

# Working with female offenders in care: The perspectives of practitioners from youth offending teams.

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
December 2019

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# Abstract

There have been significant concerns about the rates of offending among young people in care, highlighted by the Laming review (2016). However, there is an absence of evidence on how this vulnerable group of young offenders are supported, especially young women in care. This thesis reports on a qualitative study which explores youth offending professionals' experience of working with female offenders who are in care and fills a significant gap in the literature in relation to specific gendered approaches in this area of contemporary youth offending practice.

The study was conducted in three local authorities, using semi-structured interviews with 20 youth offending practitioners from varied professional backgrounds. The experiences and perceptions explored in these interviews are analyzed using thematic methods to provide rich insights into frontline youth offending practice with young female offenders from care.

The findings suggest that practice with this group of young women is distinctive in prioritizing complex welfare needs related to their trauma histories as a route to addressing offending. This is managed in practice through developing strong and supportive relationships, which are a foundation to further work. Because of this relationship, youth offending practitioners often position themselves as the primary professional addressing the welfare needs of the young women in care, which has implications for inter-agency working.

This research argues that an explicit trauma informed approach would helpfully reframe youth offending practice and allow practitioners to navigate the inherent tension in the care and control dichotomy, creating relationships that are containing, predictable and safe for young women in care with histories of trauma. This approach to practice needs to be intersectional so that experiences of minority groups such as BAME young people do not get lost. Taking a trauma informed approach will rely on practitioners across the youth justice system accessing appropriate training and support.

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# Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable insight and guidance provided by my supervisory team over the past four years; Professor Gillian Schofield, Doctor Birgit Larsson and Doctor Jeanette Cossar. I would especially like to thank Gill and Birgit - without their enduring encouragement and unwavering support – particularly during my final year – this thesis would have not been possible. I feel incredibly lucky to have had you both as supervisors.

This thesis would also not have been possible without all the youth offending practitioners who believed in the project and trusted me with their words and experiences. For them, I am deeply grateful.

Thanks also to my PhD colleagues at the UEA. Riding this wave with you all has been a joy. A special shout out to Doctor Kate Blake-Holmes, who lifted me up and propelled me forward when I have needed it the most.

I would also like to mention my new team at the University of Salford. Moving cities and starting a new job within the final few months of finishing my PhD was a tough ask, but the kindness you all showed me helped me hold my head above water. Special thanks to my roomies for making me laugh when I wanted to cry, and my mentor, Doctor Surya Nayak. Our inspiring conversations has reignited my passion, which was exactly what I needed.

And last but not least, I am eternally grateful for the love and support of my family and friends, both near and far. Your love is what gives me the courage to take on any challenge in life – even when it is half a world away.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my cousin, Adam McMaster.  
I will forever miss your love, support and contagious laughter.  
1980 – 2018

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# Introduction

This study aims to develop an understanding of youth offending practice with girls who offend and are also in care. It draws on the voices of youth offending practitioners and considers how they experience the complexities of this work and examines what they identify as the needs and challenges that girls in care bring to practice. It also explores how this work troubles the care and control dichotomy which is inherent in the criminal justice system and proposes a new, more integrated approach to contemporary practice.

## Researcher's background and motivation for this study

I am a qualified and experienced social worker and I align with radical social work principles and values. As a social worker I have been employed as a counsellor/advocate in a sexual assault trauma recovery clinic and as a case manager with a youth justice team. Both posts were in Melbourne, Australia. My employment with the sexual assault trauma recovery clinic provided me with an understanding of the impact of trauma on young people's lives and behaviours and gave me tools to take a trauma focused lens to my practice. This foundation became key to my career development.

During my employment with the youth justice team, I came across some of the most significant trauma histories in my career thus far. However, I was surprised to find that most of the young people I worked with had not been engaged with any trauma recovery services. At the time of my employment with youth justice, the trauma histories of young offenders was information that needed to be provided in writing pre-sentence reports, however it was not something that guided day to day practice with the young person. Rather, the focus was on providing support which was practical and included assisting young people engage with prosocial activities such as employment and training, access housing and support, develop victim empathy and engaging with substance misuse services. The impact of trauma on the lives of the young offenders who were also in care was similarly not something I had experienced as being discussed in care team meetings or in case plan reviews with children's services and allied health professionals. However, since my

employment moves have been made in Victoria to encourage youth justice teams to consider the impact of trauma on interventions and assessments (see Mendes et al. 2014).

As my social work career up until that point had predominantly been with young women, working with female offenders was something I felt comfortable doing. As a result, I ended up becoming the case manager within my youth justice team who was assigned most of the female offenders. Having experience of working with girls in the youth criminal justice system also provided me with an opportunity to see the difference in how female offenders were navigating the criminal justice system compared to their male counterparts.

After almost four years with the youth justice team, I decided to pursue my growing curiosity about the barriers for young women in accessing and navigating both the criminal justice system and trauma recovery services. I was particularly interested in how barriers were influenced by the social construction of gender and gender ideals held by society at large. So, I pursued a Masters in Feminist Media and Cultural Studies in England. This learning built on my original BA degree, but also provided me with a critical lens in reconsidering my experience as a social worker and introduced me to the Black Feminist theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1984). My consideration of intersectionality and how this related to power and inequality has guided my thinking ever since.

During my MA I also became aware of culturally specific constructions around gender and crime - such as 'the ladette' - that I had not experienced in Australia. I had no experience of youth offending practice in the United Kingdom, but I wondered how these cultural codes influenced criminal justice responses to girls who engaged in offending behaviours. I also wondered if these cultural constructions influenced how practitioners in the UK managed the complexities of practice – such as working with trauma. I found that there was a lack of research on youth offending practitioners' perspectives and how they work both with female offenders and female offenders in care. Undertaking a PhD gave me an important opportunity to contribute to knowledge in this field.



## Rationale for the study

In 2013 a survey was conducted in England which found that a third of boys and 61% of girls in custody had reported histories of being in care (Kennedy, 2013). In 2015 an independent review established by the Prison Reform Trust and chaired by Lord Laming was launched in a bid to explore why British children who have histories of being in care are over-represented in the criminal justice system. The report *In Care, Out of Trouble* (Prison Reform Trust, 2016) identified risks and resilience factors for offending and focussed particularly on trauma and development, exposure to criminogenic environments and peer groups, age of entry into care, type of care placement, low educational attainment, substance misuse, mental health and issues related to self-identity and self-esteem. These findings were consistent with similar research completed around the same time frame in both the UK and Australia (Schofield et al. 2014; Mendes et al. 2014).

