local authority. Department of Education (2015a) found that Children in Care were more likely to be sanctioned for an offence than the general population. Schofield et al (2015) suggests that the relationship between these children and offending are explicitly affected by their experience of the care system, their cumulative risk and resilience. The increasing criminalisation of children has resulted in the last five years in 127,000 children having their names added to the national police computer database (MOJ, 2017). It is worrying that children who are already disadvantaged due to previous life experiences are further disadvantaged by the CJS.

Identification of children as offenders appears to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy as described by labeling theorist (Becker, 1974; Lemert, 1964). In relation to gangs, it can be suggested that previous police identification and interaction is a key factor in further contact with the CJS. Waters (2007) stresses the importance of the police using discretion in order to facilitate the diversion of children from the formal CJS. There has been much documented on the negative impact of labeling children (Hirschi, 1975; Farrington et al, 1978; Al-Talib & Griffin, 1994; Francis et al, 2017). An opposing position proposed by Wolff (1995) is that labels increase access too
often limited resources and interventions. Services and practitioners may find it difficult to access specialist services for children and their families due to the service thresholds. Negative labels need to be balanced against the ultimate aim of providing access to these provisions. This suggests that there is a need for a change in the ways that services (especially preventative services) can be accessed.

In order to formulate data on gang members the London Metropolitan Police Service utilise the gang Matrix (London Council, 2014; London Assembly, 2018). The matrix identifies gang members through collating information from the police and other sources. This information relates to recorded gang violence and the perceived risk of the individual becoming a victim of gang violence. Previous criminal offending of individuals is heavily used in this process. In 2014, the data identified that there were 224 named gangs in London which consisted of 3,495 active gang members. Of this group, it was reported that 71% were in the community, 29% were subject to custodial sentences and 9% were subject to community orders. Ninety seven percent were identified as male and 70% were age between 17-23 years old. In 2016 it was identified that there were 225 recognised gangs within London, in the following year; 2017, it was reported that there were 3806 individuals on the Metropolitan Police matrix. Of this data 87% were BAME, 80% were ranged between 12-24 years old and 99% were male (Trident Command, 2017). In order to be ranked on gang matrix database, individuals need to have accrued numerous criminal sanctions. The use of criminal convictions omits many children from being identified via this process as due to their age they would not have accrued as many convictions as young adults and therefore would not be ranked. It was also identified that 77% of the cohort were from Black or Minority Ethnic groups (Trident Borough command, 2014). The police Matrix reflects that black young men are represented at least two times greater than the overall under 25 year old population (MOPAC, 2018). There have been various propositions on the reasons for these levels of disproportionality, such as that gang related crime occurs within neighbourhoods where there is higher levels of general violence and deprivation (MOPAC, 2018). It has been proposed that a review of the Trident Matrix is required to examine the way
in which the information is gathered, verified, stored and shared; in addition this review should specifically reference the ethnic disproportionality in this cohort (Lammy, 2017).

The categorisation of criminal offences and criminal offender is an extremely complex issue and often is based on subjective views. Police data has been criticised for not being an objective process. This has not only been an issue for the police as even where other information is included there is little consensus. There is inconsistency between others’ input when identifying gang members, as highlighted by Craig et al (2002) who found that parents and teachers had low levels of agreement on which boys belong to a gang.

An alternative method is self-reported gang affiliation as this would not be affected by professional’s assumptions and is led by how individuals view themselves. Based on 1,059,000 youth gang members in the United States gathered via self-reporting found similar outcomes in relation to the commencement and exit from gang activity and supported the finding of official data (Curry, 2006; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). Some studies have utilised self-nomination methods whereby an individual is identified having a level of gang membership if they state that their friendship group was gang affiliated (Junger-Tas et al, 2010). There are still identified limitations to this method as it still constrained by individual’s interpretation and perception of what constitutes a gang member (Melde, et al 2016).

However, using solely gang members’ self-reporting of membership is also a questionable measure. Gang memberships by its nature, wields pressures to conceal delinquent and violent behaviour as this creates unwanted attention from enforcement agencies. Norwegian Anthropologist, Moshuus (2005) reported the considerable difficulties he experienced in accessing street informants in Oslo, in his pursuit to obtain information directly from gang members on their perception of gang reality. Those that are actively entrenched are unlikely to disclose affiliation unless they are ex-gang members. There are few advantages for individuals to self-define as gang members other than to other gang members. Transversely children may exaggerate their involvement to consolidate their own self-image as self- identity is particular important during adolescence (Rosenberg, 2015).
This ambiguity is intensified dependent on how gang numbers and incidents have been identified and collated. There is a need not to generalise the findings of the North American studies to the UK context as it fails to account for the differences (Tita, 2007; Fraser et al, 2018). Katz (2003) asserts that there has been too little focus on how this data is generated. The importance of these inconsistencies within the data should not be understated, as this data provides the foundations on which interventionists, researchers and policy makers rely on. Meehan (2000), states that the data may not be accurate and expands this argument by stating that the figures may even be purposefully manipulated for political or financial gain. This action may be motivated due to the way that resources are allocated for enforcement. Areas which have been identified as having substantial gang problems receive additional resources (Bursik & Grasmich, 1993, 1995; Meehan, 2000) and the situation is aggravated by less than perfect data collection procedures (Katz, 2003).

**Gang related offences**

References to gang related crime in research studies are often not clearly defined. This is illustrated in drug related offences, where some offenders are classified as drug dealers and others classified as gang members who deal drugs. It appears that there is no uniformed way in which this decision is made. It could be argued that drug dealers in most instances are unable to operate in neighbourhoods unless they are working or liaising with some form of structure that could be classified as a gang. It is difficult to assess whether offences identified as gang incidents are principally gang motivated. There is the question of whether an offence is gang related or an offence committed by an individual who is simultaneously a gang member. These discrepancies make it problematic to quantify the levels of gang related incidents. It is suggested that gang incidents were more visible, violent and likely to involve a weapon (Bailey & Unnithan, 1994; Adams & Pizarro, 2013). There is more clarity with violent offences which are motivated by gang retaliations i.e. through gang related murders and rapes. These offences are used as a signal of both power and reinforce the fear generated for refuting gang rules or perceived disrespect perpetrated on gang members. It is argued that gang related violence results in more serious injury such as in relation to knife crime where 57% of stabbings flagged
as gang-related were deemed to result in a serious or fatal injury, compared to non-gang related incidents where serious injury occurred in 34% incidents (MOPAC, 2017). It is asserted that gang’s account for 41% of all offences where a gun is fired and that most gun crime is link to drugs and gangs (London Assembly, 2018).

The obstacles that are encountered due to the lack of a consistently agreed definition should not be viewed as ineptitude by those who research or work within this field. There needs to be an acceptance that gang life is evolving in response to social and enforcement factors (Densley, 2014). Gangs are required to modify in order to be sustained. Gangs are no longer highly visible and the emerging threat for communities and agencies is that gangs are becoming more competent at hiding their activities, being more structured and resembling organised crime networks (Whittaker, 2017). Services will need to be responsive to these changes in order to address and combat gang activity in a relevant and effective manner.

**The Evolution Of Gangs**

Gang research historically has predominantly been deemed a North American problem, and this has been reflected in the number of research studies in this region. The four large scale longitudinal studies which have comprehensively reviewed gangs, have taken place in North America; Denver Youth Survey (Loeber, Wei et al, 1999), Rochester Youth Development Study (Thornberry et al, 2003), Pittsburgh Youth Study (Loeber, Farrington et al, 2001) and Seattle Social Development project (Hill et al, 1999).

The earliest gang theorist viewed gang delinquency as a result of social disorganisation, endemic to slum areas (Thrasher, 1927; Shaw & Mckay, 1931). Within these environments the lack of social structure and opportunities in conjunction with extensive social needs enabled gang activity to flourish. There is some consistency in the theoretical basis for gang formation, especially in relation to the social disorganisation model, within communities of high unemployment rates gangs have been found to be prevalent (Thrasher, 1927; Aikens, Rush & Wycoff, 1993). Cloward & Ohlin (1960) suggest 'that those denied legitimate opportunities
have a heightened propensity to join street gangs as this leads to frustration and antisocial acts’. Stone, (1999), further asserts that when economic opportunities are unavailable, the gang option is seen by many as the only alternative way of obtaining power, money and protection.

Researchers developed the control and disorganisation theory and described the gang formation in terms of deviant groups who formed as a consequence of a lack of social control over their environment (Hirschi, 1969:16; Sampson & Groves 1989; Kubrin et al, 2009). The social disorganisation tradition view gangs as the consequences of economic inequalities (Toby, 1957; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Bursil & Grasmick, 1993; Kawachi et al, 1999; Huebner, 2016). Clowar & Ohlin (1960) as strain theorists, stated that such delinquency and gang involvement arises as an adaptation of structural pressures, and blocked conventional opportunities, which subsequently results in the pursuit of opportunities via illegitimate avenues.

The earlier literature placed the gang as a phenomenon that was located outside of social norms and situated only within a particular sector of society. Bloch and Neiderhoffer (1958) further reviewed this area of work in terms of strain and sub culture theories. It was suggested that that these individuals were behaving in a manner that was consistent with lower class culture (Miller, 1958). This lack of opportunity and options due to financial constraints means that families are forced to remain residing within areas that they perceive places their children at risk (Reiboldt, 2001). The psychological impact on their inability to keep their own children safe and the feeling of disempowerment has not been clearly articulated within gang research. Gangs are viewed as outsiders, threatening good society and this ironically further segregates this group of individuals, their families and those communities most affected by gang activity from mainstream society (Tita, 2007).

**Gang Formation**

For researchers and practitioners understanding the benefits of joining a gang is fundamental. The negative impact for those affected by gangs has been well publicised but this appears not to have reduced affiliation. The negative impact includes the risks of violence, enforcement
action and separation from mainstream society. Aiken et al (1993) found that there was a higher propensity for individuals to join gangs when gang members had grown up under harsh social and economic circumstances. It was identified that there was a relationship between gang membership and social and economic disadvantage (Adler, et al 1984; Hill et al, 1999; Kubrin & Wo, 2016). Community profile and composition has been identified as having an influence on gang formation as gangs evolve in transitional neighborhoods, which are categorised by social disorganisation and rapid population shifts (Conley et al, 1993). There has been rapid regeneration and gentrification (Butcher & Dickens, 2016) in many UK inner city areas. This has resulted in improved aesthetics of areas, changes in the demographics and income profile of its residents. These changes have left original communities in areas where they are unable to afford properties (Butler, 2003; Hamnett, 2003). Under these circumstances the differences between ‘the have and have nots’ is more visually accentuated. When children live in areas where gang’s operate, there are few means for children to feel safe and overtime gang culture drive children into blind alleys of risk (Palmer, 2009).

Social and economic disadvantage in itself may not be the sole reason for affiliation to gangs as there will be other children who experience these disadvantages but do not join gangs. Contributing features that may affect children’s repertoire of behavioural tactics whilst residing in these environments are implementing strategies which avoid, reduce or tolerate the stress that this disadvantage creates (Rosario et al, 2003; So et al, 2017). This is associated with where these children live and the dynamics that they have to negotiate within these areas. Pitts (2007) asserted that children who are growing up in gang hotspots become gang members, albeit reluctantly. The risk of being a victim of violence for straying outside of your ‘turf’ has a long history in working class areas that reaches beyond the current fascination with territorial conflict (Pearson, 1984). Garot (2007) found that gangs interaction through the use of dialogue when demanding to know which area someone was from held deeper meanings for these individuals. The question was actually confirming which gang the individual was aligned with. There was a clear understanding that the instigator of the question was willing to initiate violence if the wrong response was provided.
Where there are ‘postcode’ gangs, children are unable to travel into other areas, and this may create high levels of stress for these children. In such circumstances children may have to incorporate avoidant coping strategies, such as bypassing certain areas which reduces the risk of delinquent behaviour when confronted with high levels of community violence (So et al, 2017). When children incorporate such strategies in order to safeguard themselves, these actions directly impact on their long term ability to change their social economic status. When individuals are unable to freely travel outside of their own neighbourhoods they subsequently limit their education, training and employment opportunities (Rosario et al, 2003). Functioning under such circumstances will inevitably have an impact on the development of children and how they view the world. For significant periods of time these children are operating in environments in which they feel unsafe and which represent impossible crossroads for them (Emerson & Paley, 1992).

**The role of violence in gangs**

It could be argued that children carry weapons as protection due to situational circumstances, however the literature regarding whether individuals use weapons as a defensive coping strategy is inconclusive (Erickson et al, 1997; Rosario et al, 2008). It has been difficult to determine whether the carrying of weapons is a confrontational coping strategy to defend against potential attack or a tool to facilitate delinquent activity (Callahan & Rivara, 1992; Ginsberg et al, 1993). Self–defence strategies did not moderate the risk of delinquent behaviour in the face of violent exposure; meaning that these children would not only use the weapon to deter others but also had the tendency to initiate the use of these weapons (Callahan & Rivara, 1992).

To describe those in gangs as solely offenders or perpetrators, neglects to take into account that gang membership also significantly increases the risk of victimisation (Taylor et al, 2007). There is an overlapping link between offending and victimisation (Esbensen& Huizinga, 1991; Loeber et al, 2001; Zhang et al, 2001). Older children are at substantially more risk when they are outside of the family home. Twenty one percent of SCRs show that where there was a
murder perpetrated against a child they involved incidents that occurred outside of the family home and within a community context (Brandon et al, 2010).

Padilla (1992) noted that balancing gang life appears to be neither rewarding nor satisfying, as gang members were not only at risk from rival gangs, but would also be subject to harsh discipline from their own members for perceived gang indiscretions. The structure of gangs makes violence a routine part of their lives (Decker, 1996; Thornberry, 1998). Therefore, this results in gang members being at a high risk of becoming a victim. In 2007, 27 children and young adults were murdered in London by others of a similar age. 48% of those murdered with a gun or knife in London were aged 15 to 24 years old Home Office, (2018). Much of the data does not directly record serious youth violence as gang related it is reported that gangs are responsible for 50% of knife related crime which results in injury and 60% of shootings. Peterson et al (2004) found that children who reported that they joined gangs for protection still experienced significantly more violent victimisation than non-gang members. Measuring the level of gang violence is difficult, however it is identified that the health services hold a vast amount of information in relation to gang related injuries (NCA, 2016). There is a need for the co-ordination of information sharing by Health agencies which is stipulated under the NHS England (2017). This would allow a more comprehensive profile of the frequency and severity of gang related injuries to be recorded.

High levels of violence are exercised by gang members; this is a key operating model of the gang. It is suggested that this violence is interconnected to the behavioural characteristics of the gang’s members. Gang members were found to commit more violent acts than other individuals (Battin-Pearson et al, 1998; Melde & Esbensen, 2013). Violence is the tool that gangs use in order to galvanize their reputation and instills creditability in their claims that those who oppose the gang will be victims of severe violence (Decker, 1996). Gangs utilise violence as a strategy to ensure that younger members remain attached to the gang. Not only are those affiliated to gangs at risk but also those closely linked to them. Mothers and siblings
were often targeted by gangs as a means of retaliations against other gang members. This included harassment, threats and actual violence (Aldridge et al, 2011).

Esbensen et al (1999) reported that children join gangs for their social needs and that this includes the element of protection and money. Decker & Van Winkle (1996) found that joining a gang was instrumental in providing more safety for gang members where their key area of offending is related to illegal drugs distribution. The reputational factors for gangs are highly instrumental in sustaining and perpetrating the fear of gangs. Fear and shame are integral elements of the gang repertoire (Garot, 2007) and social media has now become an important element in this process, through uploading of videos where gang members vocalise threats against rival gangs and which is especially prevalent in music videos (Storrod & Densley, 2016; Wijeratne, 2015).

**Gangs and Criminal activity – Illegal Drug Distribution**

Gangs are often organised around the pursuit of monetary gain from conducting criminal acts (Fagan, 1989; Skolnick et al, 1990; Aldridge et al, 2008). One of the motivating factors reported by gang members is the amount of income that can be obtained whilst undertaking gang criminality. Densley (2014) reported that gang members often quoted inflated amounts of money earned as these gang members were incorrectly referring to revenue rather than actual income. The gang drug market is dominated by the supply of high value drugs (Heroin and crack cocaine) (NCA, 2016).

Gangs whose primary criminal activity is illegal drug distribution previously conducted their business within their own or neighbouring territories. This profile has changed in recent years and the model has included travelling from inner city areas to rural regions in order to drug deal. There is evidence of county lines activity in 88% of UK police forces returns with an estimate of 720 drug lines across England and Wales. 23% of police forces report county lines groups using accommodation such as apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks and 18% of police force identified that in order to facilitate their business this was
assisted by complicit companies like taxis, fast food outlets and car hire firms (NCA, 2017). This represents a scale and sophistication that has not previously been evident in gang related criminal activity which was limited to ‘postcodes’ locations. Densley (2014) reported that gang leaders rarely handled the contraband in which they profit from. This enables them to be distanced from the crime when enforcement agencies intercept the distribution of drugs. This is supported by the new model of running ‘county lines’ which has become a prevalent mode of criminal activity for UK gangs. This is where predominately children are recruited to travel to rural areas outside of inner cities to distribute drugs. Part of this process involves commandeering vulnerable adults’ properties from which they operate their drug distribution. These adults have a range of vulnerabilities including substance misuse, mental health issues and learning difficulties. Gangs will entice these vulnerable adults by providing free samples of drugs, money and gifts. The term ‘cuckooing’ has been coined to encapsulate this phenomenon (NCA, 2016). Some of these vulnerable adults will also be parents and their children directly become at risk from these gang members and they are at increased risk of exploitation. These rural areas are identified by gang members, as they have a receptive customer base, they are able to intimidate local drug dealers and they are not easily identifiable by local police forces (NCA, 2017).

It has been identified that vulnerable children are specifically targeted to conduct this role of transporting and dealing drugs within these rural areas. Children who are under the care of the local authority have also been targeted by gangs, especially those placed within children's homes with a history of going missing. Inner city areas that were historically more deprived were found to have large numbers of children’s care homes (Hansard, 2016) as larger properties are less expensive to purchase. This means that the services within these areas are dealing with higher levels of need which is often not reflected with additional funding resources. There has been a concerted effort by agencies to reduce this group’s vulnerability to gangs by closely monitoring missing episodes, as recommended by Ofsted (2013) in the Missing Children report.
Nonetheless, these children continue to be targeted by gangs but due to an agency wide focus on these specific children, gangs have diversified their target groups. Accordingly, the NCA (2015) has found that gangs are increasingly targeting vulnerable children who live within families units, where the parents/carers are less likely to report their children missing. This includes the strategy of encouraging children to register in the morning at school; they are then collected by adults to travel to other areas to engage in drug distribution. These children return home on the same day so as to reduce the likelihood of detection.

It is believed that children are used to distribute drugs by gangs because they are easier to control, and less likely to be recognised by police, especially if they are not previously known to services. There is also a belief that children will receive lighter criminal justice outcomes than adults, if they are apprehended by the police (Home Office, 2017). In addition there is a financial element for gangs, as these vulnerable children are inexpensive and easily recruited by initially providing gifts, and subsequently utilising violence and fear as controlling factors. A strategy of gangs to ensure compliance by children is through debt; whereby children are given drugs to store and then are deliberately robbed so that they are indebted to the gangs (NCA, 2016).

Agencies responses to this form of exploitation, has been mostly focused on girls, under the specific lens of child sexual exploitation. Boys have not received the same level of scrutiny that has been afforded to girls who go missing. There has been a major omission in the response for boys which fail to recognise that current evidence identifies boys aged 14-17 years are the group that are most likely to be at risk from this form of exploitation (NCA, 2015). These boys have predominately been viewed as perpetrators and offenders who require enforcement measures as opposed to safeguarding. This form of exploitation is not a new practice as Falshaw and Browne (1999) had already identified within their functional analysis research that boys in gangs were at risk, and in some instances this also included child sexual exploitation. They outlined that boys were associating with older gang members who were physically assaulting them and there were indications that these boys were suffering sexual assaults at the hands of these gang members (Falshaw & Browne, 1999:425)
It could be argued that some of the interventions and enforcement measures implemented by agencies have assisted in the development of ‘county lines’ networks. Individuals who have previously received a custodial sentence, whilst in custody are establishing networks with other individuals from areas which can create further drug distribution opportunities. A strategy of agencies has been to relocate gang members in an effort to manage the identified risk to them and their families. This has created an opportunity for these gang members to settle in new areas and establish new drug markets in these locations. Unlike in previous years where gang rivalries were defined by clear gang allegiances, gang members are now conducting business with rivals as ‘profit and not postcodes’ (Whittaker, 2017) is the priority within these groups.

Drugs are not solely used for generating criminal income but it is also reported that gang members displayed a far higher rates of drug use than non-gang members (Gatti et al, 2005). Hill et al (1999) reported that children with the greatest availability to marijuana between the ages of 10 - 12 years had a higher probability of becoming involved in gangs and were three times more likely to join gangs within these neighbourhoods. It should be recognised that communities where there is a high availability and presence of drugs are often found to be located around social housing where there is already a higher level of social need than in other areas. In areas of high drug availability the associated factors related to drug dealing and substance misuse are prevalent. Interestingly Hill’s (1999) study found that the availability of drugs was associated with a 52% increase in the probability of experiencing one or more serious violent victimization. There is an inseparable connection between the drugs industry, the violence that is required to sustain this market and increased probability of becoming a victim of violence. These are all elements that appear to be integral to the gang lifestyle.

Gangs have shown their ability to evolve in response to enforcement action. Gangs have distanced themselves from overt symbols of their membership as these are deemed to be “bad for business” (Disley and Liddle, 2016:36). It is a necessity for gangs to be able to modify in order to continue to operate. This is evident in their recruitment of different types of vulnerable children to conduct their criminal activity. The NCA (2016) found that white vulnerable children were being actively recruited by gangs. It is believed that older gang
members were targeting these children as they would reflect the demographic of the rural areas in which they were trafficked to conduct drug distribution, as this would reduce the chances of detection. It has been argued that UK gangs in response to external threat and financial commitments have grown into drug distribution enterprises (Densley, 2014). This form of structured organisation has previously been more reflective of North American gangs. UK gangs have over the recent years become more organised in both structure and the manner in which they operate, therefore closer reflecting Organised Criminal Networks (Densley, 2014; Whittaker, 2017).

**Gang association – the risk factors**

**Schools: The Impact Of Education**

Schools and educational establishments dominate a significant proportion of a child’s time and is a fundamental component of their socialisation outside of the family home. Schools are viewed as places that have the opportunity to positively impact on children’s lives, through both formal and informal education. Connell et al (1982) however found that mainstream institutions often failed to successfully engage with socially disadvantaged children and their families. This resulted in many children with additional needs being excluded from mainstream educational institutions which can be viewed as increasing the risk for these children. The exclusion from school for these children may solidify group formation with other delinquent children (Howell, 2010; Windle & Briggs, 2013). Gang members are often detached from school or have lower school attainment and delinquency develops when ‘individual’s bonds to society are weak’ (Hirsch, 1969:16). Strong social bonds protect children from associating with other delinquent peers (Sprott et al, 2005). This suggests that there is a need for radical policy change to reduce the number of children with behavioural problems being excluded from mainstream schools. The limited contact with school results in these children having lengthy periods of time outside structured adult supervision. It is during these periods that children associate with others who are also functioning outside the expected arrangements for those of their age. It is not the truanting itself, but rather what activities they engage with during these periods which
increase the risks of becoming gang affected. There is also evidence that specialist schools for children who have been excluded from mainstream educational provisions such as Pupil Referral Units (PRU) were specifically targeted by older gang members to recruit vulnerable children to undertake their drug distribution (NCA, 2015). Children who are excluded from mainstream social networks due to their presenting behaviours increase their social exclusion when they become members of gangs (Thornberry et al., 2003; Windle & Briggs, 2013). Schools have become very conscious of their public image (Hayden et al., 2007) which makes them reluctant to be identified as an educational establishment affected by gang activity. There is a need for schools to acknowledge and address gang related issues to ensure that they are perceived as safe places by children, otherwise they will become vulnerable environments in which gangs can flourish (Valdez et al., 2013; Estrada et al., 2016).

**Relationships in gangs - Peers**

It is clear that with all the identified negative elements which are associated with being a gang member, gang lifestyle cannot only be centred on crime and violence (Hughes, 2005). The peer relations that occur within these groups have a significant role to play. Professionals and children categorise these associations in a markedly different manner. Professionals tend to simplify gang identification as other gang members who children affiliate with for the sole purpose of committing criminal acts. This does not take into consideration gang membership which has been born of emotional closeness which was developed between children who have grown up together (Lyon, Henggeler & Hall, 1992; Windle & Briggs, 2013). Offending does not only provide children with kudos but these children are often excluded from social norms which other children may engage in. They therefore lack contact with age appropriate and socially competent peers (Craig et al., 2002). Barry (2010) argues that offending peers are often the only friends that these children have, as they are unlikely due to their behaviour to be accepted or invited into other friendship groups.