The report also illustrated the struggles that children involved in the care system face and how the systemic responses to them can put them at greater risk of engaging in offending pathways when compared to their non-care peers. In the same year the Charlie Taylor review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales (2016) was published. This review illustrated how the success of diversion programs and lowering numbers of young people in custody has meant that the young people who remain in the youth justice system have some of the most complex needs and includes young people in care. Drawing from the work of Haines and Case (2015), the Taylor review (2016) recommended a 'Child First, Offender Second' approach to practice.

However, in response to the Laming review, the Youth Justice Board (2016) noted that there is no centrally prescribed approach to working with children in care in the criminal justice sector within England and Wales. Yet since the publication of both these reviews – and at the time of writing - no government research has been commissioned examining youth offending practice with children in care or youth offending practice with girls who offend and are in care.

## The care and control binary

The youth justice response to female offenders in care is an area of research that is embedded in wider theoretical discussions around contemporary multidisciplinary criminal justice practice, the idea of the 'corporate parent', constructions of vulnerability and debates around care and control. Research examining the care and control binary suggests that when a young person is constructed as vulnerable, they are also considered at risk, which may justify a coercive response in order to 'protect' them (Brown, 2011). Hence, the boundary between what is considered a 'welfare' response and what is considered a 'coercive' response can become blurred. These debates are particularly significant to youth offending practice with young female offenders, especially those in care.

The 'root and branch' overhaul to the youth offending services following the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 saw the development of multidisciplinary youth offending teams (YOT) in England and Wales. This meant that YOTs became made up of professionals from social welfare backgrounds, health and education backgrounds and law enforcement backgrounds. Prior to this they were predominantly social work trained. These different professional bodies have different professional values and different codes of ethics. Therefore, what is considered as taking a 'welfare focus' may be constructed differently by each professional body.

Theoretical debates around welfare and risk and care and control are also central to discussions of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism involves a prioritisation of individual responsibility and personal 'freedoms' over government support and restrictions. Under neoliberalism the responsibility for escaping adversity falls at the feet of individuals and such an approach ignores the influence of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and ability. Because of this, neoliberalism has been referred to as the "politics of personal responsibility" (Howe, 2014:142). Garrett (2016) argues that under neoliberalism, social work and welfare service interventions prioritise prevention and risk management, which leads to a focus on individual level concerns. Qualitative research conducted in Canada suggests that welfare provision under neoliberalism creates a tension for frontline youth offending case managers as practice becomes "balanced against the structure of the system that requires

individuals to self-regulate and self-manage” (Liebenberg et al. 2015:1008). This is supported by Feeley and Simon (1992) who claim that practice in criminal justice in the UK has become more managerial under neoliberalism. Rather than responding to social disadvantage and how this relates to crime, practice focuses on minimising levels of recidivism where individuals are considered active subjects in reducing their own risk of reoffending (Gray, 2005). In more recent times this is compounded by the introduction of austerity measures, which have seen deep and significant cuts to the welfare state and increased levels of inequality (Puffett, 2011).

### **The invisibility of girls who offend and are in care**

As highlighted in the Laming review, a higher percentage of girls (61%) than boys (33%) in custody have a care history (see Kennedy, 2013). The Charlie Taylor review also recognises the unique needs and pathways of girls who offend. Given that statistically there are more male offenders overall, this is an interesting finding and one which has not been explored in the literature. Indeed, the Laming review pointed out that “there are concerns about the extent to which the needs of looked after girls are addressed in the criminal justice system because they represent a very small proportion of the whole” (Prison Reform Trust, 2016:15). Echoing this the Taylor Review recognised that the needs of girls who offend are different to those of boys and recommended that this be considered in practice. However, the response from the Youth Justice Board (2016) does not address the specific needs of female offenders from care, nor does it offer guidance on best practice with this particular group.

### **Practitioners’ perspectives**

The small body of research exploring welfare and criminal justice practitioners’ perspectives on working with girls who offend has found that practitioners tend to draw on gendered stereotypes when describing their work. Practitioners find female clients ‘harder to work with’, often describing them as ‘manipulative’ and ‘high needs’ (Gelsthorpe and Worrall 2009; Baines and Adler, 1996; Bond-Maupin et al. 2002; Gaarder et al. 2004). The Laming review notes that female offenders may face negative stereotyping based on their gender and that this can be compounded by their care status (Prison Reform Trust, 2016).

Research also indicates that children in care are associated with certain stigmas and assumptions around negative behaviours due to their care histories. One of the recommendations for practice made by the Laming review states that “statutory guidance must assert the important role of the local authority in tackling the stigma which children in care can encounter” (Prison Reform Trust, 2016:7).

This stigma has been referred to as ‘careism’ and research confirms that the acceptance of these stereotypes has a ripple effect within service provision. Fitzpatrick and Williams (2016) found that probation workers who worked within a pilot program with care leavers did not feel comfortable asking clients about their care history as they did not feel equipped to meet high, complex needs. As a result, practitioners avoided asking their clients about their care history all together. This research also found that practitioners felt needs-based interventions were restricted by a focus on risk, and this led to a “care-less approach” (Fitzpatrick and Williams, 2016:2).

To date, little research has been done examining how multidisciplinary YOT practitioners make sense of their work and how they consider welfare needs within their practice. Additionally, limited research has been completed examining how YOT practitioners within England and Wales consider their work with female offenders or with children in care. Therefore, a project which concentrates on practitioners’ views of their work with female offenders in care will provide a sharp focus on how gender and care status are considered in practice. This is significant given there is currently no guidance to working with this particular cohort.

Hearing from youth offending practitioners is also important because the work they do involves putting policy into practice and so there is power in how they interpret their role. In applying Lipsky’s (1980) ‘Street Level Bureaucracy’ analogy to youth justice practitioners, Sharpe (2009:255) suggests that:

The youth justice ‘system’ is shaped in part by their decisions and actions, including the extent to which they apply, modify, resist or even undermine central government policies. Furthermore...it remains the primary responsibility of (usually) Youth Offending Team (YOT) officers to attempt to

persuade magistrates and judges to dispense particular punishments in respect of young people and to enforce their compliance.

Therefore, this thesis examines youth offending practitioners perspectives of practice with girls who offend and are also in care. It explores what practitioners consider as the needs and challenges this group bring to practice. Finally, it adds to current knowledge around the complex interplay of coercion and welfare provision within the English Youth Justice system. In doing so this research asks:

1. What do youth offending practitioners consider to be the welfare and offending needs that female offenders in care present?
2. What challenges do youth offending practitioners face when working with female offenders in care?
3. What do youth offending practitioners consider as effective practice when working with female offenders in care?
4. What are the implications for the future of frontline youth offending practice?

## **Structure of thesis**

This thesis is divided into four main sections. The first section is composed of three chapters which make up a comprehensive review of the literature and provides context for the qualitative research. The second section outlines the method of data collection and analysis and explores the research experience. The third section comprises of three chapters which illustrate the findings of the research. The final section brings the findings together and considers them alongside the established literature and provides recommendations for policy and practice.

The first of the three literature review chapters is titled 'A history of youth offending policy and practice'. This chapter provides the political and systemic context for the research. In developing this chapter, I took an historical account of the literature, searching for significant policies and systemic changes and their impact over certain periods.

The second literature review chapter is titled 'The welfare needs and offending patterns of girls who offend and looked after children who offend'. In order to

synthesise the literature for this chapter I took a structured approach to the literature search. The structured literature search for this chapter was broken down into three separate searches. These searches harvested literature related to the girls who offend, looked after children who offend and looked after girls who offend (see appendix A for further details of structured literature search).

The final literature review chapter is titled 'Youth offending professionals' perspectives'. In developing this chapter, I conducted a structured literature search. Unlike chapter two however, this chapter required one search and harvested literature on professional perspectives of working with female offenders in care (see appendix B for further details of structured literature search).

# Chapter One: A history of youth offending policy and practice

## Introduction

In order to make sense of current practice this chapter will map the development of the youth offending service in England and Wales and outline key policies and documents that have contributed to its evolution. It will frame this analysis by looking through a lens which focuses on both 'justice' led and 'welfare' led approaches to youth offending work at different points in history and consider how this has influenced an understanding of youth offending practice in England and Wales. The justice and welfare dichotomy in the UK became evident from the development of the first juvenile penal institution in 1838. Criminal justice reformers at the time argued that the rehabilitation of 'savage' juvenile offenders would require welfare support, alongside punishment for their wrong doings (Culpin, 2002). This illustrates the long history of the tension between welfare and justice as an intrinsic aspect of youth offending practice. However, much of this history does not distinguish between male and female young offenders, yet small pockets of research illustrate a gendered disparity in the criminal justice response which is important to consider for youth offending practice (see Cox, 2003; Sharpe, 2012; Heidensohn, 1985; Hudson, 1989; Campbell, 1981; Cheney-Lind and Irwin, 2008; Worrall, 2000).

Therefore, as this chapter outlines the history of the youth offending service in England and Wales, it will also tease out the criminal justice response to girls who offend at different points in history, where available. In doing so it will argue that the criminal justice response to girls and women is consistent with accounts of respectable codes of femininity. Whilst the representation of breaching codes of "respectability" has changed throughout history (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008) this chapter will highlight how despite these cultural shifts the criminal justice response to girls and women in England and Wales has been unable to untangle itself from these oppressive, gendered constructions.

Muncie and Hughes (2002:1) argue that because of the pursuit of the competing goals of welfare and justice, “the history of youth justice is a history of conflict, contradictions, ambiguity and compromise”. Smith (2016) argues that the prioritisation of one position minimises the other, yet principles of both welfare and justice continue to dominate youth offending policy and practice “rendering the youth justice system a messy, complex and contested domain” (Haines and Case, 2015:1). Over time different governments in power have attempted to merge justice approaches with welfare approaches in practice, however it is argued that this has not been successful (Pickford, 2012; Goldson and Muncie, 2006)

The swing between these contrasting approaches has been informed overtime by politics, economics, media representations, sociocultural constructions of young people and youth culture and ‘moral panics’ (Yates, 2012). The fluctuation between these overarching philosophies has also been informed by welfare and legal discourses which predominantly construct children and young people as either ‘at risk’ or ‘a risk’ (Brown, 2005; Stephens, 1995). Within the criminal justice context, risk is also closely linked to ‘vulnerability’ (Brown, 2014). Therefore, if a young offender is considered vulnerable *and* putting themselves at risk then this can justify a response that may be designed to be protective but is actually coercive (Brown, 2014). Given the link between femininity and vulnerability it is arguable that this has a greater impact on female offenders (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008). Authors have also highlighted that groups who are considered both transgressive and vulnerable create complexities and contradictions for practitioners (see Harrison and Sanders, 2006; Dobson, 2011; Phoenix, 2012). Compounding this it is argued that the youth justice system at different points in history is the result of these competing and often contradictory ideologies which allow for ‘significant moments of resistance, absence and closure’ (Muncie and Hughes 2002:2). Jessop (1988:38) argues that this unclear, messy context allows for swings to both punitive *and* progressive practice via ‘structural constraints’ and ‘conjectural opportunities’.

The first section of this chapter, *The early development of the youth justice system (1901-1979)*, will provide an historical overview from the beginning of the twentieth century starting with the 1901 Youthful Offenders Act. This section will



argue that the early progression of the youth justice system developed the welfare elements of youth offending practice and will track this until 1979. It will highlight how constructions of childhood and accountability are foundational to debates around welfare and justice and will illustrate how ideas around respectable performances of gender and the boundaries of female sexuality are linked to early constructions of the female offender.

The following section *Short, sharp, shock and a focus on diversion (1980 -1990)* marks the beginning of the shift to neoliberalism which ‘has swept through governments, economics, personal behaviour and social policy’ (Howe, 2014:174). It is important to note the implementation of neoliberal politics as regardless of which political party has been in power since its implementation neoliberal ideologies in Britain (and other Western democracies) continue to dominate policy and practice. Academics have argued that the turn to “neoliberalism has impacted on the trajectory of youth justice policy, across nation states, in a range of complex (Muncie, 2005) and sometimes contradictory ways (Jamieson and Yates 2009)” (as cited in Yates, 2012:435)

The next section tracks the shift in focus from diversion to the control and punishment of young offenders. This section is titled *The punitive turn (1990 – 1996)* and examines the backlash against diversionary measures of the 1980s. It argues that this backlash was initially led by political gain but became more powerful following the death of 2-year-old James Bulger in 1993. Discussion around this case highlights how sociocultural constructions of young offenders can create public outrage, which in turn can impact policy and practice. This section will also examine how the shift to a punitive, gender neutral approach to managing young offenders had specific impacts on girls.