Their exclusion from other groups of children aligns with the selection model and social control theory (Hirschi, 2004) and the propensity theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Gatti et
al (2005) states that the enhancement model is a key element for those children that associate with gangs. These children already display a high level of delinquency, the act of joining the gang further exacerbate the presenting behaviours (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993). This is evident where children who are integrated within peer groups who exhibit similar antisocial behaviour, these peers assisted in maintaining and reinforcing their involvement in offending (Bender & Losel, 1997; Pyrooz & Ferrer, 2014). These theories suggest that gangs have a tendency to recruit individuals who are already delinquent or have the propensity towards delinquency. Those children often have a history of aggressive and antisocial behaviour and gangs provide the platform for these children to escalate and solidify this behaviour.

**Girls within gangs**

Girls have been found to be integral participants in male gangs (Valdez et al, 2009). These females can occupy various roles; perpetrators, victims and associates, and in most instances they are simultaneously all of these roles (Firmin, 2010; Gilman et al, 2017). They are primarily viewed as partners to gang members but they are also required to partake in gang criminality. This includes storing drugs, weapons and performing sexual acts, sometimes to numerous gang members. The hierarchical structure in gangs makes it unclear to what extent these girls undertake their roles with free will. NCA (2016) states that girls and young women are often controlled and subjected to domestic abuse by gang members even where they perceive themselves to be in relationships with specific gang members.

Girls are also often viewed as peripheral in relation to gang activities. More recently, agencies have been particularly focused on the roles of girls within gangs in connection to the identified links with child sexual exploitation. The use of sexual violence as an additional weapon of gang intimidation has been well documented (HM Government 2016, Home Office, 2017, Young & Trichet, 2017). Females are relatively underrepresented in gang’s statistics (Belknap & Bowers, 2016; O,Neal et al, 2016)and gang activity however they self-report gang membership at a rate up to 4.5 times higher than official data (Huizinga et al, 1993). The under-representations within the statistics are a consequence of girls often not having extensive offending histories. This is important as previous offending behaviour is one of the key identifying markers in police
identification processes. Girls are often not involved in the overt elements of gang activity such as street drug dealing, but rather their role centres on facilitating the criminality through storing weapons and drugs. Their low profile amongst services makes this role more effective and functional, as it reduces the likelihood of detection. Hughes (2005) found that male and female gang members often attributed their involvement in gangs to similar factors such as having gang involved peers or family members and a desire for protection or a sense of belonging. Nurge (2003) found that many girls seek refuge in gangs from abusive and violent treatment within their family units or from male partners, only to find themselves at increased risk of sexual and physical victimisation by other gang members. A hindrance to the research into girls and young women within gangs surround the negligible amount of intelligence on the numbers that are affected by gangs, be they sisters, mothers or partners (Firmin, 2010). The data reflects that there is a significant number of girls and young women who are closely affected or involved with gangs. It is approximately that there were 12,500 girls and young women closely involved in gangs’ (Pearce & Pitts, 2011). It is recognised that it has been difficult to fully quantify the scale of female involvement in gang related activity and it is articulated that ‘The biggest issue with girls and gangs is that we simply don't know the full extent of what is going on’ (Centre for Social Justice, 2014). This results in a lack of knowledge of either the level of criminality females are involved in or the extent of the exploitation that they experience.

**Family as a risk and protective factor**

McAra & McVie, (2007) argue that it should be acknowledged that children are powerless to alter the majority of the factors that propel them further into the CJS. Factors such as family structure, family conflict, social deprivation, gender and previous contact with the police. When children are exposed to community violence, social support from parents is assessed to be a protective factor (Kliewer et al, 1998). Parents are identified as a protective factor, but these challenges diminish parent’s ability to deliver consistent parenting and undermine the quality of
family interactions (Sampson & Laub, 1994; Kumpfer, 1999). Socio-economic factors such as poverty, structural disadvantage and economic hardship detrimentally affect parental capacity.

It is stated that lack of parental supervision (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Farrington et al, 2016) is a risk factor for children’s offending and association with gangs. There has been little investigation into the underlying reasons for this lack of parental supervision and the literature appears to assume it is principally based on neglectful parenting. Aldridge (2011) proposes that high parental supervision may simply limit the opportunity for children to associate with antisocial peers. It is identified that these children often come from single parent households within communities based in lower socio-economic areas. Further exploration is required to more comprehensively understand whether a lack of access to appropriate resources such as affordable childcare and the increase in low paid and unstable employment require these parents to work inordinate hours; hence resulting in the lack of parental supervision.

The ability to parent children within these communities where gangs are already established is often very complicated. Reiboldt, (2001) outlines that families may know that their children are facing difficulties in the community, but feel the need to defend and collude with their children about their gang activity. The Centre for Social Justice (2009) further asserts that families living within communities where gangs are the dominating force are subsequently faced with the difficult calculation of whether their child joining or resisting gang membership is the safest option. It would be easy to provide what Nixon et al (2010:49) describes as a 'discourse of blame' against these parents. Currie (1985) argues that there is a fallacy of autonomy, whereby there is a false premise that parenting capacity is isolated from circumstances in which parenting is undertaken. For all areas of the system to contribute to change for children who are gang affected, communities, including parents, will need insight and access to the information relating to the crimes that directly affect their lives such as violence and drug-related offences (Lammy, 2017:61).
It is important to take into consideration that families have fundamentally evolved in the last 30 years; children now live in more diverse family arrangements. There is a need to carefully rethink assumptions about the notion of families and who is responsible for maintenance of these structures (McNeill, 2006). It is more difficult to measure the influence of family structures as some situations have become more normalised, such as increased divorce rate (Rivett & Street, 2009), the prevalence of single parent households (Perkins-Dock, 2001) and same sex parent families. Watts-Jones (1997) highlights the increased prevalence of functional kinship roles; which refers to biologically related family members who function in a different role to that of their biological status. This is demonstrated where grandparents become the primary carers for grandchildren. It is not only biological family members that need to be accounted for when reviewing families dynamics and this is illustrated when reviewing the impact of non-family members who play a major role within the child’s life (Mcgoldrick & Gerson, 1985:3).

The way in which parents or care-givers interact with each other directly impacts on the ways in which they parent their children. This is particularly pertinent when the parental relationship is fractious and therefore families should not be viewed as ‘a collection of individual ‘selves’ but as a Gestalt, whole (Rivett & Street, 2009:8). It has been found that children from families where there has been separation and divorce have higher levels of emotional and behavioural issues (Farrington, 1989; Wells & Rankin, 1991; Hawkins et al, 2002; Price & Kunz, 2003). It has been argued that with only one parent in the home, typically the mother, control over children, especially adolescent males may be more challenging (Reiboldt, 2001:239). This was deemed to be particularly pertinent where the mother was the subject of violent behaviour from teenage children, an issue that due to the intense stigma is often a hidden and unacknowledged source of conflict (Nixon et al, 2010; Hunter et al, 2010).

Ingram et al (2007) identified no significant effect of serious delinquency related to living in a single parent household compared to a two parent household. The issue of single parent households is notably affected by additional variables such as whether the child subsequently resides within a reconstituted family unit. There are significant increases in the level of
delinquency by children who live within a home where there is a stepfather present (Matlack et al, 1994; Perkin-Dock, 2001). It is also noted that children within lone parent households fair far better than those within step families (Bhabra et al, 2006). It has been found that having absent and abusive men within the family home is a risk factor for boys and increases their propensity for gang membership (Vigil, 2007). Also, individuals with criminal fathers were more likely to have committed violent acts than those with non-criminal fathers (Mednick et al, 1984; Farrington et al, 2016).

Experience of family breakdown and in particular fatherlessness or non-resident fathers have been indicated as a key variable, as gangs are commonly found in areas with a high proportion of lone parent households (Thornberry, 1993; Craig et al, 2002). The impact of fatherlessness was defined by Glynn (2013) as the 'father deficit' where alternate male role models are found within the gang. Where there is a lack of male role models within the family home, Kumpfer (1999) suggests that these children create a reliance on this form of relationship within their peer group. The Centre for Social Justice (2009) however found that 'Guesting fathers' - where the mother has a series of boyfriends who temporarily take on the father role was an increased risk factor for gang membership. Such research indirectly infers that mothers are primarily responsible for the subsequent behaviour of their children in a detrimental direction.

There has been much discussion regarding the lack of adult male role models within Black family units (Hamer, 1997; Caldwell & Reese, 2006) and the influence that this has on boys raised within these environments. It has been stated that fathers from an ethnic minority background were particularly ‘difficult to engage’ in interventions relating to their children. There is evidence that professionals make assumptions about ethnic minority parents on the basis of their background. An example of this is the suggestion that fathers from these communities do not engage due to cultural belief systems that stipulate that raising children is specifically the domain of mothers (Page et al, 2007). These conjectures articulate that it is the service user who is problematic rather than interventions which may be designed in an inaccessible format. However, inaccessible interventions further socially exclude individuals who are unable to participate in mainstream activities within the communities that they live
(Burchardt et al, 2002:30). More effort is required by services to engage with fathers. Scourfield (2006) argues that fathers are denied any meaningful involvement in major decisions especially when statutory services are involved with their children. Scourfield (2006) asserts that the discourse relating to men by key services is pejorative and men are referred to in terms as threats, irrelevant or absent and these labels do not account for the changing roles in society of men in relation to their children. This view is reinforced within gang research where fathers are predominately referenced in terms of the risks that they present to their children and their families.

It is too simplistic to assume that the risks are reduced solely if children are raised within a traditional biologically related two parent household. The more important factor is the environment within these homes. Raws, (2016) found that maltreatment in early years affects brain development, so that during adolescence there is a focus on survival at the expense of more advanced thinking. A critical impact on children is therefore the level of conflict that children experience within their family home. Domestic abuse has been highlighted as a key factor and it is estimated that about two thirds of assaults between parents was witnessed by children within the home (Trzesniewski et al, 2006; Moffitt & Caspi, 2006). It is reported that experiencing domestic abuse can lead to children having a distorted view of conflict and leads to them being desensitised to violence (Vetere & Cooper, 2001; Mrug & Windle, 2010; Mrug et al, 2016).

Services will provide comprehensive support to victims of domestic violence which is predominately women. This approach dramatically changes when mothers do not leave the partners who are perpetrating the abuse. At this point, they are perceived as parents who are failing to protect and safeguard their children (Humphreys, 1999; Kantor & Little, 2003; Alaggia et al, 2015). Damant et al (2010) found there was a deep desire by these mothers to be perceived as ‘good mothers’ and this was hindered by perpetrators who specifically targeted their partners ability to mother their children adequately. Professionals may inadvertently be reinforcing this perception when placing the responsibility for safeguarding their children
squarely with the victim of these crimes. This removes all responsibility from fathers who are perpetrating the abuse which directly negatively impacts their child.

Children with a history of maltreatment may also have learnt distorted views of relationships. Bernard & Bernard (1983) found that males and females with distorted views subsequently participated in abusive relationships. Even where individuals may have some awareness that a person is acting in an exploitative manner they may remain in these relationships as it may still provide an unfulfilled need for protection, love and a desire to have belief in others (Hanson & Holmes, 2014). It has been found that a history of abuse within the home subsequently leads to higher levels of violent crimes committed later in life (Thornberry et al, 1999, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2001). Family characteristic such as permissive and authoritarian parenting increased gang affiliation (Vigil, 2007; Vuk, 2017). Valdez et al (2013) found that gang affected children predominately came from mother only households, with the additional factor of parental substance misuse. Gang members reported frequent conflict and abuse amongst their parents, child abuse, family member alcoholism and drug addictions, and family members having previous contact with the police (Moore, 1991; Hill et al, 2001; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001; Raby & Jones, 2016). This supports the suggestion that gang affiliation is a symptom of a wider range of complex issues and is aligned to the ‘toxic trio’ (Palmer, 2015; Jones, 2016) which highlights the negative impact for those children that are affected by family violence, parental substance misuse and parental mental ill health. There is emerging evidence that this form of adolescent neglect and its long term impact on delinquency has been underplayed (Ryan et al, 2013; Rees et al, 2011; Palmer, 2015).

Societal norms stipulate that parents are the agents for ensuring that their children are positive members of society and if these children are offenders, gang affiliated or ‘feral children’ (Manchester Evening News, 2017; Bradford Telegraph, 2017), this is due to inept parenting. Parents are acutely aware that others seek to blame them for their child’s behaviour and therefore are not always ready to admit that their children are involved in gang activity (Aldridge, 2011). It is therefore probable that when children are identified by services as being ‘gang affiliated’, parents reject this label and the perceived blame attached to their child’s gang
involvement. There is a desire to locate responsibility for their child’s gang involvement in a wider social context (Shute, 2013; Aldridge, 2011). When parenting ability is placed into question and where children’s behaviours are negatively scrutinized, this is taken very personally, but it could be argued that it is a natural response for parents to defend their child. Parents under these circumstances have a predisposition to have selective attention to information that does not fit the dominate story whilst emphasising information that confirms their position.

The impact of Diversity

BME children have consistently been over-represented within in the YJS (Tonry, 1995; MOJ, 2016; YJB, 2016). The data within this area reflects a stark overrepresentation of BAME children across all areas of the criminal justice system. 24% of first time entrants to the criminal justice system were BAME children. The levels of reoffending of this group was also found to be higher at 42.2%. This is particularly evident within the custodial population where BAME children account for 45% despite only reflecting 18% of the general population (YJB, 2018). There has been significant evidence that there are higher levels of ethnic minorities in the composition of gang membership (Esbensen & Winfree, 1998; Densley, 2014). There are perennial fears that the adult world appears to have of the young (Tita et al, 2007; Shapcott, 2016). It cannot be ignored that this fear runs deeper when related to gangs and the often unspoken ethnic dimension that is also involved in this fear.

The ethnic makeup of gangs is largely determined by social predicament, rather than the ethnicity of any particular group or community (Pitts, 2003:10). Within areas that have a predominately white demographic, gang membership reflects this makeup as revealed in the Scottish study (Bannister, et al 2010). It is recognised that there are significant numbers, especially within inner cities with high social needs, where the composition of gangs is predominated by black young men. This is more reflective of black children being more likely to be concentrated within areas of economic deprivation (Centre for Social Justice, 2009). Reiboldt (2001) suggests that gang related divisions are created within communities where there are
high levels of diversity in ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Where these factors are combined with other elements such as poverty, it creates communities where gangs emerge as a means of consolidating their identity (Hill et al, 1999). Gangs generally reflect the ethnic composition of the broader neighbourhoods within which they operate (Sharp et al, 2006) and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by poverty within inner city areas (Perkin-Dock, 2001). Valdez et al (2013) suggests that there are acculturation stresses for immigrant parents as they attempt to balance the need to assimilate into their new community and also their strong desire to adhere to their traditional cultural practices at home.

There has long been the highly contentious debate about identifying the ethnic demographic of gangs and the over representation of Black males within this cohort. This has been identified within both UK and American studies. The discussion regarding ethnicity within the criminal justice sphere and gangs has always been difficult, as there is the ongoing debate on whether Black boys and young men commit more criminality or whether they are more targeted by enforcement services. This is still a sensitive and emotive debate which sits in parallel with the larger discussion on the disproportional representation of young black men within the YJS (Glynne, 2013).

There is a substantial body of evidence that Black children, especially black boys and young men do not receive a comparable response from the CJS to that of their white counterparts. Black children are more likely to enter the CJS at a younger age and have a higher reoffending rate at 51% (MOJ, 2017). Black people make up 3% of the UK population but the MOJ (2017) found that they account for 20% of the children in custody and they are more likely to receive custodial sentences for less serious crimes. These children are more likely to be remanded into custody than their white counterparts (MOJ, 2017) and there is evidence that any period in custody results in a high probability of negative outcomes for children (Factor et al, 2016). Black boys also have a higher level of re-offending within a year of being released from custody (MOJ, 2016:69). In terms of drug offences the odds of receiving a prison sentence were around 240% higher for Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) offenders compared to white offenders. This
percentage is particularly important for gang affected children as drug related offences are likely to be crimes that they enter the CJS for. There is a high level of mistrust from ethnic minority communities regarding the disparities in the CJS. This is further perpetrated through negative experiences with those deemed to be in authority. This is shown in perceptions of the police stop and search policies, where it has been shown that Black boys are more actively targeted (Bowling & Philips, 2007; Quinton, 2015). The lack of diversity among those who wield power (Chen, 2003), with only 7% of 3000 UK court judges being from BAME background (MOJ, 2017) does nothing to dissolve the mistrust for those who are over represented in the CJS.

It should be recognised that these children are not only perpetrators of gang related offences but are predominately the victims of these crimes (May et al, 2010). There is a higher percentage of Black boys and young men murdered each year in gang related incidents (Anderson, 2017). It is difficult to ascertain the exact figures, as the classification between purely knife-related murders and gang related murders are difficult to disaggregate. This assertion that ethnic minorities are disproportionately victims is supported by American studies where murders were reported as the leading cause of death of Black and Hispanic youth (Singh and Yu, 1996). There should however be a significant level of caution when generalising to the BME population and gang crime. The mechanism for recording the ethnicity even within statutory services such as YOTs has been found to be deficient (Lammy, 2017). Lloyd and Rafferty (2006:36) raised the important concept that ‘BME communities should not be viewed as a homogeneous whole. The diversity both with and between ethnic and cultural groups should not be overlooked’.

Adolescence and the impact of gang membership
There has been a concerted effort to focus interventions on children in gangs. Bullock and Tilley (2002,2012) however found that less than 10% of the total sample of gang members comprised of individuals under the age of 17 years old; core gang membership mainly ranged between 18-25 years old. Farrington (1998) found that the onset of offending occurred between the ages of 10-13 years old leading to desistance between 21-25 years. It was found
that gang membership usually occurred between the ages of 14-24 years (Huff, 1996; Winfree et al, 1994) with the initiations into gangs occurring between 12-15 years (Huff 1996, 1998; Van Winkle, 1996; Sharp, et al 2006) and the peak age for gang membership was 15 years old (Hill et al, 1999; Dong et al, 2015). This coincides with adolescent development as this is the time period when children also become more independent of their parent/carers and have more unsupervised time (Cairns and Cairns, 1991). Craig (2002) suggested that much of the research into gangs fails to address the developmental aspects that commence before adolescence but instead focuses on adolescence solely. Thornberry et al (2003) suggested that behaviour patterns are a consequence of earlier patterns of behaviour and that the antecedents of gang involvement come into play well before adolescence.

Adolescence is a major period of change which includes a combination of biological, psychological and social changes (Mulvey et al, 2004; Hanson & Holmes, 2014). This is identified as the fastest developmental period aside from infancy in humans (Coleman, 2007; Steinberg et al 2015). The basic cognitive processes related to brain development continue to develop well into late adolescence (Keating, 2004). It is during this period that adolescents are more likely to engage in risk taking behaviour, which can either contribute to healthy independent growth but also has the possibility of resulting in negative outcomes (Calkins, 2010). During this period there are higher incidences of missing episodes among children (Hanson & Homes, 2014). It is during these times of unsupervised socialisation that children are at risk from those that wish to exploit them or associate with others that are also presenting delinquent behaviour.

Adolescence has increasingly become a demonised period of time with negative attributes afforded to this group. Children whilst transitioning to adulthood are restricted by structural constraints that are enforced due to their legal status. It is during this developmental period of time, adolescent children experience discrimination, socially, legally and economically and this is as a direct consequence of their age (Barry, 2010). There has been a growing perception that children possess problematic behaviours which need to be removed restricted or averted. This has been facilitated through enforcement measures such as Dispersal Orders and Criminal Behaviour Orders (Anti-Social Behaviour Act, 2003, 2014) which prohibit individuals from
congregating in groups, and police stop and search, which in some instances have been targeted at children. This negative view of the young reflects little acceptance that ‘nearly all children engage in some amount of delinquent behaviour’ whilst they transition to adulthood (Hirschi, & Gottfredson, 1983). This behaviour can be viewed as part of the natural process of challenging boundaries and exploration. Children as part of their adolescence and growing independence place more weight in their peer groups and this results in them spending significantly more time with these peers as opposed to family members. This is a period of time when peers become very important to children as they solidify their identity and status. A direct consequence of this changing priority results in increased parent/child conflict and a decrease in cohesion and warmth (Collins & Laurrsen, 2004). It is important that there is clear demarcation regarding normal adolescent behaviour and serious delinquency, as there are far more youth groups than there are street gangs (Klein, 2005).

Adolescents are vulnerable to policies and assumptions that have been made about their capacity for resilience. Resilience is the process by which individuals avoid or overcome the negative effects of risky experience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Theron, 2016). Resilience is promoted by access to available assets in the child’s social system. Jobe & Gorin (2013) asserts that when service resources are strained, adolescents’ needs are frequently de-prioritised in favour of younger children. It has been suggested that agencies belief in adolescents’ capacity for resilience has resulted in an unrealistic level of responsibility being placed on adolescent children. These adolescents are expected to respond to the adversities in their own lives and make sense of their own transitions (Hanson & Holmes, 2014; Barry 2010). It is an impractical position to propose that children should negotiate and resolve issues in their lives which are bound by structural constrains. The reality is that without the assistance of adults, children are unable to change where they live or which educational establishments they attend, even if they have determined that this would improve their situation. Where children feel powerless to instigate change they must develop strategies to survive within these environments; these strategies may be neither positive nor productive.
This chapter has outlined the key theoretical issues in gang research. Initially outlining the terminological scope of the research particularly in relation to the difference between terms such as ‘children’ and ‘young people’ and the importance of this clarity due to the differences in legal and moral implication for these two groups. This has included the definition issues and the continued debate on whether there can ever be a universal definition that fully reflects all gangs, irrelevant of location and time. The dynamics of gangs was explored in relation to the structure and function of these groups. It further detailed the factors that have been found to influence the recruitment and sustained engagement of children within gang activity. The importance of individual factors such as age, family and diversity were also reviewed, while incorporating the impact of contextual factors and significance risks to children who are gang affected.
Chapter 2

Gang Interventions

This chapter explains the remit of YOTs as key interventionists for children who are classified as gang members. The theoretical basis that underpins the interventions in Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), with a particular focus on risk factors and desistance theories are discussed. The different interventions that are employed for children who are identified as gang members are reviewed and this includes both enforcement and supportive interventions. The foundations of family focused intervention are explored and the different formats of these interventions highlighted. This section is concluded with an outline of the differences and implications of delivering interventions within a statutory or voluntary format.

Gang Interventions - Youth Offending Teams As A Vehicle Of Intervention

There has been significant work undertaken to understand why children commence, sustain and desist from offending. There has been a particular focus on the interventions that reduce the level of offending in children. In the 1970’s there was the radical position of the ‘nothing works’ school of thought (Martinson, 1974; Brody, 1976) regarding offending interventions. It was proposed that the same outcomes would be achieved if no interventions were implemented with offenders. The creditability of this position was undermined by research that identified positive outcomes through the utilisation of social work models (Cullen, 2005). Many of the intervention components suggested for reducing the levels of offending are dually proposed for addressing gang affiliation. The intervention models that are offered for addressing gang membership usually fall into three groupings; that of support or enforcement measures and often a mixture of both. With the reduction in funding for both the public and voluntary sector, it has resulted in YOTs becoming key interventionists for children that offend in England and Wales. These interventions are required to cater for a wide spectrum of need, from preventative to acute input. Preventative interventions are for those children who would be described as ‘at risk’ and acute would include those children assessed as posing the most risk.
to the community and are managed under processes such as Multi-agency and Public Protection Arrangements (MOJ, 2012).

In 1997 the governmental paper ‘No more excuses: A new approach to tackling youth crime in England and Wales commenced a period of increased punitive and managerialism within the YJS. Youth Offending Teams were established under the Crime and Disorder Act (1998). This legislation stipulated that every area within England and Wales, should establish a multi-agency team which comprised of representatives from the police, probations service, social services and health. The main proposition for this conjoined multi-disciplinary YJS was that offending by children is linked to a range of issues, which historically were dealt with by separate agencies (Burnett & Appleton, 2004:34); but would now be addressed in a single service.

Due to YOTs comprising of a diverse range of professional disciplines, the term practitioner is often used and relates to workers who have attained specialist training which qualifies them to work with children and their families who are known to CJSs. This can include Youth Justice Officers, therapist, social workers, probation officers, psychologist etc. There may be a robust challenge from practitioners, not to be placed in a generic grouping, as they have committed significant time and effort in the study of a particular discipline which affords them the professional prestige. The grouping of these professionals into the term practitioner takes into consideration that YOTs encourages cross fertilizations of skills, learning and disciplines, whilst working with children. Youth Offending staff although they have different professional backgrounds often receive service wide training. This is conducted in order to achieve crime reduction which requires a need to work across organisational and professional boundaries (Glennie, 2007).