The New Labour government of 1997 opens the following section, *The risk society and the new youth justice (1997 – 2009)*, which examines arguably one of the most influential periods in the history of the development of the contemporary youth justice system in England and Wales. This section, contextualised by a move to being ‘risk’ focused, outlines the ‘root and branch’ overhaul of the youth justice system, the development of youth offending teams (YOTs) and the youth justice

board (YJB). It also explores how the welfare role of youth offending practice becomes statutory in the development of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) in accordance with the Children Act 2004. It also highlights how this shift in focus moves constructions of girls who offend from being objects of risk (vulnerable victims) to being subjects of risk (active agents).

The next section will examine *Youth justice in the age of austerity (2009 – 2012)*. This section will explore how austerity measures - alongside neoliberal values - has led to further public spending cuts and impacted practice. The *Youth Crime and Action Plan* in 2008 established that young people from disadvantaged background are at greater risk of engaging in offending pathways and this section argues that austerity measures increase this risk, which has a particular impact on girls. Hence, during this timeframe the needs of young offenders became more complex. The government at the time focused on interagency work as a way of managing this conflation of vulnerability and crime.

The final section *A focus on vulnerability (2012 – 2019)* will explore the continued impact of austerity measures on the needs of young offenders and examines how youth offending practice has been influenced by the independent inquiry following the exposure of child sexual exploitation (CSE) rings in Rochdale (Jay, 2014) and Lord Laming's report (2016) on the disproportionate number of children in care in the criminal justice system. It argues that in 2019 young people in the youth offending service present with complex and interrelated welfare needs and that youth offending policy and practice need to reflect this change.

## **The early development of the youth justice system (1901-1979)**

In 1901 *The Youthful Offenders Act* was passed which had a focus on rehabilitation and "emphasised the need to find alternatives to prison" (Urwin, 2018:8). The following *Prevention of Crime Act (1908)* in turn focused on the reformation and training of young offenders and as an alternative to prison gave power to the court to pass sentences of detention in Borstal Institutions for both young men and young women, with young women being sent to a separate female-only institution. During this time and until the 1940s this female only institution was Aylesbury

Borstal in Buckinghamshire (Pickford, 2012). The 1908 *Children Act* also saw the beginnings of the juvenile courts, who had jurisdiction in cases of both children in need and children who committed crimes. Hence, this saw an early linking of the ideologies of welfare and justice in statutory documentation which created the dual role of care and control in practice as it was ‘the same judicial body [that was] being called upon to deal with both the so-called ‘depraved’ and ‘deprived’” (Pickford 2012:54).

While the linking of welfare and justice was new for young men, such an approach was not new for young women. As Cox (2003) argues, since Victorian times the welfare concerns about young women – which are predominately linked to constructions of respectable gendered behaviour - have led to their incarceration. Victorian middle-class values of respectability and domesticity placed an emphasis on female sexual behavior, which became a focus of the young women who strayed from this construction. Hence, the punitive response of the state during this period and how it addressed ‘welfare concerns’ was very much gendered and linked to controlling female sexuality. This was not the case for young men. As a result of this Victorian ‘correctional institutions for girls focused on educating and socializing delinquent females into what was perceived to be gender-appropriate behavior’ (Sharpe, 2012:11.) This approach was considered ‘rehabilitative’ and often concentrated on building domestic skill sets.

The inclusion of ‘rehabilitative support’ of young offenders is also evident in the juvenile courts of the early 1900’s. Foundational in this thinking were ideas about accountability. From this early criminal justice lens, ideas around accountability and the competence to comprehend consequences of behaviour became what differentiated juvenile offenders from adult offenders (Urwin, 2018). How accountability was constructed was also linked to chronological age. At the point that the first juvenile courts were established, children under the age of 7 were not considered to have the capacity to understand the full consequences of their behaviour and so were not held accountable for their crimes. In order to prosecute children between the ages of 7 and 14 their capacity to understand consequences of behaviour needed to be established. This remained the case until the *Children*

*and Young Person's Act* (1933) which set the age of criminal responsibility to 8. This was raised to age 10 in England and Wales thirty years later in the *Children and Young Persons Act* (1963).

The age of criminal responsibility is also constructed by culture. Britain has been criticised for having one of the youngest ages for children in Europe being held responsible for their crimes (Goldson, 2013). The most common age for criminal responsibility in other European nations is between 14 and 16 (PN 577, 2018). Having such a young age of criminal responsibility has raised concerns that this is in breach of the United Nations Rights of the Child (Goldson, 2013).

Having to consider accountability and justice alongside the welfare needs of young offenders was also specified in the *Moloney Committee* (Home Office, 1927). This Committee simultaneously described offending behaviours as being a “deliberate act of defiance” but also suggested these behaviours were influenced by “psychological or environmental factors that were beyond the young person’s control” (Pickford 2012:54). Again, this illustrates the coexistence of ideas of welfare and justice when it comes to understanding and managing juvenile offenders. Furthermore, this committee strongly influenced the subsequent *Children and Young Persons Act* (1933) which established the first ‘welfare principle’ (Pickford, 2012).

This continued convergence of welfare and justice in the management of young offenders also saw a slight shift in how delinquent girls were constructed. During this timeframe girls who committed crimes were defined as ‘lacking proper parental control’ or ‘in need of care and protection’ which was distinct from their previous construction as ‘immoral antecedents’ or having ‘knowledge of evil’ (Cox, 2003). However, the policing of the behaviour of girls remained linked to ideals of middle-class respectability. For example, during the mid-twentieth century the sexual behaviour of girls who were sentenced to correctional institutions continued to be monitored and it was common practice for girls to be tested for pregnancy and venereal infections, on a regular basis (Sharpe, 2012).

The *Children Act (1948)* saw the establishment of local government authorities which were responsible for both children in need *and* young offenders. Once more the link between welfare and justice was reinforced and the role of the state was considered responsible for the simultaneous care and the control of young offenders. The *Children and Young Persons (Amendment) Act (1952)* furthered this link by allowing local authority accommodation to be a remand option for young offenders and by creating an approved school license release which offered community supervision (Pickford, 2012).

The mid twentieth century saw criminological theories develop which began to focus on the contextual influences on criminal behaviour, as opposed to individual deficiencies. In 1960 the Home Office published the *Ingleby Report*, which drew from these theories, in particular 'labelling theory' and the impact of stigma on young offenders. The report prioritised diversionary measures and supported minimising the jurisdiction of the juvenile court as a way to achieve this. It also focused on welfare provisions and highlighted the responsibility of the local authority to meet these welfare needs to assist in preventing young people from engaging in further offending behaviours. This report also noted that 95% of boys were institutionalized for criminal reasons compared to only 36% of girls. Hence, most of these girls during this time period faced a punitive response from the state based on their constructed welfare needs and the performance of their gender. For example, according to Smith (1978 as cited in Sharpe, 2012:16) girls who were considered in need of care and control yet were also known to be sexually active "were seven times more likely to be sent to an approved school than girls convicted of criminal offences".

Over the following 5 years the pendulum continued to swing towards a welfare-based model of youth criminal justice. For example, Labour's white paper *The Child, the Family and the Young Offender* (Home Office, 1965) followed on from the *Ingleby Report* and drew on criminological theories which highlighted the role of deprivation and social inequality in offending pathways. This white paper suggested revolutionary reforms in the treatment of young offenders. It highlighted the importance of family support and suggested that social service departments should

be responsible for young offenders between the ages of 10 – 16, moving them away entirely from the criminal court system. It also recommended that a separate youth offending court be developed which would manage young offenders between the ages of 16 and 21. However, this radical proposal saw political debates around ideologies of accountability and drew criticism from the Conservative party who pushed for a more justice orientated focus on youth crime. It also did not address the gender disparity.

This conflict between the push towards a welfare model of youth criminal justice and the justice orientated backlash led to the “uneasy compromise in the form of the *Children and Young Persons Act 1969*” (Pickford 2012:55), which was not fully implemented by the Labour government at the time nor by the following Conservative government. For example, *The Children and Young Persons Act (1969)* suggested raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14, however implementation of this was rejected by the incoming Conservative government (Lacey, 2012). The Act also created the criminal care order, which allowed the courts to place welfare provisions on a young person by placing them in state care. This was in accordance with the intention of the 1969 Act to develop the youth court into a “welfare providing agency” (Lacey, 2012:16). Yet the Act also stipulated that this was to be used a last resort option (Rutter and Giller, 1983). Pickford (2012:55) argues that the criminal care order created a criminal sanction that in effect were welfare measures and saw “the ‘deprived’ and ‘depraved’ became as one”.

This had significant consequences for girls. Despite the number of care orders being similar between girls and boys in 1977, girls were seven times more likely to receive this order due to being in ‘moral danger’ (Campbell, 1981 as cited in Sharpe 2012:16). Gelsthorpe and Worrall (2009:210) argue that ‘it cannot be assumed that ‘welfare’ has been a uniformly benign intervention’ and the criminal care order is an example of this. That is, due to constructions of femininity and respectability politics the ‘welfare response’ of the criminal care order which aimed to ‘protect girls’ considered vulnerable became paternalistic and punitive.

This timeframe also saw the introduction of Intermediate Treatment (IT) which aimed to address the needs of children considered at risk of offending, which again

had a specific impact for girls. For example, two-third of boys compared to a quarter of girls in mixed sex programmes were involved for criminal offences: “Girls were much more likely than boys to be involved in IT schemes on a ‘voluntary’ basis and for reasons other than commission of offences” (Sharpe, 2012:17).

Harris (1982) argued that this 1969 *Children and Young Persons Act* also complicated the role of the social worker as it placed social workers as central characters in the sentencing of young offenders. Harris suggests this created a tension between social work values as who the client is becomes split between the young person and the state. They argue that;

The relationship between justice and welfare which emerges from the 1969 Act has itself been found wanting: in one sense the two concepts lead us in opposite directions, in another they sometimes appear in each other's guises. The idea that the social worker can effectively mediate them is not only incorrect but has reduced the coherence of the service he can offer to either client or court.

(1982:260)

McLaughlin and Muncie (2001:267) argue due to the 1969 Act the 1970s saw “a widening of the net of control”. By the end of the 1970s the “numbers of young offenders in custody had risen sharply which led to overcrowding and increased costs to the State” (Lacey 2012:16). It was at this point that there was also a turn to neoliberalism.

### **Short, sharp, shock and a focus on diversion (1980 -1990)**

In the 1980s Britain saw a period of high youth unemployment and deepening of social inequalities (Brown, 2005). Much of the cultural representations of the 1980s “were marked by a combination of moral panic and paternalistic concern and constructed mainly through the language of crisis” (Griffin, 1993:67). This period also saw a deterioration of the relationship between young people in urban black communities and the police, in which the media played a significant part. For example, the wide media coverage of the Brixton riots of the 1980s created the ‘black youth in the ghetto’ figure in the public imagination (Brown, 2005: 56). This

figure carried with it discourse connecting the breakdown of social discipline and lawlessness with race (Brown, 2005). This is something that the nation has had difficulty in shaking off as the British criminal justice system (CJS) as a whole continues to be overrepresented by populations from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities (Lammy, 2017).

Alongside these moral panics about race, the idea of the British 'underclass' emerged and was used to explain youth engaging in criminal behaviours (Murray, 1990). According to Murray, this period saw youth crime constructed as the result of young single mothers raising fatherless children, who grew up to lack discipline, morals, and a strong work ethic and therefore fell into a life of crime. An inability to secure employment and engaging with criminal activities were linked to the culture of the 'underclass', and hence the 'underclass' became the problem, as opposed to structural and social inequalities. This suggests that an analysis of the sociocultural construction of the young offender is also an analysis of race, class and mother blaming. Additionally, this sociocultural construction represented an acceptance of neoliberal values such as individuals being responsible for themselves and not the responsibility of the state.

Howe (2014:142) argues that the 'politics of personal responsibility' are the foundations of neoliberal values in practice and this has a direct impact on debates around accountability of young offenders. Gray (2005) refers to this as 'responsibilisation' and is understood as individuals being autonomous from their social positioning when it comes to self-management and self-regulation (Kelly, 2001). Hence, the wider systemic disadvantages which influence offending behaviours are erased. Simultaneously, neoliberal values also remove responsibility from the state (Cradock, 2007) which then justifies the privatisation of welfare services. Therefore, the focus on individual accountability and a removal from the responsibility of the state directly impacts how youth offending services are conceptualised (Liebenberg et.al, 2015).