There has been the view that the Youth Justice processes have minimised social problems and reframed them as criminal issues which require punitive populist responses (Kemshall, 2007). There has been a clash of ideologies for frontline practitioners who focus on vulnerabilities and this has been reinforced by the findings that although YOTs are multi-agency services, the social work ethos predominated within these teams (Burdett & Appleton, 2004; Waters, 2007).
The key agencies continue to be represented within these YOTs; however these teams have been significantly transformed since their inception. This has occurred as different areas have developed their services in line with local needs and funding capabilities. This has resulted in the structure, composition and governance of YOTs varying considerably from one area to another. This has been evident in how they are named as some are still referred to as 'Teams' and others due to their size as 'Services'. For the purposes of this study the term Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) will be incorporated as this is still the terminology that is used by both the Youth Justice Board and within the legislation.

The YOT undertakes its statutory duty by planning and implementing interventions for children who are subject to both community and custodial disposals. The effectiveness of YOTs is measured against a set of performance indicators, formulated by the Youth Justice Board. The Youth Justice Board is a body which is appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice and monitors the work of YOTs. The performance indicators stipulated by this body include, measuring the rate of reoffending, First Time Entrance to the CJS, and levels of custodial placements.

There have been significant changes in the profile and composition of the children who had contact with YOTs over the last 10 years. The current context has revealed a dramatic reduction to both the custodial population (-64 %) and the number of First Time Entrants to the YJS (-81%) (Youth Justice Board, 2017). The implementation of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012) has directly contributed to this striking reduction in the youth custodial population. The legislation devolved the cost of remands to local areas; therefore requiring areas to formulate strategies to reduce these remand costs. The YOT cohort now comprised of more children with complex and multiple needs (HMIP, 2017) and YOTs managing higher risks within the community.

The Labour government administration of 2008 released an action plan which addressed tackling violent crime. In the ‘Saving lives, reducing harm and protection’ document (HM Government, 2008) gangs were explicitly linked to urban violence and the increased use of
It is acknowledged that gang membership entails specific factors that influence the recruitment and sustained membership of gang members. Justifiably there has been further exploration of the interventions that effectively address and combat the issues that gang affiliation generate. This includes interventions which address social economic factors (Pitts, 2007; Stone, 1999), educational attainment and family issues (Hill et al, 1999).

**Risk factors paradigm**

The YJS has been dominated by the risk factor paradigm (Farrington et al, 1993, 1995, 2000, 2002; Graham & Utting, 1996; Loeber & Stouthammer, 1996). There are a variety of risk factors identified relating to those involved in gang activity including previous antisocial behaviour, substance misuse, mental health, family breakup, and low school engagement issues (Howell, 2010; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Thornberry & Krohn et al, 2006). It has been found that the greater the number of risk factors experienced by children the greater likelihood of gang involvement (Howell et al, 2005).

The risk factors agenda has supported the increasing focus on risk management and public protection strategies (Robinson & McNeill, 2004). This has led to the ‘objectifications of offenders’ where the role of agencies is to intervene, remedy or manage the risk that these individuals pose. This constructs a system which is primary centered on the actions of the professional (Bottoms & McWilliams, 1979:173). Working within such a framework creates a challenge for practitioners in which they are required to find opportunities to meet children who offend behind the negative cycle of descriptions (Wilson, 2000). Much of the work within the YJS is delivered within this framework of paternalism whereby professional opinions retain the most value. Recipients of the interventions become secondary to the professionals who lead the process through their assessment into the nature of the risk and harm. These practitioners subsequently formulate and lead the solutions (Turnell, 1998). A limitation of the risk factors model is that there is a particular focus on individual factors (France & Homel, 2006, 2010). Very small differences in risk markers can result in widely different criminal pathways as some children are found to be remarkably resilient and others not (Kemshall, 2007).
(2004) argues that social scientists appear to have established far more information on the factors that lead to children engaging in antisocial behaviour than what factors lead them to desist.

The risk factor paradigm asserts that identified risk and protective factors can be used to inform needs-led individualised interventions. These proposed interventions reduce risks and subsequent offending and reoffending. Case (2007) questioned the assertion that this format can effectively inform all youth justice interventions for all children and that this fails to understand the diversity of needs. This view has been linked to the demise of welfare oriented interventions (Kemshall, 2003). The process of assessing children and making professional judgments based on risk factors by default may become a self-fulfilling exercise. These assessments follow children through the YJS and are shared with other services, meaning that professionals interact with the child based on previous assessments. Risk factors assessments are purported to be an objective measure of risk. The alternate view is that within risk factor assessments there is no objective truth about families, but rather that the risk factors presented are the practitioner’s subjective observations of the family.

YOTs attempt to work within a framework which standardises processes and interventions. This has been based on the ‘What works’ (McGuire, 2003) agenda although these theories have been challenged, as much of the findings from the meta-analysis were based on adult cohorts, varied interventions and the North American experience (NOMS, 2005). This makes it more problematic to transfer these findings to a child centered, UK context. The assessment tool used by YOTs is ASSETplus (previously ASSET) which is grounded in the risk and protective factors research (Farrington, 1998) and have been found to attain high levels of reliability and validity. However, there have been concerns about the standardisation and consistency of the use of this tool by youth justice practitioners (Baker et al, 2005; Webster et al, 2006).

YOTs have the responsibility to provide statutory interventions for young people subject to statutory court orders. There has been some ambiguity regarding the quality of interventions provided and the subsequent outcomes that are achieved. This ambiguity has been created
due to the discrepancy between the work conducted with children and the measures that are collated by the MOJ. As there has not been an alignment in the measures, it has made assessing the performance and impact of YOTs’ interventions hard to gauge (Deloitte, 2015).

The Youth Justice Board has encouraged particular models and this has involved service wide training. The aspiration to have standardised processes has led to a youth justice discourse which is dominated by a preoccupation with evidence based interventions. Those that provide these evidenced based programmes primary focus has been on retaining programme integrity (McAra & McVie, 2007). The standardisation of processes may simplify service designs but creates limitations for those individuals that cannot be clearly distinguished, as either offenders or victims. This is evident for many children who are known to YOTs due to their complex life experiences. This form of single classification artificially focuses in on one view and silences another (Bowker & Star, 2000). The standardised response to the needs of children within the CJS satisfies the managerial requirements of the system, but reduces the ideals of justice and welfare for young offenders (Eadie & Canton, 2002).

Intervention methods fluctuate within YOTs in response to the current popularity of particular ‘good practices’. Under this constantly moving position, practitioners have tended to choose approaches they prefer and ignore others (Baker, 2004, 2007). In direct opposition to the standardisation objective within these services, it is reported that ‘best practice’ requires both high accountability and wide discretions (Eadie & Cantor, 2002). A criticism of YOTs has been their susceptibility to be influenced by the political climate. It is suggested that this has been grounded in a tick box culture that favours targets which directly interferes with the flexible approach necessary to reach and engage with children with complex needs (Smith, 2013). An additional criticism of YOS interventions is the focus on children who have already come to the attention or already entered the criminal justice system. This veers towards the proposition that there had already been missed opportunities to provide appropriate intervention at the earliest point to prevent children entering the criminal justice system. Case and Haines (2014) emphasised the importance of reframing the prevention and early intervention narrative and the importance of viewing children who have contact with the criminal justice system as
‘Children first, offenders second’. Case and Haines further assert that professionals should resist from ‘responsibilise children and utilising a deficit risk model’ but rather that the focus should be on the promotion of positive behaviours (2014:1).

**Desistance**

The Youth Justice professes that the current cornerstone of practice is based on desistance theories; however HMIP (2016) found that many practitioners possessed a limited knowledge of the underpinning theories and its application to practice. It has been suggested that desistance theories have lacked a practice framework (Weaver & McNeill, 2010). There is no unified definition or understanding of desistance in terms of how these theories relate to children (Mulvey, 2004; Loeber et al, 2016). This has been made more perplexing as much of the research has been based on adult research and it is unwise to assume that adult research findings will be relevant to children as it does not take into consideration adolescent development. The research in relation to desistance and gangs is somewhat blurred by the lack of clarity on age, specifically in relation to those that are legally defined as children and adult offenders. Studies highlight that adolescent development progresses into the late 20’s and there has been a tendency for describing all these individuals as young people. Although the rationale is acknowledged, there are clear differences in the legal and moral responses for these two distinct groups, however much of the research has merged the findings for these two groups. This research specifically focuses on children.

YOTs have been directed towards specific areas of desistance research. HMIP (2016) guidance refers practitioners to maturation (Rutherford, 1986), rational choice and violation (Cornish & Clarke, 2014; Paternoster, 2015), social bonds (Sampson & Laub, 1993, 2001), self-Identity (Maruna, 2004) and Cognitive Transformation (Giordano et al, 2002) theories.

Desistance is a journey in which offenders embark. Desistance can be seen as either the end state or alternatively as a process that individuals take. It would be unrealistic to expect gang affected children to abruptly cease gang activity; it would be more advisable to assess desistance as a gradual process (Burnett, 2004). Whilst individuals are on a trajectory of
desistance, there is likely to be periods where there are temporary increases in offending whilst having an overall decline in offences (Matza, 1964; Mulvey, 2004). McNeill (2006) describes two forms of desistance; primary desistance which relates to offence free periods, and secondary desistance which is a more stable position which is based on an underlying change in the self-identity of the individual which sustains the desistance. Desistance should not be thought of as just the cessation of the offending but rather the decrease in the offending behaviour over a period of time (Maruna, 2001, 2004). Desistance should not be merely viewed as the reduction in offending behaviour as the process is multifaceted and should take into account the relevance of the other behaviours that are replacing the offending behaviours.

The length of time individuals desist needs to carefully factor in circumstances that produce a reduction but is not directly correlated to the active desistance by that individual. Desistance requires the behaviour of the individuals to have changed, rather than merely the circumstances creating the reduction. This is most clearly exemplified when individuals are subject to electronic monitoring (tags) or custodial sentences which directly affect their ability to commit offences. Desistance should not be dictated by environmental or prohibiting circumstances but be determined by an individual’s choice.

Significant events that occur within individuals’ lives can be a trigger for maintaining new behaviours (Fagan, 1989; Maruna, 2001; Doherty, 2016). These can be events that can be perceived as either positive or negative. Traumatic experiences can be the turning point for offenders and instigate the process of desistance (Seaman & Lynch, 2016; Wilkinson, 2009). This can include being a victim or witnessing gang violence. Conversely, becoming a father has been found to be a motivating factor in increasing gang members’ desistance from offending (Moloney et al, 2009; Barry, 2010; Landers et al, 2015). Hence, transition to family life (Cernkovich & Giordano, 2001) is viewed as a significant factor. Similarly, for factors to induce a change in behavior in an individual, these factors must hold a genuine value for them. HMIP (2016) found that children identified that developing meaningful personal relationships and a sense of belonging to a family were the most important factors in moving forward with their
lives. Irrelevant of experience or background, children were found to have conventional aspirations, and desired to attain a job, home and family (Barry, 2010).

This reinforces the view that offenders need opportunities within their social settings to lead more conformist lifestyles (Maruna, 2001; Bottoms, 2006). These interactions need to create greater social inclusion within mainstream society (Bottoms & Shaplan, 2010) and this emphasises the importance of pro-social sources which comprise of informal social control (Sampson & Laud, 1993, Farrall et al, 2010). Children from backgrounds with a history of family breakdown and abuse have a higher propensity to seek their social capital from peers rather than from their family (Barry, 2010). In order for children to reject and realign with their own families, the family structure needs to be supportive and resilient to enable this reunification. It is an improbable venture to expect children to reject gang membership in preference for the dysfunctional family system which they are attempting to avoid.

Maturation theories have established relationships between age and criminal behaviour. Maturation theories have been cited as having a significant impact on desistance as children reduce their offending as they mature into adulthood (Moffitt, 1993; Rocque, 2015). This is affected by developmental changes which make criminal behaviour less attractive or unacceptable. Through psychosocial maturations, individuals enter into legitimate and socially sanctioned roles and this is part of the journey of increasing the development and attachment to conventional institutions and values (Mulvey, 2004). Viewing the consequences of punitive sanctions during this period of maturation can make offending less attractive, and the consequences of criminal sanctions become more pronounced as children move closer to the adult CJS.

Individuals must possess a sense of personal agency (Mulvey, 2004; Vaughan, 2006). Children must have a belief that they have some semblance of control over the activities and actions in which they engage, in order to resist and overcome criminogenic structural pressures. Part of this progression is children believing that they have control over the people that they choose to associate with, which has particular prominence for gang affected children. Once children are
affected by gangs, the operating model of gangs includes exerting retribution on those individuals who attempt to distance themselves. Farrall & Bowling (1999:61) and Farrall & Maruna (2004) argue that desistance is an interplay between individual’s choices and a range of wider social forces which are actually beyond the control of the individual.

There is a duality between individual’s personal agency and structures and these should not be viewed as independent phenomena (Giddens, 1984:25). Encouragingly Giddens (1984) asserts that individuals have illustrated that they have choices even in circumstances that appear very limited. Social bonds theories explain that education, families and employment can influence changes in the level of criminal behavior (Sampson & Laud, 1990). Barry (2009, 2010) asserts that children are not in a position to be able to overcome structural issues which impinge on their ability to desist from criminal activity such as poverty. Barry (2009), further suggests that that a key maintaining factor for an offending lifestyle is the need for access to finance and drugs. These structural issues directly impede on children’s level of desistance.

There have been dramatic changes in the availability of employment, as there is now an emphasis on jobs requiring formalised qualifications. The implementation of ‘league tables’ appears to have encouraged the practice of schools exclusions for those identified as less successful pupils. This includes children, who are deemed problematic and disruptive (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Tomlinson, 2016). Many children who have been excluded from mainstream educational establishments will be acutely aware that they are on a trajectory which projects that they will be unable to obtain employment which provides sufficient financial benefits, to fulfill their aspirations or rival their criminal income.

Young black men who disproportionately feature in crime and gang statistics are additionally disproportionally reflected in unemployment data (National Office for Statistics, 2017). It is suggested that barriers to life chances affect black boys early on in their lives. Black boys are excluded from school at a higher rate than other children (Blair, 2001; Parson, 2009). It is suggested that schools are failing to adequately assess additional needs which results in a lack of appropriate services for black boys with mental health and learning difficulties (Lammy,
2017). If preventative services were implemented this could sustain these children in mainstream educational establishments which would positively affect educational outcomes and subsequent access to employment.

Twenty two thousand Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) children had their names added to the PNC in the last year. As a consequence these children will be escalated through the CJS and this will negatively influence their long term life chances. Contact with the CJS directly affects their opportunities. There is a need to ensure that the criminal records system is not a process that further hinders children’s ability to fully engage within society in a positive manner. There are few benefits in continuing to penalise children who have been in previous contact with the CJS through their criminal records. It has been proposed that the disclosure period should be far shorter when it pertains to childhood offending (Taylor, 2016). Maruna (2001) highlights that for offenders to move forward with change, they have to ‘develop a coherent, pro-social identity’ and this is not possible when they are consistently viewed as offenders.

For individuals to initiate the journey of desistance there needs to be a viable dimension of social investment available (Laud et al, 1998, 2003). Integration with family and moving towards stable intimate relationships within positive communities are reported to be highly desirable objectives as this replaces association with criminal peers (Farrall et al, 2010). Interventions need to pay more attention to the social and personal context of desistance. Structural issues affect individual’s behaviour in any given situation and are influenced by the individual’s previous experience of certain situations. Mulvey (2004) suggests that there is not one single element, but rather multiple factors at play in increasing desistance including the interaction of dynamic changes in offending, psychological state, developmental capacity and social interactions. Vigil, (2007) stresses the importance of developing constructive alternatives which consequently result in gang activity becoming progressively less attractive.

When interventions are presented in a format that takes into account the wider contexts, this allows the interventions to take place in an environment that does not provide further
examples of perceived failings. Alexander et al (2013) refers to the importance of providing parents with respect and the necessity for practitioners and services to steer away from disrespect and blaming. Blame should not only be removed from parents but equally with those that are attempting to desist from offending, so that they are allowed to integrate within their communities without shame (Sen, 2009).

**Enforcement Interventions – Addressing the crimes of gang affected children**

It is important to review interventions in relation to the development context of children. Adolescence (which is the development stage at which most children who are affected by gangs accommodate) is when these children have limited ability to employ delayed gratification over an immediate need for easily identifiable gains. This should be accounted for in service design in order to motivate children to engage in the processes (Hanson & Holmes, 2014). Howell (2010) stated that agency response needs to take into account the age of the individuals. It was found that at age 15 years, support interventions can be implemented, however by 18 years old, enforcement suppression methods needs to be incorporated.

The enforcement of gang activity predominately surrounds the criminal sanctions that are taken against these children. There isn’t however a specific gang offence but the offences relate to antisocial, violent and drug related crimes that these groups are known to partake in. The Sentencing Council Guidelines (2017) takes into consideration as a mitigating factor, the age and or lack of maturity where it affects the responsibility of the offender and their involvement in crime due to pressure, initiation or coercion. This appears to have been taken into consideration regarding girls’ involvement with gang criminality, but as outlined earlier this has been less replicated for boys. There have been developments in utilising the Modern Slavery Act (2015) to address the trafficking of children who have been coerced into conducting criminal acts by gangs. When this thinking is fully implemented it will have a considerable effect on the number of children who will be charged with Possession with Intent to Supply offences (Misuse of Drugs Act, 1971). If these children are in the future connected to gang related drug offences they will be primarily assessed as victims of exploitation, as opposed to offenders.
A specific tool to address gangs is the Gang Injunctions (Serious Crime Act, 2015). The Gang Injunction provides the police and local authorities with the legislative power to take pre-emptive action against perceived gang violence and drug dealing. It could however be argued that this is a further example of children who have been identified by police intelligence methods receiving more punitive and restrictive sanctions. Zatz (1987) found that those that are identified as gang members were more likely to receive more serious sanctions. Parents are often critical of police intelligence methods which ascribe gang members in the majority of instances by associations via proximity, friendships and family ties (Aldridge et al, 2011). Gang injunctions as a civil action, require a lower level of proof than criminal matters; however the consequences of non-compliance with gang injunctions can subsequently result in a criminal outcome. This potentially has the risk of escalating of children through the YJS for offences which were initially based on less evidence than would be required for other offences.

**Support Interventions**

There are a variety of different formats that have been proposed for supporting gang affected children which include group-work, individualised interventions and parenting support. These interventions have had a range of documented success with addressing the needs of these children.

There are group work programmes which have shown some encouraging findings such as the Aggression Replacement Training (ART) for gang affected children (Glick & Goldstein, 1987, 1994). This is a ten week group-work programme which requires a high level of motivation by participants to complete the programme and is often facilitated when the participants are mandated to participate, i.e. within custodial establishments. Providing the programme in custodial establishments significantly increases the level of participation. There has been less evidence regarding the sustained effect that programmes like these have after children are back within their communities. A limitation of using such programmes which are conducted within a mandatory youth justice setting is likely to mean that the child is already entrenched
within gangs and has already entered the CJS. This is a reactive method rather than a preventative method.

**School Interventions**

There are schools programmes which increase the awareness of the negative impact of gang membership. School programmes provide the opportunity to present preventative interventions to vast audiences. Valdez et al (2013) highlights that school is a fundamental locus of intervention as schools are the main institution outside of the family. Schools have the opportunity to exert considerable control over children as school engagement is a robust predictor of gang involvement (Sprott et al, 2005). The limitations of these programmes are that many of the children who would be best placed to receive these programmes have very low attachment to school and often are excluded from mainstream school provisions. Therefore, these children will not receive the positive impact of such programmes. This suggests that these programmes should be offered to younger children so that those children who are showing early signs of behavioural issues receive appropriate preventative support at the earliest opportunity.

**Constructive Activities Interventions**

There has been large support for interventions that increase the level of constructive activities that children participate in. Gang affected children were found to be less likely to participate in recreational activities inside or outside of school (Goffredson, 2001). These activities allow children to engage in pro-social activities with other children who are not offenders or gang members. It is suggested that constructive activities like football programmes can have a positive impact (McMahon & Belur, 2013; Nichols, 2010). Despite the popularity of these recreational activities, these programmes have lacked the theoretical and empirical rationale as they have not been found to be a predictor of gang membership (Valdez et al, 2013). It is recognised that those children that have access to extra-curricular activities benefit from this engagement (Brooks, 2006; Eccles et al, 2003). Many of these activities have considerable costs (dance, sports, music, activities) for either the sessions or equipment. These financial costs may
discourage those who may most benefit from signing up to these activities. Many mainstream schools now provide free extra-curriculum activities before and after school, but this again precludes those children that have been excluded from mainstream schools.

**Individualised Intervention**

Individualised interventions have shown positive outcomes (Lipsey et al, 2000, 2006). These interventions are generally based on the identified assessments of needs and interventions are tailored to these needs. This is the framework in which YOT’s work; providing individualized interventions which utilise the risk factors paradigm and includes the level of contact known as the 'scaled approach' (YJB, 2009). The programmes utilized are grounded in a variety of theories and are not from one school of thought such as trauma – informed (Greenwald, 2000; Liddle et al, 2016) cognitive behavioural (Townsend, 2007; Hofmann, 2012; Burke & Loeber, 2016), and restorative justice (Crawford & Newburn, 2013; Bouffard et al, 2017) programmes. These individualised interventions focus on the criminogenic factors that have been identified using the risk factor paradigm. Kemshall (2007) argues that generic programmes are not as effective as individualised approaches. This is evident when accounting for the differing gender needs. Staines (2015) highlighted that processes within the YJS fail to distinguish between the genders. Staines (2015) argues that this is due to the formulaic assessment framework and results in girls being drawn into the YJS for welfare rather than offending reasons. Brandon (2010) found that where girls had contact with the YJS there was a tendency for interventions to be provided within environments that were dominated by boys. Due to the documented role that girls are inclined to hold within gangs, whereby they are at risk of exploitation (Firmin, 2010) subjecting girls to intervention in this format appears to be a dubious practice.

It is difficult to fully measure the effectiveness of any one particular YOT interventions as children through their assessment may receive a variety of interventions which are based in very different theoretical practices. Dembo et al (1998) highlights that outcomes of individualised intervention can have short-term effects, as the learning has the potential to be sabotaged by significant individuals in the child’s lives. It may be assessed by professionals that
family relationships are unproductive or negative, but Wilson (2000) stresses the importance of ensuring that practice is not divorced from the significant relationships in which a child lives. There are limitations in programmes that are delivered outside of the home and then returning the child to the original environment where no change has taken place (Alexander, 2006). McAra & McVie, (2007) state that policy makers rely on the premise that standardised programmes that work within one jurisdiction can be utilised within another area. This further presupposes that the same outcomes can be achieved, without taking into consideration the particular needs of the locality and its social context. Caution is advised against overemphasizing individualisation over social and structural issues as this would be ‘epistemological fallacy’ (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006:5). Balance is required to enable services that implement standardised processes not to restrict creativity within the individualised interventions (Baker, 2005).

**Family intervention**

Howell, (2010) argues that communities must employ multiple strategies, including reducing risk factors and strengthening family units. Family interventions have remained peripheral or absent to the official discourse on gangs and gang related offending (Shute, 2008; Aldridge, 2011). This is a confusing position as it is acknowledged that whole communities are detrimentally affected by gang activity. This includes families who are specifically negatively impacted by gang activity that their children engage in (Pitts, 2007). The Centre for Social Justice (2009) suggest that intensive intervention is required to address the multiple needs of children, which have resulted in both their entrance and their sustained commitment to these gangs. This can be facilitated through intensive family support to enable the dismantlement of gang structures and reduce the formation of the 'alternative family' relationships. It is argued that gang affiliation is created as an alternative family unit and that boys within these gangs gain some of their identity through this affiliation. Lack of parental support or control by parents is commonly found among parents of gang affected children (Farrington, 1999; Craig et al, 2002; Dijken et al, 2017). Phillips (1999) suggests that when families do not fulfil their parental role that the 'gang family' takes over as an alternative support mechanism.
Family intervention/support services are deemed to be preventative activities which support the promotion of parental competencies (Davis & Spur, 1998; Chaffin Bonne & Hill, 2001). The recidivism rate for children who offend was affected by the level of local resources and the presence of family focused interventions (Cottle et al, 2002). Vostanis & Anderson (2006), in their evaluation of family support services found that there were higher short term outcomes than those present in individualised support to children with behavioural issues. Specifically Curtis et al. (2004) found that those that received a family intervention fared 72% better than those that received standard individual services. This is also supported by the Ryon et al (2017) who found an 11% increased reduction for those who underwent family intervention in comparison to a control group.