Perhaps paradoxically, the Conservative commitment to a neoliberal focus on cutting public spending in the 1980s led to the development of youth justice policy which focused much more on implementing diversionary measure and minimised



the use of custodial sentences (Goldson and Yates 2008; Jamieson and Yates 2009; Smith 2011). As a result, this decade has been referred to as “the successful revolution in juvenile justice” (Rutherford, 1996; Haines and Drakeford, 1998).

For example, the Criminal Justice Act (1982) “involved ‘getting tough’ on those deemed serious and persistent young offenders, while endeavouring to divert first-time and non-serious juvenile offenders away from the more stigmatising effects of the criminal justice system” (Pickford 2012; 56). The government’s intention at the time was that community-based orders were favoured and that custodial sentences were shortened (yet sharper) and only handed down as a last resort (Pilcher and Wagg, 1996;63). This is seen through the creation of the Youth Custody Order (Grimwood and Strickland, 2013). The Conservative governments approach was emphasised in the then home secretary William Whitelaw announcing the ‘short, sharp, shock’ attitude to the management of young offenders (Pickford, 2012).

The following Criminal Justice Act (1988) continued to further restrict criteria for the use of custodial disposals for young offenders from the age of 14 for males and 15 for females. Under this Act, custody was only given as a last resort for serious young offenders considered significantly dangerous to the public. According to Rutherford, *The Criminal Justice Act (1988)* “served as a catalyst in that it presented opportunities but also a challenge” (1996:28) and it was frontline practitioners who took up this challenge. At this point in history these practitioners were predominantly social work trained (Urwin, 2018).

Practitioner discretion led to a focus on diversion from the criminal justice sector, which meant fewer young people were brought to court to face potential custodial sentences. The focus on diversion saw the birth of the cautioning system and diversion policies were soon adopted by the Home Office (Haines, 2002). In addition, practitioners also encouraged and supported intensive targeted community-based supervision. Furthermore, magistrates at the time were also becoming more aware of the negative impact of incarceration on young offenders (Fionda, 2005) which led to lower levels of prosecution, no increases in sentencing laws (Bottoms, 1995), no system net-widening (Bottoms et.al. 1990) and lower levels of custodial sentences (Haines and Drakeford, 1998). Therefore, despite the

pro-justice ethos of the Conservative administration, the neoliberal commitment to cost cutting resulted in the youth justice system in the 1980s being a practitioner-led and community-based system. It took a bottom up approach to youth offending as local practices and initiatives informed policy (Goldson and Yates, 2008; Jamieson and Yates, 2009) and practice developed which was 'diversionary, decarcerative and decriminalising' (Yates, 2012:436).

The 1989 Children Act abolished the Criminal Care Order that was put in place in place 20 years earlier. This legislation separated "children's welfare matters from youth justice...[which] has meant that the youth justice service has needed to conduct its own balancing act in relation to justice and welfare" (Schofield et al. 2014;13). The Children Act (1989) also established the role of the 'corporate parent' for children taken into care by the state. This role positioned a responsibility on the local authority and partner agencies, including youth offending where appropriate, to prioritise the welfare needs of the child and improve outcomes.

### **The punitive turn (1990 -1996)**

Despite its acknowledged success, the pre-court diversionary measures established in the 1980s came under criticism in the early 1990s. The then Conservative Home Secretary Michael Howard accused local authorities of 'bringing cautioning into disrepute' (Home Office, 1994). According to Haines and Case (2015) the criticism of the 1980s juvenile justice system was not based in evidence but rather was motivated purely by political gain. They argue that;

The new decade witnessed a sea change in youth justice, away from more welfare-oriented diversionary principles and towards a sentencing philosophy and policy grounded in the justice based 'just deserts' approach outlined in the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

(Haines and Case, 2015:4).

This - in theory - seemed to be a positive move for girls. During the previous decade 'welfarism' had been attracting much criticism from academics, which included how girls were being criminalized and policed based on constructions of 'moral danger' (Campbell, 1981 as cited in Sharpe 2012:16). Hence, the return to a 'just deserts'

approach meant that “girls who had been previously committed to institutions ‘for their own good’ were now to be judged on the basis of their behavior alone” (Sharpe, 2012:17). However, the judgement of girls behaviour remained tangled up with ideals of respectability and middle-class values. Hence it is argued that during this timeframe this model encouraged the judgement of girls’ actions against ‘standards of adult femininity, rather than juvenile immaturity’ (Hudson, 1989 as cited in Sharpe 2012:17-18). Therefore, although this model attempted to untangle criminality from welfare needs, the judgement of girls remained tied to the expectations of their gender. Heidensohn (1985) refers to this as the double deviance theory and argues that girls and women are unable to escape the confines of their gender in the criminal justice setting and are sentenced not only for their criminal behaviour, but for how they have also deviated from respectable performances of their gender. This - Heidensohn argues - leads to much harsher sentencing.

The 1991 Criminal Justice Act also established a sentencing model for all offenders based on proportionality and therefore sentences were ‘directly related to the seriousness of the offence’ (Home Office, 1990). Prior to this, Fionda (2005) argues that there was no guiding principle of sentencing for juveniles but rather sentencers were balancing principles of ‘retribution, incapacitation, deterrence and rehabilitation’. This 1991 Act cemented the prioritisation of proportionality. However, it did not consider how constructions of gender (or indeed race and class) can influence sentencing decisions even within the boundaries of proportionality. That is, even with offence focused sentencing models there was still an element of subjectivity in the decisions made around sentencing which was unchallenged.

Under the 1991 Criminal Justice Act the youth court (previously known as the juvenile court) increased the upper age limit to include 17year olds. The Act also drew on the well-established neoliberal ideology of responsabilisation and stressed parental responsibility for young offenders placing statutory duties on legal guardians of offenders under the age of 16 and discretion of court for offenders aged 16 and above. Section 95 of the 1991 Act “introduced statistical monitoring of the CJS with a view to identifying any areas of disproportional treatment in relation

to sex and/or racial background” (as cited in Pickford 2012:57). This, however excluded class and disability in its analysis.