Parenting programmes have been used with children that have exhibited delinquent behaviour, including gang activity. There have been indications of positive outcomes from programmes such as Triple P (Sanders, 1999, 2008) and Strengthening families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC) (Wilding, & Barton, 2009). SFSC was adapted from a US parenting programme, which was a violence prevention programme specially aimed at BAME communities. Taking into account that there is a disproportionate number of BAME children identified as gang affected such parenting groups have been specifically designed to increase the engagement of ethnic minority parents. The central focus is on cultural identity of these parents and how this impacts on their parenting practices and expectations within a UK context.

There have been varied results relating to outcomes of parenting programmes (Dretzke et al 2009). It was found that there was a high level of behaviour relapse (Jacobson, et al 1998; Lindsay & Totsika, 2017). This does not conclude that these programmes have little impact, but highlights the need for follow-up contact with professionals to augment the learning that took place during these sessions (Anderson et al, 2005). There are also financial challenges for organisations in providing services which families can continue to access. It could be suggested that with some families, continued contact would facilitate increased dependency on services.
Some parenting programmes have been implemented through a statutory framework like Parenting Orders (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998). Parents can be made subject to a Parenting Order when a court has assessed that due to the behaviour of their child they should be legally mandated to complete parenting interventions. The outcomes of Parenting Orders have been unclear as some parents feel that they are being punished for the behaviour of their children (Walters, 2007; Holt, 2008). Parenting Orders need to be proposed by YOTs in the Pre-sentencing report presented to the court. In 2016, 55000 children were found guilty of a crime but only 189 Parenting Orders were issued (MOJ, 2016). This suggests that YOT practitioners are not confident to propose this option to the courts. Practitioners are sensitive to the consequences of proposing a Parenting Order as they will be responsible for implementing both the child’s and parent interventions. This could lead to not only the child being resistant to the court ordered intervention which they are subject to, but the parent may also be resistant. This creates a barrier for the practitioners who are endeavouring to develop constructive relationships with parents to assist in increasing compliance by their child.

The term parenting training/programmes implies that those who need to undergo these sessions are deficient in their parenting abilities. This feeds into the blame culture that is projected on parents of children who are involved with gangs. Interventions which specifically focus on all the problems within the family results in a problem- saturated story (Morgan, 2000). This reduces the possibilities to highlight potential changes and positive elements within these family units. There is a blame culture within agencies that work with families where a problematic behaviour has been identified with their children (Rivett and Street, 2009). There is a propensity to ‘blame’ one family member and subsequent plans are implemented to change or ameliorate that individual’s behaviour. White (2006) suggested that problems should be externalised, therefore not objectifying the individual, but the problem. Increasing the families’ knowledge around the circularity of behaviours within a system also increases the family’s need to take responsibility for the intervention. It is beneficial to ‘eliminate unnecessary and inappropriate shame and guilt’ (Davis et al, 2002:39). This ethos facilitates the engagement of non-resident parents predominately who are fathers. Scourfield (2006) suggests that fathers
should be integral to the interventions that are provided to their children, irrelevant of whether they have parental responsibility.

The risk factor work in YOTs has created assessments and interventions that are based on a deficit model, as the risk of offending dominates the processes. There has been a trend towards supporting the development of strength based work (Turnell, 1998; Maruna & Lebel 2003). YOTs are increasingly moving towards implementing strength based models (Byrne & Brooks, 2014). Due to the perceived blame that is attributed to families that have children who are identified as gang members, Shute (2013) emphasises that family focused programmes should focus on the families’ strengths, as opposed to implementing a deficient model.

Much research has stressed the importance of the wider context that influences the formation and preservation of gangs. Gangs can be best understood through a systemic lens (Ruble & Turner, 2000). Ruble and Turner further state that the systems in which gangs operate are comparative to family systems. Working systemically with children and their families’ takes into account that as families move through different phases of their lives, multiple stories are created which include both direct family members and the context they live in. James & Cushway et al (2006), state that practitioners must have an understanding of the families’ position in society and the problems that they face. Practitioners need to address the structural issues within the lives of these children, in order to make sustainable impact (HMIP, 2016).

There have been particular systemic models which have been based on work specifically with ethnic minority families such as structural family therapy. This theory was established on the work of Salvador Minuchin in 1967 whose study focused on parental authority. Minuchin studied Black American women in lone parent households where their children were in contact with the CJS. This model stressed the importance of strength based work, and the family’s ability to mobilise alternative patterns, when internal or external conditions required the family to restructure.
The systemic model as described by Minuchin (1974) consists of Hierarchies, Subsystems and Suprasystems. Vigil (1988) explains that two of these concepts can be translated to gangs in the following ways:

- **Hierarchies** are executive roles within the family unit. The executive roles are normally undertaken by parents for the purpose of providing safety and security. Within gangs this role is undertaken by the leaders or ‘elders’, who likewise provide safety from rival gangs and enforcement agencies.

- **Subsystems** relate to the couples and siblings systems within families. Within gangs this is translated into the female ‘axillaries’ roles that support male gang members. The siblings’ role translates into the relationships which occur between younger gang members who socialise together and familiarise each other with the customs and rituals of the gang.

Nichols & Everett (1986) also identifies that the larger system ‘suprasystem’ within which families operate such as the wider community and schools are also present within gangs systems. Gangs create suitable methods of operating within their wider communities in order to ensure that the gang can effectively operate and be maintained. Where the system is entropy (Becvar & Becvar, 1982) and as such is either too open or closed, it will subsequently be unable to sustain itself. Under these circumstances the gang will quickly disintegrate. Klein (2004:59) states that street gangs can have transient leadership, membership and loose structures, when gangs are in an entropy state, the gang functions in a chaotic manner. This occurs in circumstances when there has been a period of increased police enforcement or where key gang members are in custody and this creates unmanaged voids within the gang system. Effective gangs are said to be in morphogenesis as they have the ability and mechanisms to appropriately adapt in response to outside stimuli (Vigil, 1988; Ruble & Turner, 2000).

Boundaries are just as an important element of the family system as they are in gangs. Boundaries provide clear demarcation of both emotional and physical barriers; they distinguish one system from another system (Nichols & Everette, 1986; Ruble & Turner, 2000). Gangs
rigorously reinforce these boundaries and disincentives relationships outside of their own system and implement severe deterrents to reduce bonds with other peers or family members (Winfree et al, 1994). Jansyn (1966) asserts that maintaining gang cohesion is critical to the gang existence.

Ruble & Turner (2000) argue that systemic family work should be the main focus of intervention for children affected by gangs. Through this method it can actively reduce one system’s effectiveness (the gang) by conversely strengthening another system (the family). It is asserted that systems theory can be applied to any structure of the family, be that direct or extended family (Walrond-Skinner, 1976; Nock, 2000; McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008). Systems theories underpin much of the family intervention work (Bateson, 1972, 1979; Becvar & Becvar, 2017; Glick et al, 2003; Dallos & Draper, 2005, 2010). This has been described as the treatment of natural systems (Walrond-Skinner, 1979, 2014).

Family units are not static structures and they may transition from instability to another relatively stable pattern (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988, 2013). This is particularly prevalent as families work through these patterns as children become adolescents. The systems within the family are interdependent and influence the behaviours that are exhibited within that structure. Behaviours in a family structure should not be explained in isolation of the systems within which they operate. Families are defined by outside influences such as religion, politics and local police law enforcement (such as social housing policies) that directly impact on their lives.

In the UK few systemic practitioners adhere rigidly to one school of thought (Vetere, 2001), but are pragmatic in their approach and utilise a variety of methods to fit the families’ style and preference. Vigil (1988) asserts that system thinking enables the whole system to be taken into consideration, which reduces the blame culture that runs parallel to many gang interventions. This allows all factors implicated in gang formation to be addressed throughout the intervention, including the individual, family and wider community factors. Interventions need
to address all the variables which have led children to search for an alternative family unit via gang membership.

There are well documented systemic based family intervention models such as Functional Family Therapy (Barton et al, 1985; Alexander, Pugh & Parson, 1998) and Multi-Systemic Therapy (Henggeler et al, 1992; Henggeler, & Schaeffer, 2016). These interventions are family focused and implement problem solving, strength based strategies. These models take into account the wider context in which the family lives such as peers, school and family resources and view the caregivers as the key to long-term positive outcomes for the child (Kazdin & Weisz, 2003). Henggeler (2009) states that this treatment theory is based in socio-ecological and family systems theories of behaviour.

Such intensive interventions are expensive to deliver due to the requirement of practitioners having low caseloads and the availability of practitioners support during out of office hours. Both Multi-Systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy programmes have purported to be cost effective in the long term (Leschied & Cunningham, 1999, 2001; Bowyer & Wilkinson, 2013). Multi-Systemic Therapy has illustrated positive outcomes with post-treatment reduction of 43% in criminal offending (Borduin et al, 1995; Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005). These programmes make much posturing about the essential requirements of ensuring treatment fidelity (Henggeler et al, 1997) and this supports their positions as evidence based programmes. Littell (2006) highlighted that much of the evaluation of the interventions has been conducted by the developers of these programmes and there is a need for more robust external scrutiny.

McAra & McVie (2007) propose that there are several groups who have an invested interest in maintaining evidence based approaches, such as academics and those operating these expensive evidence based models. It cannot be ignored that providing interventions that state they reduce offending behaviour has become a lucrative industry which has been elevated with the increase in the privatisation of services. Evidence based programmes should not be viewed as the ‘magic bullet’ but rather as a tool to increase good outcomes by using good research evidence (ESRC, 2003:208).
**Voluntary vs mandatory intervention**

The efficacy of family focused interventions is well established (Richardson & Joughin, 2002; Tully, & Hunt, 2016). There is a need to consider the evaluation of these interventions within the context of the services that they are being delivered, as this can impact on outcomes (Axford et al, 2017; Vostanis & Anderson, 2006). This is especially relevant if the interventions are provided within a statutory framework such as YOTs.

Some programmes state that all key family members must voluntarily agree and actively participate in the treatment (Cunningham & Henggeler, 1999; Gebora, 2017). This would firstly require that there is some acknowledgment by families that change would be beneficial and this is not always the position. When initial participation has been agreed, the practitioners need to measure the level of involvement. Change is a delicate process as too little assistance can sustain negative behaviours and too much involvement can be too challenging and cause the family to disengage from the intervention (Vetere, 2001). Cecchin (1993) suggested that practitioners should continue to be offered appointments with families until they decide that they no longer require support. This is a rather idealistic view of service delivery as the funding of services is consistently present within organisations. When reviewing the design of interventions, funding constraints need to be considered, as short-termed interventions are often the preferred option because they are deemed more cost effective. This form of cost effectiveness often does not calculate the cost of the revolving door syndrome (Martin et al, 2012) when service users are continuously re-referred to services. Accordingly, there is the need for interventions to be time limited as families require the space to settle into their emerging integrations independently (Hoffman, 1981,1993).

With the risks that gang affected children present to themselves and others, it is not always a valid position to offer interventions that fully require voluntary participation. It is unsurprising that interventions where families and children voluntarily agree to engage have higher retention and better outcomes, than those where participation is mandated through a legal framework. There will unfortunately be those families and children, who irrelevant of
encouragement or coercive measures will refuse to engage with services. There have been family intervention models which have included both elements of support and enforcement. The Family Intervention Programme (Flint et al, 2011) provided intensive interventions to families. Families were clear at the outset that if they did not engage with the programme or the behaviours of concerns continued then enforcement action would be instigated. This is particularly important where some family members wish to change behaviours and other family members do not. Positive outcomes have been found for families that have engaged in this programme (White, 2008). This highlights that it is not necessary for all members of the family to fully agree to an intervention for change to be achieved.

The role of the practitioner is important where intervention is mandated. Bruner (1991,2004) states that there is a richer story to be uncovered, as these stories are underpinned by real experiences which are not fully reflected in the dominant version presented to services and practitioners. Families require assistance to develop their own narratives in a reflective manner which supports their future development (Vertere & Dallos, 2007). Narrative theories emphasise the subjective changes in individuals and the ways in which they perceive themselves. This sense of self and the ways in which these can be modified can be a strong motivation to desist from offending (McNeill, 2006). Keeney (1983) suggests that it is difficult to fully describe a system as it is dependent from what perspective the observer is describing it. The Second order system (Becvar and Becvar, 1999) takes account of the bias of the reporter. Those that observe systems are by their presence part of the system, influencing and skewing the version that they are reporting. The practitioner and family interaction should enable the family to disagree with the narratives that are being presented. This draws on the systemic method of hypothesising (Selvini-Palazzoli et al, 1980b; Cecchin, 1987;Loras, 2017); these hypotheses are viewed as propositions and therefore are not stable, but changeable. The systemic approach clearly articulates that the practitioner is part of the process therefore reducing the focus on the expert role that professionals usually hold. Systemic interventions are presented within a more constructivist viewpoint and recognise the subjective nature of knowledge and knowing (Glasersfeld, 1996; Fotsnot, 2013).
Practitioners need to be aware of the influences, perceptions and assumptions that they convey within the work they undertake. This is especially pertinent when providing interventions with ethnic minority groups. Care needs to be taken that practitioners do not solely believe that cultural competency is sufficient, as practice is often skewed toward cultural awareness as opposed to cultural sensitivity. Practitioners need to be aware that cultural sensitivity requires the practitioners to have additional skills in order to respond to families with authentic respectfulness (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995; Divac & Heaphy, 2005; Hardy, & Bobes, 2016). Page et al. (2007) suggest that in order to achieve a holistic approach to the issues that face families, staff should be recruited from local communities to reduce the perception of ‘us and them’. Where interventions are relevant and responsive to the needs of groups, family interventions have been found to make a positive impact (Valdez et al, 2013).

Richard et al. (2005) advocates that rapport should be created with children to enable positive outcomes, it is noted that this is difficult when the participants have been coerced into taking part in the programme. Not only are children hesitant to fully engage with interventions which have been legally mandated, but their parents will lack trust in statutory agencies that have the power to take their children into the care of the state (Aldridge, 2004). There are instances where interventions can be viewed negatively by all those involved. Interventions can be perceived as a trap, in which both the practitioner and the client feel duty bound to participate (Fredman & Dalal, 1998).

Youth Offending practitioners are required to provide interventions to service users that are often not willing participants. Trotter (2015) states that under these circumstances where practitioners have the dual role of providing support and enforcement, the practitioners must ensure that their role is explicitly outlined and there is a high level of transparency. Where enforcement is a key component of the intervention, building a positive relationship is critical, as these professional relationships need to be sufficiently robust to withstand the impact of enforcement measures.
It is ludicrous to profess that there is any form of equality between parents and practitioners when practitioners have the statutory power to instigate actions that can fundamentally change the structure and dynamics of a family (Turnell, 1998). Turnell (1998) further asserts that practitioners should endeavour to work in partnership with families and this should include the process of participation, and cooperation between the practitioners and families. The practitioners within family focused interventions are key to the success of the intervention. When working in partnership with parents it begins with the development of the relationship and understanding the problem, implementing appropriate strategies and understanding the appropriate ending of the process.

When interventions are legally mandated the skills of the practitioner are paramount. James, Cushway et al (2006), state that a key factor in achieving engagement with families is the qualities that the practitioner possesses. This requires competent and confident practitioners (Fadden, 1997, James et al, 2006) as whilst undertaking work with families with complex needs, difficult and uncomfortable issues will need to be raised. Children who are assessed as delinquent are often viewed as ‘difficult to engage’ due to oppositional behaviours and are found to have higher lifetime contact with specialist services (Vostanis & Anderson, 2006). Practitioners who lack confidence often project unsuccessful engagement and outcomes onto the families, as opposed to reflecting on their own skills (Fadden & Birchwood, 2002). Similar to other children, these children valued supportive relationships with non-judgmental adults who they perceived could assist them in negotiating their complex lives (Frances & Homel, 2006).

Care needs to be taken not to implement strategies which weaken family units by re-enforcing the belief that parents are unable to protect their children. Services in response to the significant risk that some children face from gangs are re-located to other areas and in some instances this is not as a family unit. This reduces the possibilities of implementing family focused work which would empower parents. Family practitioners through systemic work can insert the possibility of new beliefs and behaviours for the child and their family (Vigil, 1988).
This can include working on the perception of gender roles within the family and reframing the view of dependent and submissive mothers. This will assist in empowering parents to regain the position as the decision making adult within their lives, which is imperative when mothers are the primary carers (Vertere, 2001). There is a need to provide parental strategies which enables them to combat the influences of gang members who attempt to erode the precious parent/child relationship.

There has been much weight placed on the dynamic that children have with professionals and the need to develop respectful and trusting relationships. Hill (1999) suggested that children tend to rely on their own resources and social networks which they view as more productive than professional interventions when resolving their difficulties. This highlights the limitations and constraints of professional interventions. Systemic interventions can encourage new narratives for families and recognise that this input is dictated by time constraints. The reality is that children spend significantly more time with their families, peer groups and communities than in structured intervention sessions. It is a challenging proposal in a framework of intervening for professionals to do less rather than more (McAra & McVie, 2007; Haines & Case, 2015). When interventions are inappropriately implemented there can be negative effects for these children (Gottfredson, 1987; Dishion et al, 1999; Dodge et al, 2007) and behaviours and situations can be made worse for families. Services and practitioners have a daunting responsibility to ensure that what we do does not harm those that we strived to protect.

In closing, this chapter aimed to highlight the diverse range of gang interventions that are available to children. It outlined the important role that YOTs have in delivering these interventions. This was framed within the prism of the YOT’s as the agency that conducts the majority of intervention to children known to the criminal justice system. This includes the various models of interventions currently available and reported benefits and limitations of these interventions. The differences in the outcomes of these interventions were also presented, especially in relation to whether these interventions have long-term impact on the children and families. The extent of families’ choice in participating (through voluntary or statutory mandated intervention) was reviewed and whether this affects the level of
engagement. This included the different models of interventions inclusive of enforcement interventions which utilised both civil and criminal tools. Supportive interventions such as constructive activities, individualised and family focused interventions were explored across a spectrum of services delivery agencies including schools, YOTs and communities.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter outlines the epistemological foundations for the methodology incorporated in this study, and the rationale for the selected methods employed. This encompasses the research design, including the sample selection, data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with exploring the ethical issues and the observed limitations of the study.

Aim of research
In the previous chapters, the theoretical background for the study was outlined in relation to gang research and family intervention work. This was explicitly in relation to children who exhibit problematic and offending behaviour.

The research aimed to:

a. To study gang affected children
b. To examine their characteristics and to investigate how they respond to two different methods of intervention.

The specific research objectives:

• To describe the demographic and the behavioural characteristics of gang affected children within this study
• To outline the demographic characteristics of gang affected children in the study who were exposed to individualised child focused interventions and family focused interventions
• To compare the characteristics of gang affected children who were exposed to individualized child focused interventions with the behavioural characteristics of gang affected children who were exposed to family focused interventions.
• To examine how the parents of gang affected children who were exposed to family focused interventions perceive the experience of the intervention and their experience of having a child identified as gang affected.
This study investigated the research questions in the context of two areas in London, UK. London was selected as the research site as gang activities have increasingly become more problematic for children, both as victims and perpetrators.

**Epistemology**

The selection of methodologies is underpinned by the researcher’s epistemological basis. The research incorporated quantitative methods which are grounded in the positivist paradigm. This was in line with much of the research within the field of gang and adolescent offending, which is predominately risk factor research (Farrington 1998, 2008; Farrington and West 1993; Loeber, 1990; Loeber et al, 1998, Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Hill et al, 1999; Haines et al, 2008; Esbensen et al, 2009; Herrenkohl et al, 2000, 2014; Mulder et al, 2011; Taylor et al, 2007; Battin-Pearson et al, 1998). The rationale for incorporating this methodology was based on its strengths in identifying significant effects within the data, which can provide a semblance of confidence relating to levels of validity and reliability. The research design took into consideration that previous studies had reported limitations, in the understanding of the gang phenomena, due to the critical disconnect between the subject area and quantitative research traditions (Hughes, 2005; Hagedorn, 1996, 2008; Maxson & Whitlock, 2002).

The research was also underpinned by constructivism philosophy, whereby understanding is generated by reflecting on our experiences (Fosnot, 2013, Hammersley, 1992; Charmaz, 2000, 2007, 2014; Carrier, 2011). As a practitioner within an organisation, which had direct contact with children and their families, there is the aspiration to increase knowledge and subsequently improve outcomes for children. Costley (2012:84) stated that researchers in work-based studies maintain a strong drive towards achieving authentic reflection of participants’ subjective reality. The qualitative element of the research was influenced by Grounded theory; in the aim of deducting meaning from the data provided and ‘not impose (theory) on the data (Patton 1980). Methods were utilised to further understand whether families perceived any benefits of receiving family focused interventions when addressing their child's involvement in gangs. Bagnoli (2002) identified a tension between the epistemological relativism of constructionist
research and the truth claims associated with interventionist work. There is a need to be comfortable with accepting that the process of knowing is based in attempting to make sense of what is to be human as oppose to scientific knowledge (Steedman, 1991, 2000). This is a journey that a researcher will need to take with those that are participants in the research of knowledge. The rational for each method incorporated will be further explored within each section of this chapter.

**Mixed Methods**

Silverman et al (2008), aptly states that it is important to select a model that suits the research areas. It was therefore determined that neither methodological approaches alone would adequately explicate the research questions. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were incorporated in this research. Hesse-Biber & Johnson (2013) defines mixed methods in terms of ‘attempting to respect the wisdom of both these viewpoints while also seeking a workable middle solution for many problems of interest’ (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013:113).

Quantitative data can yield copious descriptions on the composition of gangs and insight into the gang population. These descriptions are insufficiently explained by official data or surveys alone (Hughes, 2005). Quantitative data can reflect relationships and differences in the data, but does not comprehensively explain the reason for these relationships. Both methodologies were implemented in this study, as when quantitative data is presented in collaboration with qualitative data, it produces a depth to the understanding of the topic area that could not be obtained by numbers alone, when studying social interaction. Utilising both methodologies has the ability to reduce the bias that could occur from any single method. The utilisation of this research design aimed not only to detect the effects of the intervention, but also provide a deeper enrichment of knowledge by gathering information directly from those individuals who actually received these interventions. This was achieved through the triangulation of the data collected. Triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon. This technique enables data validation of the phenomena through the substantiation of two or more sources (Moran-Ellis, 2006; Hussein,
Due to the identified strengths and weaknesses of any methodology, there has been an increase use of triangulation. Triangulation through the use of a mix of methods supports the validity of the results found (Denzin, 2012; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, 2007; Plano et al, 2008).

**Insider research**

This research was undertaken in my field of work which is positioned within the larger infrastructure of the YJS. It could be suggested that this study did not sufficiently fulfil the criterion of ethnographic research, as shaped by the history of anthropological studies as I was not a frontline practitioner directly engaged in the interventions provided. O’Reilly (2008, 2013) highlights that ethnography has included a wide range of disciplines and is not restricted to a single criteria. Hammersley and Akinson (2007:3) described ethnographic research, as the study of people in their own environments ‘gathering whatever data is available to throw light on the issue’. Bursik and Grasmick (1995) observed that the longest tradition of gang research is based on some variation of ethnographic fieldwork with gang members. Costley et al (2012) states that ethnography is potentially a useful approach, when the researcher has an active role within the organisation. She further contends that work-based research has the benefit of the researcher possessing in-depth knowledge of organisational idiosyncrasies. This allows the researcher to possess a higher level of scrutiny over the research questions and ensure that they are relevant to the field of work. There needs to be confidence that research questions are not posed, where there is little use or interest in the findings obtained, but actively build on the divergence between practice and theory.

This method enables researchers to utilise their knowledge of the issues that influence organisations interaction with service users and enables employment of methodologies, which increase access to the sample population. Organisations that provide direct interventions to clients are not static elements and this creates hurdles when attempting to investigate and measure an evolving phenomena. It was important to acknowledge that as a researcher within my own field of work, there were additional factors that were a pre-requisite for developing the methodology. Conducting ‘insider enquiry’ as defined by Costley et al (2012) required
recognising the impact or influence that my professional role could have on the research. Nixon (2008) stated that undertaking ‘insider-led’ research can make a significant contribution to work practices. This form of research is not without flaws and when constructing research designs there is a need to rationalise the benefits and appropriateness of such projects (Costley et al, 2012), The ‘flaws’ that can be present in insider-led research are addressed in the limitations and ethical section of this chapter.

Sample
Research Sites
The sample population was drawn from two London YOTs. The justification for gathering the data from these sites was due to YOTs having the statutory duty of administering interventions to children who are subject to Criminal Justice outcomes.

Sample population
In both the control and intervention groups, the children were identified as gang members through localised processes. This identification was a mixture of police intelligence and practitioner assessment. As outlined in chapter 2 there are limitations in using police Intel and practitioner assessments but this is the current mode of identification incorporated by services. Some of these children were also ranked on the Metropolitan Police gang matrix. The police gang matrix assesses and ranks individuals in relation to the gang risk or harm posed (London Council, 2014). The limitations of the gang matrix have been well documented (Smithson et al; Williams, 2015). MOPAC (2014) stated that this tool does not effectively gauge real time gang conflict. This means the matrix could include individuals who are no longer active gang members. In addition children who are gang affected may not be included on the police gang matrix as they do not fulfil the matrix criterion. This is notable as the NCA (2016) found that younger children who are less prominent to police and professional networks are actively being recruited by older gang members for the explicit purpose of undertaking gang activity (particularly drug distribution) in an undetected fashion. There are concerns that the police
matrix disproportionately labels ethnic minority groups as gang members on the bases of subjective police Intel (Williams, 2015; Williams & Clarke, 2016).

The sample of 158 cases were equally divided across both the family focused and individualised child centred focused groups. In this study these groups will be referred to as control group (individualised intervention group) and intervention group (family focused intervention group) for easy of identifying groups. It is recognised that although the term control group infers an experimental design this research is quasi experimental as both groups received interventions and were not randomly assigned to a group.

**Control Group (Individualised Intervention)**

The control group consisted of children who were known to the YOT, due to their offending behaviour for which they were subject to a court order. These children were also identified as gang affected. These individuals received interventions which were formulated via the assessment tool (Asset) in relation to their offending behaviour, risk and protective factors. The process of Assessment, Planning, Review and Supervision (YJB, 2008) and the interventions implemented were primarily focused on the individual child’s needs. These children received interventions only for the duration that they were subject to their court order. The practitioners were from a variety of professional backgrounds including, social work, probation and youth and community. These practitioners were not specifically trained in systemic family interventions.

**Intervention Group (Family Focused Intervention)**

The intervention group consisted of children who were identified by the areas' local gang referral process. These individuals received interventions from the YOT which were also formulated via the assessment tool (Asset) in relation to their offending behaviour, risk and protective factors. The process of Assessment, Planning, Intervention, Review and Supervision (APIRS) as stipulated by the YJB (2013) was undertaken. The interventions implemented were family focused. Practitioners would work with the families whether or not the child was
currently subject to a statutory court order. The rationale underpinning this process enabled the continuity of interventions and reduced the numbers of practitioners that the family had to interact with. These children received interventions for the duration of the court order for which they were subject to, or 6 months, if they were not currently subject to a court order. The practitioners in the family focused intervention team were from a variety of professional backgrounds including, social work, youth and community, drug and education specialists. All practitioners were trained to NVQ level 4 in systemic family interventions. All managers that supervised these practitioners were trained in systemic management supervision.

Referrals were made to the area’s multi-agency decision making panel which oversees gang cases. The panel consisted of Probation, Children and Social Care, Adult social care, YOT, Health, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) co-ordinator, Education, Police (from Gang’s, CSE and schools team), and Housing. Referrals would be reviewed by the panel to ensure that the issues which were included in the referral were specifically gang related. Cases fulfilled the criteria for receiving interventions if two or more professionals had knowledge of the individual and the behaviours of concern. There were cases where there was no prior knowledge of the individual by key agencies, but where a specific incident indicated gang involvement. Examples of such incidents included, where a child comes to the attention of the police outside of their home borough in the company of known gang members, indicating county lines (NCA, 2016). The panel actively utilised ‘soft Intel’ to gather a more comprehensive picture of the child's gang activity, this included health input such as gang related admissions to hospital.

The panel reviewed both children and adults cases; adults and children would however instigate different responses. The foundation for reviewing both age ranges in one forum recognised that gang activity indivisibly involved both children and adults. The panel also reviewed both victims and offenders as those involved in gang activity are at higher risk of becoming victims of gang violence, and this included their family members (Firmin, 2011). When children, were deemed appropriate for intervention, they would primarily be referred to the family focused intervention team. It should be noted that this was not the only intervention
available to gang affected children via this panel. There were instances where other services are assessed as more appropriate such as the Child Sexual Exploitation support team; the decision would be made on the key presenting factors. The panel could make the decision not to refer to interventions, when it is assessed that there are sufficient services already in place for the child and their family. This can occur when statutory services (i.e. Social Care) are already working with the family.

When a referral was agreed at the panel for the Family focused team to work with the child and the family, a letter would be sent to the parent/carer explaining the concerns and the support available. The letter schedules an initial meeting which would be jointly attended by the family focused practitioner and a police officer. The police officer was attached to the police gangs’ team and was a specialist officer who specifically works alongside the family focused practitioners. The basis for having a police officer present at the initial meeting provided clarity about the intervention. The local gang strategy stipulated that both support and enforcement elements are incorporated. It was the role of the police officer to articulate to families, that where there is evidence of continued gang activity conducted by the child, proactive enforcement action will be instigated. Where children or families are victims of gang activity, a relationship was already established with a named officer. Support and enforcement processes ran concurrently. Through the development of the programme it was found that parent/carers appeared to find police presenting information that their child was gang affected more credible, especially when the child did not have current contact with the YJS. Where families were known to have a history of negative interactions with the police, to reduce the probability of families’ non-engagement, the practitioner would conduct the visit with another allocated worker, such as the original referrer.

The intervention was a locally devised programme and would not fulfil the criterion of evidence based practice. The intervention did not mandate following a manual to ensure programme integrity, as often outlined in evidence based programmes (Morris 1988; Henggeler, 1997). Evidence based programmes require the integration of empirical research evidence with
practice expertise (ESRC, 2003). There was a specific emphasis in the Intervention group area on family focused interventions and the service had piloted family based programmes such as father and son residential for gang affected children. In addition the local authority had adopted an ethos of whole family practice across many of its services, as it recognised that working with the family can provide sustainable outcomes for children. Perkins-Dock (2001), found that treatments that focused on the family unit were more effective than individual treatments with delinquents.

It was acknowledged that children that are assessed as having additional needs and reach the threshold for interventions may have numerous services simultaneously working with them. It is therefore difficult when researching one particular intervention to precisely disaggregate the impact of other interventions. In order to address this challenge, this study is less preoccupied with a specific programme, but more focused on the interventions that are underpinned by family focused principles, as outlined in Chapter 3. This was feasible within the intervention group area as the YOT had actively engaged in embedding family focused work with children and their families. The data was specifically drawn from the gangs family focused team but acknowledged that families may have encountered other services.

**Sample size**

There were 158 cases in the quantitative section of the research and 15 interviews conducted in the qualitative section of the study. The determination of a suitable sample size and with comparable numbers of similar size projects was circuitous. Gangs are by their nature closed structures, due to their criminality and magnifying the mystique of a gang. It is difficult to access this group of individuals. Self-identification places the individual at higher probability of being targeted by the police for enforcement or intervention by statutory services. It is logical to assume that active gang members are hesitant to identify themselves. Consequently researchers tend to restrict their attention to the limited number of gangs into which they are able to gain entry (Hughes, 2005). This was not a large scale research. It was noted that different gangs had different characteristics and therefore this research did not profess to be
representative of all gangs, but rather attempts to work within the remits of gangs own realities. This supported the assertion that gang behaviour takes place among cliques and or small groupings (Hagedorn, 1988).

There can be a desire to secure large sample sizes in order to increase the power of statistical tests; however Oppenheim (2000) stressed that the emphasis should be the accuracy of the sample, as this is as important as it size. The sample size for the quantitative element of the methodology was determined by the number of children who had the gang characteristic marker on the management information system. This would have been input during the assessment period and therefore relies on practitioners.

The sample size for the qualitative element was primarily determined by the number of families willing to engage and the constraints of time and capacity on a single researcher undertaking this element of the research. The sample size was deemed to be sufficient for the research purpose.

**Quantitative method**

Quantitative methodology was utilised in the study and this took the form of comparing offending data and reviewing the demographics from the 2 YOTs. Spergel (1990) found that studies into gangs tended to employ small, non-random samples usually without comparison groups. In order to address this criticism, this research selected a comparison group. To minimise the differences in the control and intervention group, the control group was selected from another London borough which had similar gang issues and demographics. Both control and intervention group’s areas have diverse communities; the BAME breakdown in the control area was 70% and 48% in the intervention group. The deprivation index ratings fell between 25-35 for both areas (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2015).

The reason for focusing on offending data was there are higher levels of validity and reliability with this data source as this data related to offences that children received convictions for. The
collection of this data is also somewhat standardised across YOTs in England and Wales but will always be affected by human inputting errors. Research (Baker et al, 2005) has focused on the assessment scores of YOTs, but as discussed in more detail in the previous chapters, there has been criticism of the YOT assessment tool, Asset. Muncie (2009) pinpoints the subjectivity of the tool and also that it is affected by the competency of the practitioner undertaking the assessment. The Asset tool was reviewed during the period of research and amended to the Assetplus. It was not deemed appropriate to use the new assessment tool as a measure of intervention impact, as the level of confidence and competency by practitioners varied widely.

Many areas incorporate the use of voluntary and third sector organisations to provide gang interventions. The reason that children’s data was not gathered from these provisions was in relation to their criteria for accessing their services. Community organisations tend to implement very inclusive criterion, as they aspire to ‘reach, relate and equip children to make positive and informed choices’ (Spark2Life, 2016) or ‘help and divert, violent energies, towards self-empowerment and social change’ (Gangs United, 2016) for any child who requests assistance. This means that the needs and level of gang involvement in community organisations clients spans a large spectrum.

YOT data was drawn from each area's database, as the criterion for assessing a child is extensively more standardised. It gave an indication that the children would have a higher level of gang involvement as the threshold for receiving statutory services is significantly higher than for community agencies. The configuration of YOTs is different in each area however there are standardised requirements that are stipulated by the Youth Justice Board. This includes the collation of data on all children who access YOTs and therefore is comparable data.

Gang interventions via YOTs have become more prevalent in efforts to address offending and reoffending of gang affected children. These children are increasingly entering the YJS with crimes that are believed to be gang related such as violent and drug related offences. There can be little surety when categorising an offence as gang related. It is the role of the professional
network in assessing whether an offence such as Possessions With Intention To Supply is primarily drug offence or a gang related offence as both are connected to criminal networks.

When conducting research in real work environments, the structure, processes and dynamics are not static, as organisations are impacted by external factors such as funding, personnel and political changes (Swank, 2001, 2005). These changing variables are outside of the research control and it would be remiss not to acknowledge their presence. During this research period, the entire management information systems for the control and intervention groups changed, due to the implementation of a new assessment framework; Assetplus (Youth Justice Board, 2015). This had a dramatic impact on collating information. Management information system changes require a period of staff training, familiarisation with the new system and also rectifying glitches with the system itself. As such the process of extracting the research data was elongated but not affected.

The research was attentive to the extensive current operational pressures on YOTs. This was due to funding reductions and the offences of violence against the person being the most common offence committed by children (Youth Justice Board, 2016). An integral component of planning the collation of the data was ensuring that practitioners were not required to undertake additional tasks outside of their normal work duties such as adding extra information to the system. The research involved accessing personal data such as offending and demographic information. This required extensive discussions with the information/analyst officers within both areas to verify the feasibility of collating this data in a manageable fashion. When this was established, agreement was obtained from Managers (of the appropriate level) from each area after they had been assured that the data collection would not be an arduous task nor impinge on the service delivery.

The data was drawn from 2013 -2015; children were required to be no older than 17 years old at the end of 2015. This was to enable the reoffending data to be captured for a minimum of 12 months. Reoffending data was recorded on Youth Offending systems up until children are 18
years old. It would have been problematic to gather reoffending data after this point, as the individuals (excluding children who were in the care of the local authority) would cease to be collected by Children Services. Subsequent convictions would be captured on the National Probation Service systems for adult offenders. The specific age range took into account that children within the research cohort would be in a similar developmental stage. As the research was focused on family interaction and specifically parental impact, it crucially required that parents still retained parental responsibility, as defined by the Children’s Act (1989) and were legally responsible for their child.

**Qualitative method**

It was important for the research to capture the voice of the service user groups, as there is a risk that their input becomes peripheral to the research and subsequent policies and interventions which are ultimately designed for them. This is particularly evident when those that are receiving the interventions are deemed to be ‘difficult to engage groups’ or ‘hidden’ communities. Wiebel & Lambert (1990) defined these populations as ‘those who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised….. (comprising of) criminal offenders, juvenile delinquents, gang members and runaways’. Included in this group are particular section of the BAME communities (Garland et al, 2005, 2006). The methodology was informed by a necessity not to circumvent the challenges of accessing such groups. It is our responsibility as researchers to endeavour to be more innovative and tenacious in our quest to obtain a better understanding of these ‘hidden communities’ by ensuring their inclusion in the study.

There are difficulties in obtaining access to particular groups for research studies, especially those that are categorized as vulnerable individuals. Vulnerable individuals compose of those with ‘diminished autonomy due to physiological/psychological factors which create status inequalities ‘(Silva 1995:15). It could be argued that gang affected children and their families encapsulate this definition due to the impact of gangs in their lives. The qualitative methodology involved conducting semi-structured interviews with families. Both children and their parent/carers were informed that they could attend the interview. The interviews were
only conducted with the intervention group; those families that had received the family focused interventions. The aim was to assess what families perceived they had derived from the experience of receiving the family focused intervention.

Each methodology accommodates its own limitations and these were considered in the research design in an effort to utilise the most appropriate form for the research. There was an awareness that conducting interviews with participants who are deemed to be gang affected could generate low numbers and research has a tendency to focus on either quantitative data (Esbensen, 2001; Taylor et al, 2008) or interviewing the professionals that undertake the interventions (Phelps, 2015). It would have been more manageable to incorporate this method, as professionals are more versed in these processes; however it was important that the voice of families should be included. Semi-structured interviews are resource intensive for a single researcher and this impacted on the numbers completed. Consideration was given to other methods such as questionnaires as it is possible to circulate to larger numbers however the more pertinent issue, is the response rate. Bourma (1995) noted that the response rates to questionnaire surveys are low. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic it was anticipated that the response rate for these particular participants may consequently be significantly lower.

As a single researcher there was significant pressures on the amount of time that could be realistically achieved conducting each interview. It was not possible to arrange the interviews in geographical areas to reduce the travelling time, as it was important to conduct these interviews at times that were appropriate to the participants. Strass (1987) defined theoretical sampling as continued data collection until there is a confidence that there is theoretical saturation. Moore (1995:147) defines data saturation as ‘as collecting data until no new information is obtained’. 15 Semi-structured interviews were conducted and this sample size has been found to be sufficient (Bertaux, 1981). Guest et al (2006, 2012) found within their study of 60 interviews that data saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews.
Focus groups were considered as it is suggested that ‘much individual based interview research is flawed in its emphasis on individuals, as atoms divorced from social contacts’ (Morley, 1998:33). Focus groups, creates the space for participants to explore issues relevant to them. It is suggested that focus groups are most effective when they are naturally formed groups (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Morrison, (1998:154) stated that groups which are assembled to discuss a specific topic is not inherently naturalistic because the social setting is essentially contrived. It was judged that this methodology would not be appropriate for these participants, as it would be an artificially devised group, who may not feel comfortable to discuss their issues openly. Additionally formulating the group could have created risks by identifying the participants as gang members to other families. There was also the health and safety factor as there would be significant risks if rival gang members were gathered together inadvertently. Case & Katz (1991) found that there was a relationship between families’ criminal behaviour and children’s propensity to offend. As adult family members could have a history of gang involvement, the risk management of a focus group would have been complicated as the offending history of the adults was unknown.

In order to ensure that the appropriate families were included in the qualitative section of the study practitioners from the family focused team provided names of families who would be willing to participate in the interviews. The research design acknowledged that the outcome would only be reflective of those families that were motivated to partake in the research and therefore caution was required about how widely the findings could be generalised. It was assessed that simply writing to families would not generate sufficient numbers. It was necessary to have practitioners who had built a rapport with the families to present the proposition of being interviewed and also explain why they were being included in the research. From discussions with colleagues it was determined that parents may be more comfortable declining the request via a worker rather than directly to the researcher.

It was important that families were not chosen on the basis of them being ‘easier’ to engage or ‘more articulate’ families, as the subsequent analysis would not be reflective of the complex
needs of this group. Aspirations for larger sample size could have led to the group being dominated by gang affected individuals who had peripheral or had tenuous links to gang activity.

15 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted during the spring of 2017 within the intervention group area. These interviews were conducted with families who had children that were gang affected and who had received family focused interventions. The interviews were scheduled for approximately 30 minutes and they ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. Interviews were scheduled in advance and it was arranged for the interviews to take place at the home addresses. As the research involved face to face contact with participants, who were assessed as having complex and multiple needs and identified as being involved in entrenched gang activities, there were additional considerations required in the research design. The nature of the sample group, their behaviour and associations raised the level of risk when undertaking the family interviewing element of this research.

The organisational processes and policies were incorporated to manage the risks; it was necessary to risk assess the home-visits for health and safety. This process was informed by a police officer as some homes were assessed as at possible risk of gang retaliation. These individuals were removed from the home-visit list; this was not a complicated process as practitioners through their day to day work had already conducted these assessments and were aware where home-visits were not appropriate. Participants were offered the option of having the interviews within their homes; this was to ensure that families were in an environment in which they felt at ease. Barlow et al (2003) asserts, that families are less anxious and more in control in their own environments. 3 families chose not to have the interview at their homes and preferred the option of telephone interviews. It was important to respect that some families may not wish to have a researcher within their home. Telephone interviews instinctively appear more impersonal and there are disadvantages of not being able to assess elements like body language (Opdenakker, 2006). Novick (2008) however argues that there is a lack of evidence that telephone interviews produce lower quality data. It was a conscious
decision not to conduct the interviews in one of the organisation offices, so that there was a clear differentiation between the research and the interventions that families receive.

It was anticipated there would be a number of times when families were not home and instances where families were clearly at home, but chose not to answer the door; these are normal obstacles encountered by practitioners when working with service users. This was viewed as a fundamental part of the consent gate keeping process, as although parents had indicated through verbal agreement to participate; this was viewed as their enactment of their right of withdrawal from the research. These families received a follow up telephone call, but it was important that it was not perceived that there was not undue pressure exhibited on families into participating in the interviews.

**Interview process**

Each interview commenced with an explanation of the remit of the research, this was followed by a process of working through each element of the consent form. This ensured that each facet of the consent was fully understood by the participants. Participants had the opportunity to obtain further clarifications on any areas. The form (Appendix C) explained the following:

- The aims and objectives of the research.
- The voluntary nature of the research and most importantly that the participants could cease to continue with the interview and research at any point.
- That additional information would be gathered about the family composition.
- That data would be reviewed by the university.
- The reason for the interview to be audio taped.
- The confidentiality practice that would be incorporated in relation to the study.

Due to the diverse needs of the group, it was not appropriate to present a verbatim script. In order to address the diversity needs, some of the participants required reframing of the information to ensure that there was a clear understanding of what they were agreeing to be party to, as it was evident that English was not all participants’ first language. An interpreter was also engaged for one parent.
The questions incorporated the following themes (Appendix D)

- Families’ knowledge of gang issue and the effect on family
- Families contact with Family Focused Intervention and what support was received
- Other support the family has received from other services
- Perception of the benefits of the service
- Perception of what would improve the support that they have received.

Similar formats were incorporated for both the face-to-face and telephone interviews.

Incorporating qualitative methodology affords those individuals that receive these interventions the opportunity to communicate their reality. Coolican (2017) further suggested that such methodology provides respondents with the scope to explore unpredicted avenues of thought. The questions were formulated to encourage discussion with the participants; however it took time during the interviews to exhibit key information. Experience of working with service users highlights that meeting agendas and outcomes are generally predetermined by the professionals. This model of the ‘expert helper’ (Davis et al, 2002:48), results in parents assuming hierarchical roles in meetings that they attend with professionals. Sufficient time was required to enable participants to become comfortable and confident that there were no right or wrong answers and that the research was authentically exploring their views.

The rationale for not conducting the interviews with a colleague was due to the power positions that are created when professionals outnumber service users. This could increase the likelihood of participants within the interviews providing responses that they perceived the researchers desired. There is a need to be vigilant of research methods that are exploitative and create power relationships between the respondents and researchers. It was appreciated that parents may have been initially hesitant to disclose sensitive information about their families to an unknown person. The impact of sensitive questions should not be dismissed. Sensitive topics are more than subjects which merely make people uncomfortable, but may have potential consequences or implications either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented (Sieber & Stanley, 1988:49).
Semi-structure interviews were conducted, whereby there were a set of questions which provided a framework for the interview, but created sufficient scope to permit space and flexibility for the participants to be able to introduce topics that they identified as important to them. Researchers may have predetermined theories of what participants will discuss which can constrain the journey of exploration; the semi-structured interviews provide the possibilities of the unknown being discovered. This method was informed by the principles of grounded theory as shaped by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in that formation of theories can be generated through the systematic collation of the data, which subsequently enable ideas to be formed.

The structure and the wording of the interviews were formulated to ensure that it encouraged open responses, therefore open questions were employed. A structure of questions was created, but it was necessary for the structure to be flexible. This allowed the order of questions to change to take account of the participant's responses, so that the interviews did not become disjointed and artificially manufactured.

As a practitioner within the social care field, it was imperative to retain a clear demarcation of my role as a researcher during the interviews. It was particularly pertinent, not to revert back to the practitioner role when participants raised queries about services or when parents expressed opinions that would normally be challenged during my practice. The interviewees should feel no moral assessment of what they reported, Coolican (2017) asserted that respondents may wish to look favourably to the researcher and provide responses they perceive would be socially desirable.

**Analysis**

**Quantitative data**

The analysis involved comparing the data of those children who received individualised child focused interventions in the control group and the family focused intervention group. Both of
these groups received their interventions from YOTs practitioners. The data collection was completed within the spring of 2017 and inputted into SPSS over the subsequent weeks. SPSS was utilised to numerically code the data and this will further be explored within the results chapter. A between subjects ANOVA and paired t-test was employed to test whether there was a significant difference between the control and intervention group in relation to the number and type of offences committed. This included comparing the pre and post gang identification data.

The offending rate of the cohort was analysed pre and post intervention; only substantive outcomes were included. Civil sanctions such as Criminal Behaviour Orders and Gang injunctions were also included. Outcomes that were defined as preventive interventions such as ‘triage’ were excluded from the data. Triage describes the process whereby children who have committed a low gravity offence can receive a diversionary intervention rather than a formal court process (Youth Justice Board, 2013). Children are required to admit to the offence, in order for this disposal to be available to them, but the outcome is recorded on the police system as a ‘no further action’ and not a criminal disposal.

Offences where children were arrested were not included, as although this information was available it could not be assumed that these arrests would directly translate into convictions as those identified by the police are proactively monitored and this could result in more arrests (Brownfield et al, 2010). Where children had been charged for offences but subsequently had no recorded conviction for these offences, these cases and offences were removed from the data set. It was important to retain the ethos of natural justice as reflected in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, therefore not assuming guilt on those that the criminal justice process had not found guilty. Violent offences were measured; violent offences constituted all violent offences against the person.

**Qualitative data**
The qualitative research via the interviews aimed to identify discourse trends. Oppenheim (2000) states that attitudes are not formed in isolation but have links with other deeper value systems within the person. The majority of interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Permission was not obtained to record all the interviews and in these instances written notes were taken of the interview. Discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992) is viewed as the construction of versions of truth as the language occurs (Coolican, 2017). The transcribed interview data was coded to identify key themes that were grounded in the text. This was in order to gain insight into the experiences and impact of interventions on those whose lives are directly affected by gang activity. The analysis intended to ascertain families’ perspectives, and review the differences and similarities of the group. It explored whether the perspective of families and professional theories are cognisant.

Weber (1946) highlighted that ‘all research is contaminated to some extent by the value of the researcher’. It is difficult to analyse the text completely unmotivated, without any preconceived notions of what would be uncovered but it was important to constraint the analysis and not make inferences. Durkheim (1966) suggests that we should aspire to abandon all preconceptions to be able to analyse the interpretative repertoire at work within the discourse. Semi-structured interviews generate an extensive level of data, which required transcribing. The initial plan was to have the data transcribed by a professional service. On subsequent review of the recordings, it was apparent that it would be laborious and possibly an unproductive exercise for a person who had not actually been present to transcribe. It was therefore necessary for me to undertake this entire task. A consequential benefit of transcribing was utilising this time to commence identifying reoccurring themes that arose within the discourse at the initial stages of analysis.