For young offenders, serious and persistent offending behaviours are correlated with experiences of disadvantage (Bateman, 2014; Yates, 2012; Griggs and Walker, 2008). Young offenders therefore created a paradox for the neoliberal framework. On the one hand, young offenders are constructed as rational, autonomous beings responsible for their actions whereas on the other hand young offenders are understood as being vulnerable to social ‘risk factors’ for offending, such as a lack of educational attainment, which becomes the responsibility of their parents (not the state) to address (Muncie and Hughes, 2002).

However, this all changed in 1993 when Britain was faced with making sense of the murder of 2-year-old James Bulger by two 10-year-old boys who were caught on video leaving a shopping center with James. It can be argued that this case reinforced the ‘punitive turn’. Phil Scraton (1997) argues that this case created such strong emotions in the public regarding retribution that it typified the media’s construction of the “loss of innocence” of a generation void of morality. Similarly, Jenks (1996) argues this case led to the ‘demonisation’ of youth. The vast majority of crimes committed by young people are minor crimes and serious criminal offending, such as rape, murder, domestic abuse and serious burglaries are committed predominantly by adult offenders (Brown, 2005). However, when a young person does commit a serious crime, the perceived risk to the general public is inflated by the media, reinforcing the construct of ‘youth as a problem’ and the associated symbolic risk to the community. This can feed into public anxieties which encourage a punitive response, as was evidenced in the societal response to the Bulger case (Fionda,2005; Hendrick, 2006; Jenks, 1996). Due to the severity of the crime, these two boys were tried in an adult court which was slightly adjusted to recognise their status as children (Wolff and McCall Smith, 2001). The European Court of Human Rights later found this to be in breach of the right to a fair trial in that;

a trial in an adult court, amid a blaze of publicity, with hostile crowds attempting to attack the cars that brought the children to court each day,

would have had a seriously inhibiting and intimidating effect on the boys and would have compromised their ability to understand the proceedings and instruct their lawyers.

(Wolff and McCall Smith, 2001:134).

The political discourse of the time needed to reflect the public outrage and recognise perceived risks of such a crime happening again. This is referred to by Haines (2002:139) as “popular punitiveness”. This case and the response of the government highlights how political rhetoric, social policy, frontline practice, media representations and the public opinions all influence and are influenced by one another. An analysis which excludes media representations, or political discourse is at risk of missing key elements which help understand how meaning is created. For instance, the public impact of this case remains just as strong in 2019 as is evidenced by the media and public reaction to the release of the short film about the Bulger case titled ‘Detainment’ (2018).

In 1994, the year following the abduction and murder of James Bulger, the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act* was put in place. This Act drew on justice principles and was much more punitive in its treatment of young offenders. This Act focused on ‘persistent offenders’ and increased custodial sentence options for 12 -14-year olds who fit that category and increased the maximum custodial sentence to 2 years. In direct contrast to the 1991 *Criminal Justice Act*, the 1994 Act allowed for secure remand and police detention for offenders aged 12 and above and allowed the ‘grave crimes’ procedure to be applied to young offenders from age 10 (previously this was aged 15). This highlighted the shift in prioritising punitive responses to young offenders and moved the focus away from welfare concerns.

Worrall (2008) argues that the swing back to a justice led approach to youth offending policy and practice was also gender-neutral. Policy at the time did not differentiate between female and male criminality, despite female offending patterns being much less serious and for shorter durations when compared to male offending patterns (Sharpe, 2012). Once again this theoretically presents as a potential improvement to the treatment of girls in the criminal justice system as it

suggests a move away from welfarism. However, this approach ignores the gendered nature of offending, the specific needs of female offenders and does not address the double deviance theory (Heidensohn, 1985) which proposes that girls tried in the criminal justice system are held accountable for not only breaking the law but also for breaching codes of femininity.

In 1996 the Audit Commissioner inspection led to the report *Misspent Youth*, which highlighted the failings of the then youth justice system. It was at this point in the aftermath of the Bulger case and the findings of the *Misspent Youth* (1996) inspection that the New Labour government came into power.

### **The risk society and the new youth justice (1997 – 2009)**

The incoming New Labour government was highly critical of the previous youth CJS and in the same year of taking office, seven consultation papers were released, of which 5 focused specifically on youth justice practice. The conclusion drawn by the New Labour government from these papers was put succinctly in the *Tackling Youth Crime* paper, which stated;

The youth justice system is in disarray. It simply does not work. It can scarcely be called a system at all because it lacks coherent objectives...At the heart of the crisis in youth justice is confusion and conflict between welfare and punishment. Too many people involved with the system are unclear whether the purpose is to punish and to signify society's disapproval of offending or whether the welfare of the young person is paramount...this confusion cannot continue. A new balance has to be struck.

(Home Office, 1997a).

However, despite New Labour's acknowledgment of the 'confusion and conflict' between justice and welfare led approaches outlined in consultation papers, the government did not make this tension any clearer but rather it was "sadly ignored in the legislation that followed for the next 13 years" (Pickford, 2012:90).

New Labour accused the previous youth justice system of developing an 'excuse culture'. This was defined as the system being preoccupied with the social

circumstance of young offenders and using this to 'excuse' them for their offending behaviours. Not only did this reflect the party's embracing of neoliberal policies in regard to youth offending, it also suggested, although did not explicitly state, that the primary role of the youth justice system was to protect the public. Accordingly, the New Labour manifesto promised to "halve the time it takes to get persistent young offenders from arrest to sentencing; replace widespread repeat cautions with a single final warning; bring together Youth Offending Teams in every area; and streamline the system of youth courts to make it far more effective" (Home Office, 1997b).

New Labour's approach to youth offending practice also marked a significant change in UK policy on crime which stood "against both the welfare-oriented innovations of the 1960s...and the diversionary measures of the 1980s." (Pitts and Kuula 2005:147). New Labour's position on crime focused on managing 'risk'. The following Crime and Disorder Act (1998) drew heavily from the *No More Excuses* white paper (Home Office, 1997c) and prioritised management of risk in its approach to youth offending.

Haines and Case (2015) argue that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 allowed New Labour to distance themselves from the previous government's focus on youth crime, as they described a 'third way' approach to youth offending practice (not welfare, not justice). However, the 1998 Act did include the Section 95 anti-discrimination clause which advised a much more welfare focused response to young women (Worrall, 1999). Yet, this was met with a media backlash suggesting that a 'new breed' of 'cocky, feminist, aggressive superheroines' were 'menacing the streets', outwitting and 'playing the system' in order to achieve more lenient sentences (Worrall, 1999:30).