**Ethical Issues**

Research that involves vulnerable individuals, especially children and their families requires robust research design. The review of ethical issues must ensure that there are no negative consequences for those that participate. The British Society of Criminology (2015) guidelines on
ethical conduct in research, state that researchers have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected. It was paramount that those participating had a clear understanding of the aim and objectives of the research and the principles of consent. Through informed consent there can be a higher level of certainty that participants are voluntarily partaking in the process. Safeguarding participants is a complex course of action and necessitates the ‘respect of others in more than careless rhetoric’ (Costley, 2012:39).

This research acknowledged that due to the subject area there was a possibility that participants may divulge information that exposed criminal activities, offences or information in relation to safeguarding issues. To ensure that participants were explicitly aware of my remit and responsibility as a researcher it was clearly outlined before commencing the interviews that any information shared which could be deemed as constituting a risk of harm to or by any individual, would be shared with the appropriate services. When conducting research there is a prerequisite that the welfare of participant and other individuals is not compromised. Research that interacts with everyday life must endeavour to fulfil its social responsibility and foresees and societal impact of the work particularly in relation to the safety, health or welfare of the society (Bird, 2014). Where research involves children and vulnerable participants the paramountcy principles (NSPE, 2003) must be adhered to, therefore ensuring that ‘the child’s best interest and welfare is the first and paramount consideration (Children Act, 1989) in any actions that professionals undertake. As a research practitioner with extensive experience within children services and Youth Justice, paramountcy principles are the core foundations of professional practice and aligned with safeguarding policies and procedures.

To ensure that ethical issues were effectively actualised, consent was obtained from both areas to undertake this research and utilise their data. At the research proposal stage the study was reviewed by Portsmouth University Ethics committee and fulfilled the requirements. As the research was conducted as a professional doctorate, it was monitored under the supervision of the University, from proposal stage until completion.
Due to the sample populations it was important to firstly establish whether the data would be accessible as organisations often have reservations regarding research that involves children's information. A high level of transparency was required regarding how the data would be used and reflected in the final thesis. The process of alleviating these concerns for both research sites, involved providing assurances that this data would be collated in an anonymised format. This included confirmation that areas would not be named in the report. All information was stored securely in line with the organisational policies.

My professional role requires me to be a reflective practitioner. A reflective practitioner is defined as:

‘The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation.’ (Schön, 1983:68)

During the process I was progressively monitoring my presence and impact it had on the research. I have taken into consideration that my role as a senior manager within one of the research sites. This could be viewed as in conflict with the research, however it is hoped that any affect was minimised, as I was not the frontline practitioner with any of the families that were interviewed. This reduced the likelihood of the participants not feeling able to express their opinions about the services that they have received, as Oakley (1981:58), asserts that the investigation of people is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical.

There are numerous difficulties when conducting work based research as colleagues may find it difficult to distinguish the research role as separate from the professional role. This can be more pronounced when the researcher has a managerial role within the organisation. Costley
et al (2012) stated that care needed to be incorporated as colleagues especially subordinates may feel obliged to cooperate with the research as I was the overall manager of the Service. It was important to recognise the impact on the practitioners whose work was being researched and acknowledge that my role as a senior manager and as a researcher would not be viewed in the same way as an external researcher. Practitioners were not required to engage with the process and it was clearly articulated that there would be no detrimental impact if they made this decision. The majority of practitioners expressed no concerns regarding their clients partaking in the interview process. The process was clearly explained to practitioners; however some practitioners still expressed suspicion and perceived that client feedback would be an evaluation of their competency. Discussions were undertaken with staff to waylay these anxieties, but it is unclear whether this had an impact on the families’ names that were submitted for interviews.

It was critical for the research that the YOTs were not named in the report, as the findings of the research were intended to assist in informing theory and practice. Morse (2006:4) highlighted that researchers should think ‘on the politics of the methodology within the organisation’. The findings were not intended to create any negative reputational impact for either area that had so kindly agreed to be involved in this research. As a researcher with direct experience of negotiating access, there is a duty to assist in reducing organisational anxieties, regarding participation in research so as not to hinder future research studies.

**Limitations**

There was an awareness that there would be complications in conducting research on this subject area both due to the gang issue and also because it was specifically focused on children. It was anticipated that there would not be a large sample size for either the quantitative or qualitative elements of the research. It would therefore limit how widely the findings could be generalised to other populations. It is acknowledged that the research may have been enhanced through the inclusion of larger sample sizes. Intervention programmes received by service users are not components that occur in isolation and can be affected by numerous
variables that are outside of the control of research designs. Children who are identified as being gang affected are often identified by other services regarding additional issues of concerns, such as low school attendance (Stevenson, 2007; Rocque, 2017) mental health (Elliott et al, 2012) family related safeguarding concerns (Farrington, 2002). This would result in statutory processes being instigated where children and their families will receive a variety of services to address this. The control group did not specifically receive family focused interventions via the YOT, but it would be misleading to state that none of the children within the control group had received any form of family interventions during the research period.

This research proposed that family focused interventions would be the dynamic factor which would influence outcomes for children. Lambert and Barley (2001) suggests that intervention outcomes are influenced primarily by the practitioners’ skills to engage with clients rather than the programme content. There was a need to limit the study area, in order for it be realistically achievable, therefore practitioner competency was determined to be outside of the scope of the research. This decision took into account that ‘it is better to answer a small question than leave a large one unanswered’ (Bourma et al, 1995:13). The interventions provided were not conducted in a manualised fashion. This means that it creates difficulties for replicating the process in other areas.

Offending rates were used to quantify the impact of the intervention; however offending data can be problematic. The YJS asserts that there should be aspirations for the ‘swift administration of justice’ for children (YJB, 2003). These aspirations are often not actualised and this is evident where due to delays in the criminal justice process, children receive criminal disposals after interventions have commenced for offences that were committed prior to the current interventions. It could be argued that the level of reoffending is skewed by gang members being proactively targeted by police and therefore more likely to subsequently receive more court outcomes. It was anticipated that this phenomena would equally affect both the control and intervention group, but should be considered when reviewing the level of offending for these groups.
There were predicted limitations of having a single researcher on a study. This included the number of interviews conducted and also the matching of interviewer. Schaeffer et al. (2010) study highlighted the effect of the interviewer’s race on outcomes; it was found that the effect justifies the matching of interviewer and respondent. This was not possible as a sole researcher on this study.

Conclusion

This research followed a process of:

- Data collection,
- Data preparation,
- Data Analysis (which included both descriptive and inferential statistics)

The chapter outlined the research methodology and the foundations of this study being from an insider researcher perspective. This chapter also explained the rationale for the selection of the sample population, the method and reasons for the choice of data analysis. This chapter also presented the ethical issues which were pertinent when conducting research with children, vulnerable groups and those who are involved in the criminal justice system and the ethical safeguards which needed to be implemented. The chapter concluded by outlining the limitations of the study and what efforts and methods were incorporated to reduce or mitigate any identified ethical or research limitations of the study.
Chapter 4

Quantitative Results – Understanding the Impact

This chapter outlines the results from the analysis of the quantitative data that was collected from both the control and intervention sites. The children in each site were identified as gang members by YOT practitioners and this was recorded in each area’s management information system. All children received their interventions from YOT practitioners. Within the intervention site, the interventions were family focused, in the control site the intervention were individualised as they were focused on the child only. It should be noted that throughout this research children have been referred to as ‘gang affected’ however on the YOT systems, it is categorised as ‘gang identified’ in relation to them being active gang members. The analysis aimed to test the hypothesis that children who had received family focused interventions (intervention group) would have lower levels of offending than those children who received Individualised child centred interventions (control group).

Demographics of gang affected children

Gender

As outlined in Figure 1, it was found that the majority (96.8%) of all those identified as gang members from both the control and intervention group were male. Within the control group there were no females identified as gang members. This is reflective of the position that although girls are known to be integral to gang structures, there is insufficient information collated on the numbers of girls involved and affected by gang activity (Firmin, 2009).

The process of gang identification is dictated by professional assessment and this figure may reflect the practitioner’s beliefs on male and female offending. It has been found that girls are
often not identified as gang members but rather as victims of gang activity. These results reflected the findings of other similar studies (Nurge, 2003; NCA, 2016).

**Figure 1: Gender Breakdown Of Family Focused And Individualised Intervention Groups**

![Bar chart showing gender breakdown of intervention groups](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family-focused intervention group</th>
<th>Individual intervention group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age**

The age parameters for this cohort were determined by the remit of YOTs. Children are only able to access YOT interventions from the age of criminal responsibility at 10 years old up to their 18th birthday, when they transfer to adult services (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998). There are some exceptional cases where 18 year olds still access the YOT. This usually occurs when the intervention commenced before their 18th birthday and it is assessed that the YOT should complete the intervention rather than transfer the case to Probation.

It was found that the age of first conviction was similar in both areas. The ages ranged from 11 years old to 17 years old, and the mean age was 14.72 years old with a standard deviation of 1.22. The majority (36%) of the children received their first conviction when they were 15 years old. The findings were similar to that of previous studies in relation to both commencement of offending and gang affiliation (Van Winkle, 1996; Huff, 1996, 1998; Sharp, et al 2006).
Ethnicity

There was not a unified way of recording ethnicity across the control and intervention research sites. Some practitioners used nationalities such as Bangladeshi, Pakistani as opposed to ethnicities. For the purpose of research, the categories were placed into groupings so that they could align across both control and intervention groups. The majority (87%) of the children identified as gang members across both groups were from ethnic minority backgrounds. This was dominated by ‘Black’ children. There were several categories used to identify this group and practitioners tended to use the term ‘Black Other’. The control group had a BAME population breakdown of 90%; Black represented 65% of the cohort however Black only represented 18% of the boroughs’ population. In the intervention group the BAME breakdown was 84%, but Black only represented 15% of the area’s population (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2015). These findings indicate that Black children were over represented in this sample. In total, 61% of the whole cohorts were Black. These findings support both UK and American studies, where ethnic minority communities are found to be disproportionally represented in the composition of gangs. The data was taken from YOT database and it is well documented that Black boys are also disproportionally represented in the CJS (MoJ, 2017). It has been highlighted that overrepresentation of black boys involves a
range of complex factors such as different responses from the CJS (Lammy, 2017), being targeted by the enforcement agencies (Bowling & Philips, 2007) and socio-economic factors (Hodge, 2017). This finding highlights that black children are disproportionally categorised as gang members. Characterisation by YOT practitioners appears to be a key component in the classification of these children.

Figure 3: Ethnic Breakdown Of Family Focused And Individualised Intervention Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Mixed Heritage</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Focused Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total group</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Behavioural characteristics of gang affected children

Offences

The data specifically utilised the number of offences that children received a Criminal Justice outcome for. Children often receive one disposal for numerous offences so number of convictions would not accurately reflect the extent of the children’s offending. The average number of offences for the control group was 10 (n=791) compared to the intervention group which was 7 (n=618).

The gang identification date was deemed as the initiation point for the gang intervention. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the offending levels of all the gang affected children pre gang identification and post gang identification in both the control and intervention groups. There was a significant difference found in the scores of gang affected...
children (both in control and intervention group); pre gang identification (M = 5.82, SD 5.46) and post gang identification (M = 3.16, SD 5.38) conditions; t(157)=4.05, p= 0.00 . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The findings indicated that the interventions provided by YOTs (either individualised or family focused interventions) reduced the level of offences that gang affected children were convicted for after they were identified as gang members. It is difficult to ascertain whether this affect was wholly due to specific gang intervention employed after the children were identified as gang members or whether the reduction was affected by the duration of the intervention that the child has undertaken which resulted in an increase desistance over time.

**Table 1: T-Test, Difference In Level Of Offences Pre And Post Gang Identification For All Children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was then explored whether there was a difference in the level offending between the control and intervention group pre and post gang identification. A between subjects ANOVA was employed to compare the offending level of gang affected children in the control and intervention group pre and post gang identification. No significant effect was found in these groups at [F(1,157) =1.92, p = 0.167]

There were some concerns surrounding the accuracy of gang identification date. During the process of analysis it was identified that the same date was inputted for a number of children both in the control and intervention groups. It is assumed that there were particular points when the YOT undertook an exercise of identifying children who were already subject to YOT interventions who were gang affected. As a consequence of such an exercise the same date was inputted. The gang identified date may therefore be more a reflection of the identification process by the YOT rather than the actual date when a child was identified as gang affected. It
therefore could indicate that the gang intervention did not commence exactly after this point and may have commenced earlier. Due to this possible factor, a further analysis was conducted to assess whether there would be significant differences in the total number of offences committed between the control and intervention group as this would remove the pre and post intervention variable. An independent t-test was employed to determine whether there was a significant difference in the number of offences that children committed dependent of whether they were in the control or intervention group. It was found that there was a significant difference between the control group (m=10.01, SD=9.02) and the intervention group (m =7.54, SD5.06) t(156)=2.12, p=0.035. The finding was marginally significant but indicates that children who received family focused interventions had committed significantly less offences than the those children who received individualised interventions.

| Table 2: T-Test, Difference In Level Of Offences Between Control And Intervention Group |
|---------------------------------|----------|--------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                 | F       | Sig.   | t      | df   | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference |
| Total convictions               | Equal variances assumed | 6.90   | .009   | 2.12 | 156   | .035 | 2.46 | 1.16 | .16 | 4.76 |

| Violent Offences |

The average number of violent offences that were committed by all the children (both control and intervention group) was 3.66 (total number =579). A paired t t-test was conducted and a significant difference was found in the number of violent offences for all children (both control and intervention group) between pre gang identification and post gang identification. There was a higher average number of violent offences committed pre-gang identification (M = 2.66, SD 2.66) than post gang identification (M = 1.01, SD 1.71); t(157)=6.36, p= 0.00
Table 3: T-Test, Difference In Level Of Violent Offences Pre And Post Gang Identification For All Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Lower 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Upper 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Violent offence pre and post identification</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was then explored whether there was a significant difference in the level violent offending between the control and intervention group, pre and post gang identification. A between subjects ANOVA was employed to compare the violent offending level of gang affected children in the control and intervention group pre and post gang identification. There was a significant effect found on the level violent offending of these groups at \( F(1,157) = 6.79, p = 0.01 \)

Table 4: ANOVA For Difference In Level Of Violent Offences Pre And Post Gang Identification For Control And Intervention Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Noncent. Parameter</th>
<th>Observed Power (^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>69.778</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69.778</td>
<td>6.786</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>6.786</td>
<td>.735</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a higher total average number of violent offences committed by the control group (4.22) than the intervention group (3.11). Although the control group had a higher number of total offences, the results indicated that the control group had a lower average number of violent offences post gang identification than the intervention group as illustrated in table 5.
Table 5: Average Number Of Violent Offences Pre And Post Gang Identification For Control And Intervention Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Intervention Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre gang identification</td>
<td>3.27 (n=258)</td>
<td>2.05 (n=162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post gang identification</td>
<td>0.95 (n=75)</td>
<td>1.06 (n=84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further independent t-test was employed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the control and intervention group in relation to the total number of violent offences committed by gang affected children. It was found that there was a significant differences between the control group (m=4.22, SD =3.403) and the intervention group (m=3.11, SD= 2.57) t(156)=2.30, p=0.23. This finding further indicates that gang affected children who receive family focused interventions had lower total levels of violent offending than those who received the individualised interventions.

Table 6: T-Test Average Number Of Violent Offences Pre And Post Gang Identification For Control And Intervention Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Violent Offences</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results further supports the position that YOT interventions are positively impacting on gang affected children’s level of offending and that these interventions (either individualised or family focused) produce a reduction in violent offences committed by gang affected children.
Drug related offences

Drug criminality is suggested to be a key element of gang activity (Howell et al, 1999; Moore, 1990). The data highlighted that there was a similar distribution of children who had drug related offences to those who did not, across both areas. There was a marginal difference in the percentages between the control (individualised intervention) and intervention group (family focused intervention). In the control group 49% had a drug related conviction and in the intervention group this was 61%. The data indicates that there were similar number of children with drug related offending and that this was key factor for this group.
Table 7: Drug Related Offences For Family Focused And Individualised Intervention Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Family Focused Intervention Group</th>
<th>Individualised Intervention Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Drug offences</td>
<td>31 (39%)</td>
<td>40 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Offences</td>
<td>48 (61%)</td>
<td>39 (49%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Re-offending

It was found that there was very little difference in the re-offending rate between the control and intervention group pre and post gang identification. The control group had a slightly higher number of children who re-offended after they were identified as gang affected. 41% of the total cohort reoffended after being identified as gang members. This is in line with general reoffending rates for children who offend which are 42% (YJB, 2016). This result should also take into consideration the limitations surrounding the accuracy of the gang identified date which was outlined earlier.

Figure 6: Re-Offending Rate Post Gang Identification For Family Focused And Individualised Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individually intervention</th>
<th>Family focused Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not reoffended</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reoffended</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the quantitative section of this study. The research finding supported previous studies in relation to the demographics of gang affected children. This particularly pertained to the overrepresentation of black male children, the age offending and gang affiliation commenced and that the majority of the cohorts were male. It was identified that there was no significant effect when comparing the offending level of gang affected children who had received either family focused or individualised interventions pre and post gang identification. It was identified that there were several areas where a significant effect was identified. It was found that the gang affected children who had received family focused interventions had fewer offences (including violent offences) than those had received individualised interventions. It was also identified that although the control group had more violent offences pre gang identification, there was a larger reduction in violent offending post identification than the family focused group. The limitations of the data were highlighted especially pertaining to the inconsistencies in the data recording.
Chapter 5

Hearing The Voice Of The Families

This chapter presents the experiences and perceptions of a selection of parents who were involved family-focused intervention. There has been a tendency to rely the story of gang members through the voice of professionals or adult gang members. This part of the research aims to provide a richness to the data and to hear the voice of those that are integral to the lives of gang affected children; their parents. Parents of gang members are often peripheral to the research and mostly referred to in terms of how they increase the risk (Shute, 2013; Aldridge, 2011). Gang membership is generally initiated during adolescence, a stage when parents still have parental responsibility. Yet these children are often viewed as totally autonomous (Hanson & Holmes, 2014; Barry 2010). This chapter will outline these experiences in relation to some of themes that were identified from the interviews.

Qualitative results – Hearing the Voice of the Families

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen parents, their children were able to participate in the interviews. I believe that some children were home when the interviews were conducted but only one child requested to sit in on the interview. There were particular areas which the interviewed endeavoured to cover, however where it was clear that parents did not wish to discuss areas raised this was respected. 13 of the parents were mothers and 2 fathers. The ethnic makeup of the group was 2 parents were White, 11 were Black, 2 were Asian. There were 2 families where it was specifically stated that they were married/partnership.

This part of the research aimed to increase the understanding of parent’s experiences of having a child that has been identified as being gang affected. The interview aimed to establish parent’s views on the family focused intervention they participated in; any benefits and any areas of the intervention which they felt could be improved.
The data was interpreted by reviewing the transcripts and identifying themes which were raised by a majority (more than half) of the participants. Through this thematic analysis I was able to identify reporting patterns within data. The ‘keyness’ of an identified theme was not solely dependent on the measurement but rather focused on the importance it represented to the overall research question (Braun & Clark, 2006; Aronson, 1995).

As only one child participated his comments were included if they were in line with other comments made by the parents

The following areas were identified

- Acknowledgment of the issue
- Labelling my child
- Peers – the unknown and friends
- Education as a predicated factor
- The intervention – what works
- The intervention – what could be improved
- The impact on my family
- The future for my child

‘Acknowledging the issue’

There was a general consensus from parents that they were unaware of the gang issues for their child until this was raised by services. This was mostly highlighted at the point their child came to the attention of the police.

‘I did not know........... it was a shock for me’ (Parent 1)

‘I found out when he was involved with the police and court. I was shocked in the beginning as we are a simple family’ (Parent 4).

Parents clearly wished to distance themselves from the stereotypical view of families whose children were affected by gangs. This supported the assertion that parents were aware of the blame that is attached to parents of gang members (Aldridge, 2011). Some parents appeared
perplexed by the fact that their children had been affected by gangs and viewed that their family structure should have insulated them from this risk. There was a sense that they felt that this issue affected certain families and that their families did not fit this profile. Parents wanted me to get a sense that their family unit was not deficient or dysfunctional.

‘Why he became gang affiliated – I have no idea maybe the area, pressure of growing up to tell the truth I don’t know. I have lived here for 17 years and I have never had any issues before’ (Parent 4).

‘I have heard from lots of parents that this is just a phase but I know he has changed a lot’. (Parent 13)

‘It is very hard to accept as we are a very close family’ (Parent 15)

‘It has shocked my family, my mum is coming I have my brother here, my sisters here, my friends here, we have lots of family. (Parent 7)

‘I have a very strong loving family and we love each other but he’s made stupid mistakes’ (Parent 6)

There appeared to be a hierarchy in what was perceived as deviant behaviour. Some parents were more comfortable with the idea that their children were involved in criminal behaviour but were very unwilling to accept that their children were involved in gang related activity. Gang activity had considerably more negative connotations for these parents than criminal activity.

‘He wasn’t in a gang, but he was found selling knives and hitting a police officer’ (Parent 1)
‘My boy has nothing to do with the stuff that’s going on out there, the police were in contact once but he hasn’t been in trouble since’. (Parent 8)

‘They posted a picture on Facebook making (gun) signs but they are not gang members’

(Parent 6)

‘Labelling my child’

The stigma attached to the definition of gangs has created intense debate amongst academics and professionals, especially in relation to the ways in which services respond to those who are categorised as gang members. It has been argued that the label has been used to disadvantage young black men (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006) and this objection to this term was echoed by parents. There was a strong reaction to the term ‘gang’ by parents, who did not acknowledge that their children were gang members. They articulated a very precise criterion for gang members which they viewed their children did not fulfil.

‘I think it’s wrong, one thing I found, I know the police know things but to insinuate that someone is labelled a gang member, to know my son and to read the (court) reports it’s like hard, I know the police know things, he wasn’t a gang member he was just a child that went to the PRU’ (Parent 6).

‘That part I was very upset he’s not a gang member, gang members are people with guns shooting around. Gangs are people, robbing people’ (Parent 13)

Those that live within areas where gangs are prevalent are acutely aware of the risks that they present within their communities and parents feel their role of keeping their children is compromised (Kumpfer, 1999). Even though parents did not accept that their children were gang members, they felt that their children were at significant risk from gang activity within the community. All the parents irrelevant of where they lived in the borough were affected and
commented on the recent murder of a child in the borough. The murder was reported to be a
gang and drug related motivated crime.

‘I’m sick and very worried’ (Parent 7)

‘It’s really bad out there, we didn’t know him but that boy was just a child. I know that the kids
aren’t angels but he’s still just a child and when I saw the flowers it made me sad and scared’

(Parent 8)

‘Peers – The unknown and friends’

Many of the parents stated that they did not know the adults who their children were
socialising with and felt disempowered by these unknown individuals, who imposed significant
influence over their child’s decision-making. Their children often went missing when in the
company of these older gang members. During these missing episodes these individuals had
taken on the hierarchical role which is usually the position of parents in family units (Minuchin,
1974) and were providing accommodation and finances to their children. It wasn’t clear
whether their children had actively not introduced the adult gang members to their parents or
whether these individuals were actively avoiding detection.

‘Whose these friends I want to see them, these people who give him some where to sleep and
give him money, I think he uses drug, where he sleeps, whose friend, where are they from, I
never know who these people. He is 17 he is not an adult. Some children is not smart, some
children are soft, my son is soft’. (Parent 7)

‘They took my son, it’s not my son, they washed his brain, he was a good boy, respectable’

(Parent 12)

‘I can’t force my son to stay with me... he stays one week and then he goes again’ (Parent 7)
‘They (social services) placed him away from the area and he just runs away from his placement’

(parent 6)

In order for the gang system to function, they need to retain hold and loyalty on younger members. The system must create rigid boundaries which clearly demarcate their system (Winfree et al, 1994). This includes reducing contact with others outside of their system. Older gang members were not only involving these children in criminality but also were actively creating division with people and activities which were previously protective factors.

‘Before he went to Mosque, he does not go now, he’s not fasting’ (Parent 7)

‘When he was at .... school he was expected to be a A* student and now he doesn’t want to go

(Parent 12),

Where parents were aware of the individuals that their child associated with, these were children of a similar age and were long established friendship groups.

‘They are the friends that he chose when he was 13 or 14’ (Parent 4)

‘I know all his friends from when they were young’ (Parent 15)

‘He only has just 2 or 3 friends which I know’ (Parent 13)

One parent expressed that her child did not socialise with many peers at school or in the community as justification for him not being involved in gang activity. There was no acknowledgment that the risk could come from other older family members and that family member’s involvement in gangs increased the risk for younger children (Hughes, 2005).

‘He sticks within the family and his cousins...he made some friends from the (PRU) unit’

(Parent 1)
Circumstances within the family such as fathers with criminal histories (Mednick, 1984) and homes where children experienced domestic abuse (Thornberry et al, 1999; Holt et al, 2008), increases children propensity to become affected by gangs. Parents identified that traumatic events in their children’s lives were a trigger for behavioural issues which made them at risk of becoming affected by gangs.

‘He hadn’t seen his father and contact was organised by the social worker but his father came in a prison van, I didn’t know that was going to happen and this had a really bad effect on him. (Parent 6).

‘If a child has negativity all through their growing up.......there had been domestic violence in the past’ (Parent 13).

‘Education as a predicing factor’
All children should be in education throughout their adolescent years, however for those that have a lack of attachment to education there is a higher likelihood criminality and becoming gang affected (Thornberry et al, 2003; Sprott et al, 2005). Education was viewed as a fundamental trigger point for their children and their association with gang members and criminality. Parents reflected that the change appeared to be dramatic and occurred over a short period of time.

‘he enjoyed studying and then he changed to another college (specialist educational provision) and the problems started’

(Parent 4)

‘It has only been a problem for 8 mths’ (parent 7)
Parents expressed that there was a history of behavioural issues which were initially highlighted at school. Behavioural issues are identified as a strong predictor of future gang membership (Farrington et al, 1995; Thronberry et al, 2003).

‘He got kicked out of mainstream school because he was disruptive and ended up in these units’

(parent 14)

‘This young man has learning difficulties and behavioural issues and went to a special needs school and he got himself into a bit of trouble’ (parent 5)

‘He does not go every day and he doesn’t want to go to school’ (Parent 1)

‘He’s not keen to go back to school’ (Parent 4)

‘He no go to college’ (Parent 7)

Parent expressed that a specific trigger was when their children were permanently excluded from mainstream schools and were placed in specialist educational units. These parents expressed a particularly negative view on these specialist educational units.

‘He was in mainstream school and he got expelled and they put him in a PRU one of those units. I think it’s the worst thing they have invented, they just go there and they don’t get any better, meet up with other kids and it gets worse. I was told that if he went through this (PRU) he could go back to mainstream school. If he was in mainstream school like he was in primary he would have a routine’. (Parent 1)

Another parent expressed the frustration with a school’s response to her child's additional needs.
He got angry at school, the school didn’t address it…. They washed their hands of him, they put him in a unit ………..He grow up with those children and I have been to the PRU and those children are rude, if you have negativity around you will become negative, if you have positivity around and people thriving and doing well, it’s all about the environment’ (Parent 6)

This parent further illustrated how difficult it was to protect her child from perceived negative influences.

‘A teacher pulled me aside and told me to keep him away from a boy as he was bad, but what can I do they were in the same school’ (parent 6)

One parent appeared unaware that the unit that her child attended was a specialist unit, which he would have been moved to due to their being identified issues. None of the parents expressed any knowledge that they could challenge the decision of placing their child within these educational placements.

‘When he went to that college (special educational unit) was when the problem started’

(parent 7)

*Cultural differences*

Parents expressed that they struggled with the differences with their cultural expectations for their children which did not align with the child’s expectations.

‘In this country is very different I would never speak to my mum like that’ (Parent 7)

‘Even if he married we would like to stay all together’ (Parent 4)
One father who was the primary carer of his children outlined how his experience of growing up was different from the expectations in the UK. This had resulted in a clash of parenting ideologies between him and safeguarding services.

‘They are not raised like we was………………I stopped my big boy because he came in with a £50 note and three mobile phones and a knife. I found it in his room and I lose it and say that I send for you for a better life and not take people’s phone ……………the next day police and social services came to the house, how can you blame me, what are you telling me, you give my kids the right to do what they want to do, the system makes you have to step back (Parent 5)

The negative perception on parts of the community was articulated by the child in relation to the media presentation about gangs and crime. It reflected how he felt his community were represented in the media.

‘It (Media) only shows all these black people doing this and black people doing that’ (Child 1)

The intervention

It was clear that many of the parents had very little clarity where one service started and another ended or which services any of the workers came from. Parents intermixed the terms ‘Probation’, ‘YOT’ and ‘social workers’ throughout their discussions. The terms that they used implied that the interventions they were receiving were all within a statutory framework. There was a lack of understanding about which elements of interventions were statutory or voluntary. This raises the issue of whether these families fully understood that they were not mandated to engage with many of these professionals. None of the parents called any of the professionals 'family worker/practitioners'.

It was clear that many of these families had numerous professionals working with their families’ simultaneously. It was understandable that it was unclear which professionals did what. This was particularly well illustrated when I arrived to undertake one interview and the mother (who
required a translator) initially had little idea who I was as she had 3 appointments that afternoon with different workers from different teams. Another family named two family support services working with her children, two YOS worker (one was a specialist worker), a therapist and a social worker. Multiple workers reduces the ability of families to build trusting, respectful relationships with practitioners which is a key component of family support interventions (Alexander, Pugh & Parson, 1998). Under these circumstances families are continuously required to repeat their life stories to different practitioners.

‘The intervention – what worked’

The general consensus was that the family interventions that they had received had been beneficial. I was able to decipher when they were specifically referring to the family intervention and not another services when they named the worker and the work they conducted. Parents were clear that the support was helpful but found it difficult to articulate exactly what the worker did which assisted them and their family. These parents were specifically receiving family focused interventions however they were of the opinion that the intervention was specifically for their children and appeared hesitant to state that they needed any help.

‘They need the help, not me’ (Parent 10)

‘My son needs help, I’m ok, my other children are ok’ (Parent 7)

‘Not me....... my son needs help’ (Parent 8)

‘I haven’t had anything to do with social workers in my life’ (parent 1)

The information relayed however indicated that they as parents most appreciated having someone who they and their child could talk to, and a professional that they had built a meaningful relationship with (Trevithick, 2005, 2011)

‘She (Family worker) actually got him to talk to her’ (parent 1)
'He can talk to someone........we came to know how he feels about things that we didn’t know, things that he was angry with us about’ (Parent 15)

‘I was very happy and they handled it well, they were very professional. You can’t expect miracles to happen and they can only do so much’ (Parent 4)

‘The help that I have got is good, they have tried to help him’ (parent 9)

‘They were there at the end of the phone’ (parent 6)

(Workers) ‘tried to explain wrong from right and I would say it worked........100% he got help’ (Parent 5)

Child 1 went on to explain how he perceived the support provided

‘They ask me what’s happening on road, they tell me what happening on road, before they came I was bad but now I have changed. They made me change the way I talk and act, I use to be on road 24/7 and get into trouble with drugs when my dad was at work, he realised I was getting into trouble (Child 1)

It is reported that there is a high level of gang affected boys, who reside within homes where their mothers are the sole carer (Reiboldt, 2001). In reference to this issue, one parent expressed that there were elements within the family which she felt could be more appropriately addressed by a professional. She spoke of this as a support and was not undermined by the workers input.

‘They have been really supportive can’t say anything bad, they have bent backwards to guide him. There is a big part of him that has heard what they are saying. Being a single parent
without a man around they (male workers) were who could sit down and talk to him and give him what I couldn’t’. (Parent 6)

‘Intervention – what could improve’

When questioned about what parents felt could be improved with the interventions, they desired more specific information from workers about the work that was being conducted in sessions with their children. The aim for more information was in order for them to be able to better assist their children. It did not appear that they mistrusted the practitioner but required more transparency and partnership. Parents required information in relation to their children to enable them to sustain the position as the decision making adult within their child’s lives and increases the level of partnership between practitioners and parent (Turnell, 1998).

‘I’m not sure what happens in the hour (that he is with the worker).....the only communication I receive is if he’s not on time or if he’s being rude’ (parent 1)

Lack of communication and information was found to be particularly prevalent when children were close to turning 18 years. These individuals were classed as adults but they were still living in the family home and their parents still felt that they had responsibility for their child’s welfare. This shows the difficulty for interventions that commence when children are 17 years old and the significant difference in service response when they reach 18 years old.

‘She’s very good but when my son turned 18 as a parent there was not much contact or information. As a parent, as a mother especially, I would like to know what happening so we can help him but when they reach 18 this stops’ (Parent 4)

Desistance is a gradual process and there is likely to be periods when offending reoccurs (Burnett, 2004). Many systemic family intervention models recommend that there are booster sessions available (Anderson et al, 2005). Parents expressed there should be a follow-up support. It was felt that there should also be activities provided for a longer duration and not
just when their child was receiving the interventions as there was a cost implication which
would hinder parents continuing to fund these activities.

‘When you deal with young person you can’t just deal with it all and then walk away. When
you do things with a young person and walk away they drift back. A lot of people need the
same help (the workers) should check every 2 months or 3 months and have a few meetings
to ensure that things are still ok’ (parent 5)

‘When young people have nothing to do, like gym for him to do in the afternoon or weekends……
to occupy their minds, (but) nothing is free’ (Parent 15)

‘Get them into activities’ (parent 12)

Parents had expressed that enforcement measures had been beneficial and reduced their
child’s association with other gang members and assisted them in engaging in core activities
such as education.

‘He sleeps and he does not go out..........he is on tag , maybe because of that he is staying at
home’ (Parent 1)

‘He has been complying with that tag, the judge said one more breach (of his court order) and
your spend a sentence in one of those youth offending places, which I really don’t want him to
go to’ (Parent 2)

‘School was a nightmare........so I am very happy with the education requirement (in his order)
as he knows that he has to attend education now or he will have to go back to court if he
doesn’t’. He’s given up on school.....that was a nightmare; he now has a single tutor’ (Parent 13)
However other children appeared to struggle with enforcement measures that they were subject to and a parent felt that due to her son’s age it was difficult for him to understand the gravity of his noncompliance.

‘Because he’s so young he kept breaching’ (Parent 11)

Another felt that their child’s non-compliance was related to the relationship they had with their worker and the interventions. They expressed that they felt that practitioners needed to improve engagement with children in order to increase compliance as escalating their child through the CJS was futile.

‘He doesn’t connect with the worker…………he has breached three times’ (Parent 3)

‘He finds it tedious…….. You’ve got to ask kids what they want to get them to engage’ (Parent 1)

‘It easier if you speak to the kids to find out what they want and what will make them engage rather than going to court all the time, it’s hard’ (parent 14)

‘The impact on parents and family’

Parents illustrated that their child’s involvement with gangs and the interventions they were required to conduct had a substantial impact on them (Pitts, 2007).

‘The whole thing has been very stressful’ (Parent 3)

‘I’m really depressed at the moment as he is in foster care. It is heart-breaking to have an empty house’ (Parent 6)

Parents expressed that they felt punished for their children’s actions and behaviours. They expressed that they felt powerless to ‘make’ there children comply but were consequently
penalised by services as they were unable to change their child’s behaviour. Increased parental supervision has been identified as a protective factor.

‘if (he) no go to school, they will fine me again...........I was taken to court before because he did not go to school and they fined me £100’ (Parent 1)

‘Because of his behaviour I have been put on this thing, a Parenting order’ (Parent 3)

‘When they are on these things, it’s like you are on these things too’. (Parent 13)

It was evident that their child’s behaviour had a wider impact for parents and affected areas such as their employment. Parents had left employment in order to be more present for their child and this had an effect both emotionally and financially for these families. These parents had assessed that a higher level of supervision was required to safeguard their child.

‘Give up work was the only thing I had left to do. I had to left work to come and pick him up from school when problem kick in and he loses it, it was quite difficult….. when people call him names, disability and things .................Me really want to work............. sometimes this is a gap in the help. He really doesn’t want me to pick him up but what is going on round in the area, I go pick him up’ (Parent 5)

‘I’ve taken time off work as I’m depressed and on antidepressants............I’m going to push myself back into work. I left work because he got stabbed and I thought I could save him from becoming something I don’t want him to become’ (Parent 6)

This parent further elaborated on how leaving work had affected her self-image

‘Your nobody at home, your somebody at work, everyone loves you, I don’t want to be sitting at home feeling like nothing. I want to get on with my life’ (parent 6)
The research has indicated that siblings are at risk of being affected by gangs if they have siblings who are already gang members (Farrington, 1998). This was not found to be the dominate position for the families that were interviewed. Only two families had siblings that were both identified as gang affected or in contact with the CJS.

‘There are no issues with his sisters’ (Parent 4)

(His older brother)’ is very good, he has good friends and made good life choices’ (Parent 6)

‘No issues with my other children, he is the only one who has a problem’ (parent 7)

Parents were very recriminating of themselves for their child’s behaviour, but felt torn between their different children’s needs. This was highlighted where this was having a negative impact due to their associations and behaviours. Not only was safety an issue for other family members but also the emotional impact of their sibling’s.

‘I know people think that I am a bad parent but he doesn’t listen and I have to think about my other child’ (Parent 10).

‘It’s like the family that going through the impact....... my daughter when he got stabbed she couldn’t get out of the door for a year because of the anxiety’ (Parent 6)

Safety and welfare of their other children was a high priority for parents. They felt that they had to balance the needs of one child against another. Moving from the area was seen as a key solution to reduce their child's association and would also safeguard their other children.

‘I just need to move, it is really important for me to move, as it’s not safe for me or my children’.

(Parent 9)
'Before I don’t want to move. I need to move area now, I don’t want to stay as I’m scared, my son is scared. Because of my other children at first I wanted to stay’ (Parent 7)

‘All I can think about is moving’ (Parent 11)

The child also illustrated how gang constrained his life and the fear that they instil.

‘I’m please being inside the house .... Stay in the house on my phone, play my games. Since that incident I stay in house, why should I take myself outside where my boy died the other day anything could happen. I rather stay in my house on my phone. I know not leaving the house (means I ) don’t get into trouble. Everyone is carrying knives I was standing looking at the flowers (at a memorial to a child who had been murdered) and a group staring at me and my sister. I don’t know what they were going to do, I just walked away. Because of the drugs everyone has knives’ (Child 1)

For some parents moving had the added complications of creating disruption to the family unit

‘They tried to find accommodation for him..... they wanted us to move from this area, but they could only find a place very far away out of London and I had to think of the other kids and my husband is not a well person and all his consultants, doctors everything is here , to move the whole family is difficult (Parent 4)

‘The future for my child’

All the parents had aspirations for their children and were clear that ensuring that their children were able to access Education, training or employment (ETE) was their key priority for their child. Parents wished to increase their child’s social bonds within their community (Sprott et al, 2005) Education, Training and employment is a strong protective factor for gang affected
children (Laub, & Sampson, 2001) and parents viewed this as the key vehicle for change for their child.

‘Education is really important’ (Parent 1)

‘He has something to keep him occupied, being young and energetic and all that free time and if you’re not using it will have an effect........... you have to be proactive to engage them is some sort of work’ (Parent 15)

‘He was in college before.... He wants to be an electrician but he has to get some sort of education’ (Parent 6)

‘Young people drift when they have nothing to ...... to occupy their minds. He has passed his level 1 and working to level 3 . We are looking for a college but most apprenticeships need a level 3 and he has been out of school for a long time’ (Parent 5)

This view that education was an important part of the process of distancing them from gang activity was also echoed by the child.

‘First a mainstream (school) I went but I couldn’t handle it. I (now) go to a college. It gives you responsibility where if you do something wrong this is your consequence. Makes me think as a young man going to college, makes you think you have something to look forward to , what’s good for life, its no good to go to prison, come out, go in, come out , you need to break the cycle’ (Child 1).

There appeared to be a tension for parents between ensuring that their children received education against what they perceived to be educational establishments which increased their child’s risks.
This chapter outlined the challenges that parents experience when their children are gang affected. It has also provided an insight into their experience of receiving family support intervention both in terms of the benefits and also the areas in which they feel that it could be improved.

In summary the majority of the parents acknowledged that there was an issue regarding their children being affected by gangs in some form. It was however evident that parents were not comfortable or felt it justified that their children were categorised or ‘labelled’ by professionals as gang members. Parents clearly articulated that both peers and education were integrally related to the presenting issues in their child’s lives. These parents also articulated that they has found the family focused interventions beneficial but had been reticent to acknowledge that this intervention specifically addressed their needs as well as the needs of their children. It was felt that the intervention could be improved if there was more communication with parents regarding the sessions that practitioners undertook with their children and that booster sessions should be available. The impact on the whole family was clearly presented by parents and their belief that access to appropriate ETE was imperative to assist their child in distancing themselves from negative peer groups. The chapter outlines the importance of obtaining the voice of service users as practitioners are outside observers to families’ lives.
Chapter 6

Conclusion and Discussion

The initial chapters of this thesis outline the theoretical framework relating to gang structure, function and available interventions to address gang issues. There was a particular focus on the factors that effect and impact children who are identified as gang affected and their families. The two preceding chapters reviewed both the quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a better insight into the gang phenomena. The triangulation of this data provided the opportunity to assess this issue not only from an organisational perspective through analysis of offending data of this group but also from the perspective of parents. These findings are now discussed in this chapter, and reviewed in terms of their contribution to extending knowledge in the field of gang research. It also includes the practice implications for those who work with gang affected children and their families.

Discussion

This research aimed to study gang affected children across two London boroughs. The particular focus of the study was on the effectiveness of interventions which directly addresses the factors that affect children’s criminal activity. The main research objective was to assess whether children who received family focused interventions would have more favourable outcomes in relation offending than those who had received individualised child focused interventions which did not specifically involve members of their family.

This study went on to interview parents who had received family focused interventions in order to obtain a better understanding of their experiences. This was in relation to their experience of being categorised as a parent of a child who has been identified by professionals as a gang member and also their views of receiving family focused interventions. Parents during this process were invited to provide feedback on whether they viewed any benefits from this intervention and whether there were any elements that they felt could be improved or were unhelpful.
This discussion will discuss the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative elements of this research. It will also review the findings in terms of previous studies and the implications of these findings for both theory and practice within the Youth Justice sphere. The discussion will conclude with identifying and acknowledging the limitations of the study. It will provide direction for where further research can assist in the advancement and development in this area of study.

**Characteristics of gang identified children**

The findings of this research supported previous studies in relations to some of the key identified characteristics of gang affected children. The age of commencing offending by this group was similar to that identified in other studies (Huff 1996, 1998; Van Winkle, 1996; Sharp, et al 2006). The peak age fell between 15 – 16 years old. This supported the assertion that interventions should be focused on this age range. By addressing the issues of this group at the earliest point it assists in reducing the likelihood of associations and criminal offending becoming entrenched. It is accepted that the groups of children included in the study were by virtue of being in contact with YOTs already embedded in the CJS. It could be argued that by this point numerous opportunities have already been missed to provide appropriate support so that these children do not receive criminal convictions. The behaviours of concern exhibited by these children are likely to have been present way before this point Craig (2002). There appears to be a dilemma for professionals, as there is a hesitation to classify children gang members due to negative labelling issues until they have received a criminal justice outcome. It could be argued that there should be less emphasis on labelling this a gang issue and more importance placed on addressing the early indicators of risks as interventions should always view them as children first and offenders second (Case & Haines, 2015). Access to interventions should not be predicated on a child entering the CJS, as being known to enforcement services makes these children more likely to be targeted (McAra & McVie, 2007; Wiley & Esbensen, 2013).
Like other gang studies, the overwhelming majority of the children identified were male, (Farrington et al 1973, 1998; Thornberry, 2003; Weerman et al, 2015). This further suggests that the professional response to the gang issue for male and female children continues to be different. There is evidence that girls are present within gangs (Valdez et al, 2009; Archer & Grascia, 2006; NCA, 2017) but they are reported primarily as victims of gangs (Firmin, 2010; Peterson, 2010) and address via safeguarding routes, whereas boys appear to be viewed as offenders and dealt with via criminal justice methods. These findings suggest that there is a need for professionals and agencies to address the needs of male and female children affected by gangs equitably.

Consistent with previous research studies these male children predominately came from ethnic minority backgrounds (Valdez et al 2000, 2005). The study was undertaken in two boroughs which have diverse communities, but even when this was taken into account black boys were still disproportionately represented in the data. There is a fundamental issue which consistently filtrated through the current and previous studies regarding the identification of gang affected children. The lack of a clear definition for gang members hinders the process of intervention as there is a need to ensure that inappropriate interventions are not being provided to children as this can have long-term detrimental affects (Dishion, 1996). Munro (2011) states that practitioners require space to utilise their professional expertise and knowledge when assessing children. In order for practitioners to be confident in the assessments that they undertake, they require a clear framework which is consistently agreed as the position by the majority of professionals who work within the field. This is not the case for gangs as there is a lack of clarity on the definition of gangs and also gang members. There has been a tendency for professionals and practitioners to define these phenomena by their own belief systems on what is and isn’t a gang or gang member (Crew, 1997). Defining gang membership has included previous offences, associations and police intelligence (Fritsch et al, 1999; London Council, 2014). A contentious question is whether ethnicity and gender in conjunction to the other factors are unconsciously included in practitioners belief system and decision making. There needs to be an open debate regarding whether children of other
ethnicities who commit similar offences are deemed solely ‘offenders’ whereas black boys are categorised as ‘gang members’. It was clear through parents feedback that being labelled a gang member was viewed considerably more deviant than being solely an offender.

The outcome for those that are identified as gang members is significant as they are more likely to be targeted by enforcement agencies (Fritsch et al., 1999; Kennedy, 2009; Ralph et al. 2009) and more likely to have higher contact with the CJS (McAra & McVie, 2007). This does not always result in a criminal justice disposal but generates further mistrust of those within positions of power (Lammy, 2017). Youth Justice Practitioners have the onerous responsibility of being an integral part of the subsystem that gang affected children function within. Practitioners are not passive participants to this process (Becvar and Becvar, 2017) and the impact of their assessments will have immediate and long-term consequences on these children. Individuals are not static beings but the labels and classification often follow the individual even when the label is no longer relevant. This is evident in relation to the impact of criminal records has on individuals ability to access employment. This is particularly concerning if criminal records have been obtained through disposals such as gang injunctions which have not been based on a specific offences but more on agencies perception of gang affiliation and predication of possible future criminality.

There has been much documented on the negative outcomes of labelling children (Al-Talib & Griffin, 1994, Becker, 1974). There continues to be a debate on the benefits and drawbacks of classifications of children as offenders or non-offenders, gang member or victim of gangs (Firmin, 2010, Williams 2015). This preoccupation appears to merely provide justification on whether it is a punitive or welfare response and detracts from the essential point that these are children with additional needs. These classifications are required in order for organisational systems to function, as it enables services to retain their individual expertise. These labels do not fully account for the complexities of individuals and tend to focus on one element to the exclusion of others. The power of these labels should not be underestimated as they are ‘highly
limited and problematic descriptors of what the world is and how we are in the world’ (Bowker and Star, 2000:326).

McGhee and Waterhouse (2002) aptly stated that the ‘classification of children as offenders and non-offenders risk that we stop seeing the individual child and their personal circumstances. These terms assist services in creating demarcation between those that require support and those that require punishment. Bureaucratically and operationally these categorisations provide simpler frameworks however it does little to assist with providing interventions which effectively address both public protection and safeguarding needs for vulnerable children (McGhee & Waterhouse 2002:273).

The inconsistent categorisation of gang members hinders the process of measuring this issue and also reduces confidence that the term is being appropriately placed on children. There is no consistent method of identification for gang membership and the process of identification is a subjective assessment by practitioners. In both research areas classification was informed by police intel but this also was not based on standardised methodology. Some of the factors included in the identification were associations with other gang members (Aldridge, 2011). This was particularly relevant when taking into consideration parents views on their children’s associations. Parents confirmed that friendship groups (which were likely to be defined as gang associates by practitioners and agencies) were often formed within special educational units which their children attended. These children appeared to have become labelled as gang members not only in relation to the behaviours that they were exhibiting but additionally on the friendship groups that they had developed in their school. Parents expressed the view that their children attending a specialist educational unit had placed then in an environment with other children who required additional support for their behavioural issues. This supported the view that this increases their offending and association with pro-criminal peers rather than increase desistance (Gatti et al, 2005)
**Offending**

YOTs are the key interventionist for children that are found guilty of committing offences. The Youth Justice Board provides a standardised framework for the work undertaken within YOTs (Youth Justice Board, 2013). There are still major variances in the interventions and practices implemented in different YOTs. This study found a reduction in the offending rate for both groups of children post gang identification. This suggests that the interventions provided by YOTs are effectively reducing the offending rate whether they are family focused or individualised interventions. This was particularly evident in relation to violent offences; there was a reduction in the level of violent offences within both groups. These findings are promising as it supports the assertion that YOTs are implementing interventions which are achieving positive outcomes for children irrelevant of the model implemented.

It was found that there was also a high level of violent crimes conducted by this cohort of children. Violence is a key component of gang activity (Decker, 1996). This study like other research was unable to disaggregate whether these violent offences were primarily gang motivated or committed for unrelated issues. As outlined in Chapter 1 violent crime has been documented as a key factor for gang members but it should not be assumed that this is only specific to gang affected children. The majority of offences that children subject to YOT Interventions relates to violent offences (Youth Justice Board, 2016). Violence within these gangs has been instrumental in facilitating their illegal drug activity (Howell et al, 1999; Moore, 1990; NCA, 2016, 2017). It is suggested that children have become key in the distribution of illegal drugs on behalf of adult gang members (National Crime Agency, 2016, 2017). This study did not identify drugs to be a consistent factor in the children’s offending history in either research sites.

**Impact of Family Focused Intervention**

The quantitative element of the study established that there was significant differences in the outcomes for children who had received the family focused interventions particularly in relation to the level of offences. Families when supported can be a strong protective factor for gang
affected children (Kliewer et al, 1998; Taylor et al, 2007). Systemically working with families enables them to implement their own strategies to protect their children. Many children who are identified as gang affected are travelling through adolescence on their journey to adulthood. As with many children this is a period of time when children demand increased independence (Cairns and Cairns, 1991) but still require guidance and support from their family unit.

Although parents were specifically engaged with family focused interventions they did not acknowledge that the intervention was equally directed at all members of the family. They were clear to state that the issues that they were experiencing was not in relation to their parenting but rather that these issues were related to wider context and subsystems in which their family functioned (Minuchin, 1974). Working with families in a systemic way reduces the need to focus blame on any particular family member (White, 2006) however parental responses in the interviews indicated that there is still a measure of blame associated to the parent for the behaviours of their child (Aldridge et al, 2011) Parents appeared to want to distance themselves from this blame. Building respectful and trusting relationships during the intervention is a key factor for successful outcomes (Alexander, 2006). An implication of this finding for professional practice is the need to acknowledge the perceptions that are projected onto these families. In order to retain continued engagement by these families there is a need to reduce the level of shame and alienation these parents encounter as a consequence of having their child categorised as a gang member. Both parents and children need to feel part of communities and not be isolated by labels, as establishing positive social bonds increases the likelihood of desistance (Sprott et al, 2005).

The interventions provided to these families were based on 2 specific categories; that these children had committed an offence and they were also identified as gang members by the YOT. Parents were able to accept the criminal justice outcome and this could have been in relation to the standardised and systematic processes of the YJS. Parents however did not identify nor acknowledge that their children were gang members. Parents conceded that their children
were affected by gangs and principally viewed children as victims of gangs. Parents perceived their children as victims of crime within the community, the education system, and gang exploitation. They also perceived other children as victims of their circumstances and as vulnerable children. There was a differentiation between peers that parents were aware of and ‘unknown adult gang members’ who their children associated with. Parents reported that their children had a high level of missing episodes whilst in the company of these adults and perceived them as predatory. Gang affected children often go missing when they are exploited by gang members (NCA, 2016). These findings supported the view that children vulnerabilities should primarily be dealt with as a safeguarding issue as oppose to a gang issue. Policies and legislation stipulate that the safeguarding of children should always be paramount (Department of Education, 2015; Children’s Act, 1989,2004).

Peer associations were defined by parents as either friendships which were created through long established relationships. In the majority these were created whilst their children were in education. Parents viewed their child’s peer relationships not as gang membership but more as a friendship group who they socialise with and whom they felt safe with (Garot, 2007). It is understandable that most children build their friendship groups through contact in educational establishments such as schools. Parents reported this to be the same for their gang affected children. The primary difference for this group of children was they were socialising and developing friendship groups with other children who exhibited behavioural problems.

This resulted in increasing children's likelihood of gravitating towards children with similar behavioural traits and subsequently reinforcing the problematic behaviours (Gatti et al, 2005). It also reduced their interaction with pro-social peer groups who could provide alternative views (Bender & Losel, 1997). Disruptive behaviour by these children within mainstream schools appears to commence a journey which culminates in their placement at specialist educational units where the dominate behaviour is delinquent and defiant. Schools that do not implement effective strategies to ensure that children feel safe subsequently become vulnerable breeding ground for gang recruitment and formations (Valdez et al, 2013). This
indicates that policy and practice should consider the implications for reducing the level of exclusions from mainstream schools for these children.

It would be inappropriate to present assumptions on specialist educational establishments as this study did not investigate the impact of these units. It would be unjustifiable to state that the services that are provided are either inadequate or deficient. This research does direct towards a need to ensure that educational establishments are safe environments where older gang members do not view them as an opportunity to recruit children who already have been assessed to have additional needs. There is an intrinsic conflict between the needs of the majority of children and those children with additional educational needs. Services which work with children aim to improve the outcomes for all children. This is a complex process which involves differing priorities for the variety of services that work with children; be that in the Youth Justice System, Education or Safeguarding services. Agencies will blind others services with science in order to achieve their own priorities (Ellis et al, 2007). These interagency conflicts should not be defined away, avoided or circumvented (Crawford & Jones, 1995) as without open discussion the status quo is retained and the outcome for some children will remain poor.

Children need to have social bonds in society (Sampson & Laub, 1993, 2001) such as schools and education. Schools are a positive locus of socialisation for children and an engagement with education is a protective factor for both children who offend and are identified as gang affected (Crosnoe et al, 2002). Children need to be provided the opportunity to be in positive supportive environments, where they experience an alternative to the negative behaviours that they may experience within their wider communities and sometimes within their homes. It is noted that children within positive environments rate of offending quickly retreats to levels consistent with children who never joined a gang (Tita, 2007). Schools provide children with access to additional positive factors, such as extra-curriculum activities which many school provide free of charge for the children that attend. Parents noted that they felt there children had little access to constructive activities and this was influenced by the cost of these activities. This
reflected that those who remain outside of mainstream provisions are also excluded from other wider social networks. There is no magic bullets for combating gangs (Howell et al, 2005), what is required is a collective response from all those that are significant in a child's life. This includes establishments which should increase their social bonds such as schools and employment (Sampson & Laud, 1990). Parents articulated that education and employment were fundamental factors in sustaining their child’s desistance.

As services that aim to improve the outcomes for children it requires us to be brave enough to learn through our experiences and further scrutinise and evaluate the services that we provide. It is through this process of experience that new knowledge is uncovered (Charmaz, 1995) and from the challenges we discover we are provided with the opportunity to implement change. Children with additional needs often have a complex web of agencies that work with them and their families. These include those which are delivered on a voluntary base as preventative measures and those working within a statutory framework, where the work is mandated via courts or legislation. Families due to their assessed needs may be working with both voluntary and statutory services simultaneously. Multiple services are confusing enough for the practitioners that are part of these systems. It is understandable that families are confused by the number of professionals and agencies working with their family and are unclear which remit each one covers. The parents interviewed were not clear about agency or team remits but could clearly name the practitioners who they had the most contact with and found to be beneficial. Teams and titles appeared insignificant for families, but rather were measured on the quality of the interaction (Fadden, 1997). This finding suggests that services should reduce the number of practitioners that work with families at any one point.

The sense of helplessness that some parents experience was tangible in their interviews. They perceived that they were unable to safeguard their children from the perceived risks outside of their homes. Gangs thrive in areas where there are high levels of deprivation (Toby, 1957; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Bursil & Grasmick, 1993) and this coincides with parent’s financial inability to leave these communities. These families have less autonomy (Currie, 1985) and the
wider context of their lives influences their choices. The study however reflected that parents made significant changes with factors that they had the power to alter. This was particularly evident in relation to parents giving up employment in order to safeguard their children. Parental supervision has been identified as a key protective factor for children affected by gangs (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Graham & Bowling 1995; Farrington et al, 2016). The parents within this study had an acute awareness of this factor. These choices were made even when this would have a negative impact on the family as a whole. In these instances parents were illustrating that they possessed the ability to be morphogenesis in order to modify in response to outside stimulus (Vigil, 1988).

The family is the most consistent element within these children lives and these family units will be present way beyond the interventions of Children Services. Professionals have a tendency to become quasi parents but with none of the longitudinal reality of a real family relationship (Hallsworth and Young, 2008). This is particularly pertinent as many YOTs will cease contact with parents as soon as the child’s Court Order finishes. The reality for these families is the issues do not cease in line with service remits. Family interventions have been found to have longer sustained outcomes than interventions that are provided solely to the child (Vostanis & Anderson, 2006). It is paramount that those that will sustain long-term behavioural change have been provided with the tools to undertake this role and in most instances this will be family members.

Parents also felt that there should be continued support for their children and this was in line with many systemic models which emphasise the importance of ‘top up sessions’ to ensure the learning is sustained (Henggeler et al, 1992). Desistance is recognised to be a journey as the individual creates new social bonds (Sampson & Laud, 1990; Bottoms, 2006) and self-identity (Laub & Sampson, 2001) and families may require additional support during this transition. There is a need not to measure families by predefined standards but more to appreciate that if families are able to sustain their family systems without specialist intervention and professionals input then significant distance has been travelled. There should not be a pursuit
of perfection as few families would be confident to state this as their reality. It is more achievable to accept Cecchin's (1987) view that intervention is no longer required, when families cure itself of the idea of being sick and practitioners cure themselves of the idea of them being useful. The assessment and intervention framework that YOTs work within must be attentive to the practitioner’s assessment and description of the identified issues. There should be an acknowledgement that they are presenting a segmented definition of the individual due to their own position within the system. It should not be dismissed that this is just a case of semantics as it influences how the practitioner views their client. Keith & Whittaker (1985) points out that the greatest failure in practice is in disregarding our integrity and failing to take responsibility for our actions.

Parents articulate perceptions which are based in their own reality and where they position themselves within suprasystems. Parents in the interviews externalised the problems (White, 2006) and were able to better discuss and address the problems when the focus was not directed as a deficiency in their parenting capacity. Gang activity primarily creates risks outside of the family home and parents concurred with this position. It was evident that families have endured negative life experiences such as family breakdown, domestic abuse and mental health issues which they acknowledged had an impact on their child’s behavioural issues. Parents were willing to address this through the interventions. It was also noted that parents did not feel that the response from services had been early enough or adequate. Children’s resilience to life experiences ‘may be strongly influenced by patterns of interpersonal relationships (Rutter, 1999:119). Many families face adversities and will require additional support from agencies to build sufficient resilience in order to protect their children from outside influences.

Systemic interventions which purport outcomes for families must take into account the organisational structures that these practitioners work within. Providing family support in a voluntary format should not be measured in the same way as those interventions which are provided within a statutory mandated framework, such as within YOTs. The systemic model suggests that this work needs to be conducted when all family members agree to participate
(Cunningham and Henggeler, 1999). Parents however reported that enforcement strategies such as electronic monitoring and educational requirements assisted them in distancing their children from other gang members. The findings of this research indicate that having agreement from the whole family was not always required and that change can be achieved when those with the 'hierarchies' role in the system (parents) are actively modifying the dynamics within the family unit.

Limitations of the study
A limitation of the study was using YOTs data as this was highly dependent on the consistency of the practitioner recordings on the system and also there assessment of what constituted a gang member. There were inconsistencies in the ways that different practitioners and YOTs recorded information. This was evident in the recording of ethnicity and date of gang identification; this reduced confidence in the overall measurements obtained. In order to fully assess the impact of interventions it requires a level of consistency in the method of recording. This uncovered a more fundamental issue in the evaluation of the interventions, as it can be assumed not only were there inconsistencies in recordings but additionally they may have been inconsistency in delivery of these interventions. In order to provide effective interventions practitioners are required to be highly skilled at engagement (Fadden, 1997). This was not an area factored into the analysis but it may reasonably be assumed that the outcomes for children are affected by practitioner competency in delivering interventions.

The reoffending rate was measured over a four year period, which is a significant time period for children’s development. The study does not assert to reflect whether maturation (Rutherford, 1985) and social bonds (Sampson & Laub, 1993) or changes in self-identity (Maruna, 2001) which would have part of the family interventions delivered were able to maintain desistance into adulthood. Follow-up analysis of the cohort would be able to establish whether there had been long term desistance. The interviews provided a valuable insight into the experiences of parents whose children are gang affected. These parents due to the numbers interviewed could not be considered representative of all parents whose children...
have been identified as gang affected. The group was more reflective of parents who were willing and confident enough to discuss their families’ difficulties with a complete stranger.

**Contribution to knowledge and Future research**

There has been extensive research into the area of gangs, however to date there has not been a consensus on key areas such as the definition of gangs or a consistent measurement of gang activity. This research suggests that there is a need to place clear demarcation when referring to children who are affected by gangs. Adult and children research into this area should not be amalgamated as the needs and intervention requirements for these two groups are distinct. When adult research findings are associated with children it neglects to take into account that children are still in the process of development and they are not the ‘finished article’ but are vessels of opportunities for change. When adult theories are joined to child’s outcomes it fails to consider their vulnerabilities and focuses on the punitive criminal justice responses. As the classification of gang membership is subjective there is a need to acknowledge that the disparities in the makeup of this group are based in practitioner’s beliefs on gangs. These beliefs appear to influence the inclusion and exclusion of some children; this was evident in regards to ethnicity and gender. The findings have also established that family focused interventions can have favourable outcomes even when some members of the family are mandated to participate. This is an alternative view to those previously presented in the research. It was noted that individualised interventions also resulted in a reduction for this group of children.

This research was specifically focused on informing practice. The implication for practice particularly surrounded the impact of classification children as gang members. The findings suggest that agencies should review their practices in relation to classifying children gang members. The benefits of classifying children gang members were unclear, as parents perceived that this further disadvantaged their child. These children are exploited by older gang members and therefore this should be viewed as a safeguarding issue. Parents do not accept the classification and labelling of their child and this could therefore hinder their engagement
with services. The findings suggest that family focuses intervention can assist in reducing the level of offending by gang affected children. It would seem advisable that family intervention training is more widely available to practitioners who work with children who are gang affected. Gang membership includes individual, family and contextual factors and there is a need for the intervention to take this into account.

An area for future development would be to review the difference in the intervention outcomes between practitioners as the intervention model may be effective but the delivery inconsistent. This would establish whether the most important factor is the model of intervention or the practitioner's competency. This study identified the disproportionate numbers of black boys that were identified as gang members by YOT practitioners. There is a need to further understand this phenomenon in light of the already disproportionate number of Black boys in the CJS. The Lammy Report (2017) highlighted that this was due to the different responses that Black boys received from the CJS than their white counterparts. Lammy (2017) noted that black boys were not appropriately assessed and had unmet needs. There is a need to conduct in-depth case reviews to understand the journey that these gang affected children take through the CJS. This will assist our understanding of whether the gang involvement commenced at the point of being excluded from mainstream provisions and entering specialist educational units or at the point of their total disengagement with education. Based on the findings within this study, in relation to practice, it is recommended that YOT’s should incorporate the following:

- That practitioners should re-examine how and why particular children are classified as gang members to ensure that racial and gender bias is not underpinning the decision making.
- That additional safeguards are implemented for children who attend alternative educational placement to ensure that their attendance at these placements does not become an additional risk factor for children who are already assessed as vulnerable.
- That family interventions should be embedded across services with children that are identified as at risk of being gang affected. Family intervention works alongside the model of ‘children first, offender second’ Case and Haines (2014) in terms of acknowledging that it
is adults (not children) who are responsible for facilitating children’s access and capacity to realise their entitlement and rights.

- That the voice and concerns of parent/carers should be central to the intervention provided as they are likely to be the long term consistent presence in these children’s lives.
- There is a tendency to utilise enforcement measures to address gang activity. There is a need to clearly identify and understand the needs of children and young people as children and not use adult centric models of enforcement to achieve behaviour change. Such models fail to recognise the developmental process which include heightened vulnerability by virtue of age, immaturity and powerlessness (Case and Haines, 2014).

**Conclusion**

Interventions should take into considerations all the elements that influence a child’s commencement and sustained attachment to gangs and the associated criminality. Families are the consistent factor in children’s lives and this should be acknowledged by services and practitioners. The context of these children’s lives should not minimise or ignore that they encounter barriers that are outside of their control, which reduces their life chances. This includes where they live, go to school, their gender, and their ethnicity and subsequently how professionals categorise them. Furlong and Cartmel (1997), highlights that class, race and gender affects the life course of children. By honestly facing these barriers practitioners can work in partnership with families and the wider systems to enable children to become more resilient.

This research presents some promising finding in relation to gang interventions delivered in YOTs as both intervention types reduced offending levels. The need to implement effective interventions as the risks for these children could not be graver. Within the London area, children are being exploited by criminal networks to conduct criminal activities (National Crime Agency, 2017) and they are becoming criminalised by the YJS. Violence and intimidation is being perpetrated on these children in order to ensure that they are too afraid to leave these gangs (Padilla, 1992). Ultimately these children are at risk of being murdered or becoming the perpetrators of murder whilst involved in this gang constructed system.
The families of these children feel disempowered by external influences from often unknown individuals who create divisions within their family units. Parents strongly repute the assertion that their children are gang members and should retain the same categorisation as those that they deem exploit their children. The very uncomfortable reality is that this issue is disproportionately affecting a specific community. In the last year of conducting this research the tragic consequences of this issue was glaringly evident. Three children had died in the research areas from what were identified as gang related murders and the effects on families, communities, practitioners and organisations are devastating.

The evidence emphasises that communities and professionals need to employ multiple strategies in order to address the gang issue (Howell, 2010). The finding suggests that it is beneficial to view the gang issue systemically. This includes an understanding that strategies should work in tandem to strengthen family units and reduce risk factors both in the home and wider community. The benefit of family focused interventions is it is strength based and centres the solution within the family units. There needs to be a collaborative approach where all participants inclusive of professional and organisations understand their impact as ‘We all become blinded to the systemic nature of being a human being, even though we are always part of something else, we somehow forget it’ (Rivette and Street 2009:11). No one intervention should profess to solve all the ills in society but the systems approach enables family units to become more resilient to the realities of the many inequalities within their lives.
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Appendix A: Invite Letter

Study Title: **Family Partnership Intervention and Gangs**

REC Ref No: .................................................................

Dear (Inset Name)

Your Family Partnership worker will discuss the content of this letter with you as I will only be given your details if you agree to be contacted. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study into Gangs and Family Intervention,

I am a Professional Doctorate student at Portsmouth University and I am investigating whether providing family support helps reduce young people’s involvement in gangs.

I am aware that you have been working with the Family Partnership Team and this is the reason I would like to interview you.

This research is voluntary, which means that you don’t have to take part and can withdraw from the research right up to the time that I start to analysis the data.

To help you to make the decision on whether to be involved in the research I have attached an information sheet and there is also a consent form for you to sign.

If you would consider being involved in this research please let your Family Partnership worker know and then we can arrange a suitable time and place to carry out the interview.

If you have any questions about the research I can be contacted on -------------------

Thank you for taking the time to consider taking part in this research

Regards

Ellanora Clarke (Researcher)
Appendix B: Consent Letter

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 1st July about the study. I have had the chance to think about the information, ask questions and have received suitable answers.

2. I understand that my taking part in this research is voluntary and that I am free to pull out at any time without giving any reason, up to the point the before the information and data is analysed.

3. I understand that in order to better understand your family, information will also be gathered from the Family Partnership Team, this information will only be collected if you have provided consent.

4. I understand that data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from Portsmouth University or from regulatory authorities. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.

5. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent and that the Researcher will also keep a copy for the file.

6. I agree to my interview being audio recorded

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

8. I understand that the researcher will keep my personal information confidential however I am aware that if the researcher becomes aware that I or anyone may be or come to harm that the researcher has a duty to share this information with the appropriate services.

Name of Participant: Date: Signature:

Name of parent/carer (if applicable): Date Signature:

Name of Person taking consent: Date: Signature:
Appendix C: Participant Information

Ellanora Clarke (Researcher) email icj70743@myport.ac.uk
Dr Nathan Hall (Supervisor)
Institute of Criminal Justice Studies
University of Portsmouth, St. George's Building 141 High Street Portsmouth
PO1 2HY Tel: 023 9284 3973

Study Title: Does Family Intervention help reduce gang affiliation

REC Ref No: .................................................................

I am a Professional Doctorate student and as part of my course I am required to undertake a piece of research. I would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what your involvement will be. Please talk to others about the study if you wish and ask us questions if there is anything that is not clear.

What is the reason for the study?
This study is to see whether the support that families are given by the Family Partnership Team helps young people reduce being involved in gangs.

Why have I been invited?
Families who have been working with the Family Partnership Team have been invited to take part in this research.

Do I have to take part?
Taking part in this research is voluntary and it is up to you whether you wish to take part. When you have heard all the information about this research, if you decided to take part there will be a consent form for you to sign. If you decide not to take part it will not affect the service you receive from the Family Partnership Team; it will continue as usual.

What will happen if I take part?
You will be interviewed and this interview will be recorded. This interview will take place at a time and place that is suitable for you. This interview will include just you or you can choice to include other family members, assuming that both you and they are happy to join the interview. The interview will take about 45 minutes. In order to understand your family, information about the services/professionals you have had contact with will also be gathered from the Family Partnership Team, this information will only be collected if you are happy for this to happen and you will need to sign consent to let us know this.

Expenses
If you need transport to get to the interview we will pay this cost.

What will I have to do?
You will need to take part in a recorded interview.
What are the possible benefits of taking part?
The benefit of taking part in the research is it could help to improve services and help us to have a better understanding of how to support families.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
The information that you provide in the interviews will be kept confidential, your name will not be used in the end report. If you join the study, it is possible that some of the data collected will be looked at by authorised persons to check that the study is being carried out correctly. These people will also have a duty of confidentiality to you. Any information relating to you will be stored securely and won’t have your name attached to it but a code. After completion of the report, only information without names will be kept. Your information will be kept confidential however if the research becomes aware that you or another person is at risk of harm them this information will be passed onto the appropriate services/professionals.

What will happen if I don’t want to carry on with the study?
If you decided to stop being involved in the research that is fine, and you can withdraw from the interview as any point, however your information can only be removed before analysing the data has started.

What if there is a problem?
If you are not happy with anything in the research you can contact me on the details above or if you are still unhappy then you can contact the research supervisor and we will do our best to answer your questions. If you are still unhappy and wish to make a complaint, you can do this contact Phil Clement (Department Head) or Samantha Hill (complaints Officer) on (0)23 9284 3642

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of research will be placed into a report, your name and personal details will not be included within the report/publication.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research is sponsored by the University of Portsmouth.

Who has reviewed the study?
Research in the University of Portsmouth is looked at by independent group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.’

What if I want to discuss anything after the interview?
If you want to talk to someone after the interview about issues in the interview, please contact your Family Partnership Worker

I would like to thank you for considering taking part in this research and reading this information which you can keep whether you decided to take part in the research or not. If you do decided to take part you will need to sign a consent form.
Appendix D: Interview schedule

Family Semi structured interview

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Employment status:
  - Employed full time part time
  - Student
- Partnership status (married/partner/single)
- Number of Children
- Age of children
- How many live at home
- Which area do you live in
- Occupation status

1. When did you become aware that he/she was involved in gangs?
2. What was your first contact with the Family Partnership Team?
3. Has his/her involvement in gangs affected the other members of the family and if so how?
4. Have you received any other support before the Family Partnership Team made contact with you?
5. Were you aware how your child was identified by the Family Partnership Team?
6. What support have you received from the family Partnership?
7. How did you feel about the police being involved in the support?
8. What do you feel has been the most helpful pieces of support you have received?
9. Is there anything that you would change about the support that you received?
10. Have you found any differences with your children since the Family Partnership team has been involved?
11. How long has the family partnership team been working with your family?
12. Has the support provided by the Family Partnership team finished?
13. If yes, did you feel it was the right time for the support to end?
14. Do you feel that (young person’s name) has reduced their association with gang members?
15. Have they been involved in the criminal justice systems?
16. If so was the offence gang related?
17. Do many of the gang members live locally?
18. Have any members of your family had contact with any of the following service?
19. In the last 6mths
   - Social services details
   - Police (details)
   - Anti-social behaviour team via housing
   - Youth Offending Service
   - Probation
   - A&E in gang related injuries
   - Any other services
20. Please let me know if there is anything else you would like to mention about being involved with the Family Partnership Team.
Appendix E: Ethics

FORM UPR16
Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook for more information)

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information

Student ID: 4126150

PGRS Name: Ellanora Clarke

Department: IGJ

Start Date: November 2013

First Supervisor: Nathan Hall

Study Mode and Route: Full-time

Title of Thesis: Gang Affected Children: A Study Of Gang Affected Children And Family Support Interventions

Thesis Word Count: 50076

(excluding ancillary data)

if you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University’s Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:
(if you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee report or the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research)

a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?

YES □

NO □

b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?

YES □

NO □

c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?

YES □

NO □

d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?

YES □

NO □

e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?

YES □

NO □

Candidate Statement:

I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)

Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC): 12/13/32

If you have not submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered ‘No’ to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:

Signed (PGRS): Ellanora Clarke

Date: February 2018
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