The 'third way' approach was consistent with a much wider shift of focus in the 1990's on 'risk' (Feeley and Simon, 1992). The 'risk society', it is argued, evolved from individuals feeling less in control of their lives due to modernisation and technological change (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). According to Feeley and Simon (1992) this has translated into youth offending practice becoming preoccupied with the management of risk and potential future risk. However, this shift to a 'risk

society' does not resolve the tension between welfare and justice, rather it conflates them. For example, having higher welfare needs puts young people at 'risk' of engaging in offending behaviours. As a result the third was approach has been critiqued as being punitive in practice (Muncie, 1999; Blyth, 2005)

It can therefore be argued that having high welfare needs became criminalised, which is more likely to affect girls who offend and children in care who offend. This shift to a focus on risk also meant that girls who had previously been defined as objects of risk – those constructed as 'vulnerable', in 'moral danger', 'needy' or 'at risk' - were reconstructed as subjects of risk. This then positions these girls – whose needs could have been met via welfare interventions - as requiring a criminal justice response which targets their constructed 'criminogenic risk factors'. (Sharpe, 2012). Phoenix (2018) refers to this as 'oppressive welfarism'.

Furthermore, France et al. (2012) argue that a focus on 'risk' aims to predict offending behaviours and target 'deficiencies' within the individual rather than understand behaviours as a normalised response to systemic inequality and disadvantage. Similar to the responsibilisation focus of neoliberalism, a focus on risk also places offenders as active subjects "in the reduction of their own risk of reoffending" (Gray, 2005:938). Individuals' are also expected to regulate their own 'choices' in their behaviour (Feeley and Simon, 1992). As a result, the risk paradigm reflects an individuals' inability to resist these risks as opposed to examining the lack of decisional pathways available to them which led to these 'risks' in the first place, such as social positioning, poverty, lack of resources, ethnicity and class (Case and Haines, 2015). Urwin (2018:15) further argues that "a risk management framework does not allow for 'acceptable risks', and so individuals are given more specific conditions, which often has unintended punitive impact on top of the original punishment".

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) also introduced a 'root and branch' overhaul of the youth justice system implemented over a number of years. Prior to this Act the management of young offenders was the responsibility of youth offending workers who were part of the social service departments. The Home Office (1998) set out key objectives which focused on partnership and multiagency working, tackling



offending behaviour and providing early intervention, focusing on reparation and reinforcing parental responsibilities, developing more effective custodial sentences and setting up a national framework. This last point led to the development of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) in September 1998, a landmark event which led policy and practice ever since.

The YJB was established to prevent offending, monitor and advise the youth justice system, set up national standards, commission research and both purchase and commission secure establishments for young offenders in detention and on remand (Grimwood and Strickland, 2013). Since 2009 and continuing into the present the YJB has also produced practice guidance including assessment processes, quality assurance and case management protocols (Pickford, 2012). The YJB also commissions research into effective practice, fund grants for the development of good practice and publish information. Perhaps in recognition of the simultaneous role of justice and welfare, at the time of its inception the YJB was jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

Central to the YJB initiative of preventing offending and reducing youth crime in England and Wales was the creation of Youth Offending Teams (YOT) which were envisioned to be able to provide and coordinate a multidisciplinary and multi-agency response to offending (Goldson, 2008). As previously stated, prior to this the youth justice system had been criticized by New Labour as being ineffective, inconsistent and creating a tension between welfare and justice (Graham and Moore, 2004). Therefore, the objectives in designing Youth Offending Teams were to “assist in creating a more effective, systematic and consistent approach to combatting youth crime, with the underlying assumption that targeted intervention is more beneficial in promoting positive outcomes for children and young people” (Baumgartner, 2014:6). This also included placing a statutory duty on each local authority (in consultation with other agencies) to submit to the YJB an annual youth justice plan, which outlines what the service being provided includes, how it will be executed and how it will be funded. It was expected that the youth offending

service would prioritise prevention of young people engaging in offending pathways, which is accordance with the Children Act 1989.

Part of the focus on prevention led to the implementation of the Restorative Justice (RJ) approach. Between 1998 and 2004 13.3 million pounds were spent on implementing RJ programs within England and Wales (Pickford, 2012). However, Fionda (2005) argues that New Labour's push for RJ in youth offending practice in England and Wales was problematic as its use was framed as retributive which directly conflicts with the underlying rationale of encouraging reparation and restoration. For example, the 2003 New Labour consultation paper read:

The government is committed to placing victims' needs at the centre of Criminal Justice System. We also want a system that encourages responsibility, so that offenders face up to what they've done and make amends...Restorative justice is not a soft option... For the victim restorative justice may not be about forgiveness, but a desire to tell the offender how the crime has affected them and their family, or getting information that only the offender can give.

(Home Office, 2003a:4-5)

A further significant overhaul of the youth justice system was the statutory guidance on multidisciplinary and multi-agency practice. There was evidence of multi-agency practice prior to 1998, however the New Labour government made it foundational to the development of the new multidisciplinary youth offending service. Guidance stipulated that each YOT must have at least one professional from social work, the police department, probation, the education department and the health service. This meant that not only were youth offending teams multidisciplinary in nature, but they were also required to work alongside other services within the community in order to provide a multi-agency approach.

However, Urwin (2018) argues that these guidelines allowed for local interpretation of the development of YOTs. Although each YOT was bound by having a minimum of one worker from each discipline, local teams could also include professionals from other backgrounds where they saw fit. For example, housing workers or

substance misuse workers. Urwin goes on to argue that this led to a lack of clarity in role and responsibility and resulted in “no baseline for what acceptable levels of support for young people were, meaning the youth justice practitioners became a ‘catch all’” (2018:14).

In response to the death of 8 year old Victoria Climbié in 2000 the green paper *Every Child Matters* was released with its companion document *Youth Justice – the next steps* (2003). The proposed changes to reform Children’s Services led to the Children Act (2004). In relation to youth justice reform, this included “promoting further profession specific training and investigating multi-agency links with YOTs” (Pickford 2012:102). The *Children Act 2004* put this into action with the establishment of multi-agency Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). LSCBs encouraged joined up working with police, probation, youth offending, NHS trusts, Connexions service plus schools, housing and members from voluntary/community sector. This placed a duty on members of the LSCB to coordinate practice and intervention with the primary focus on safeguarding. Hence, by law YOTs were mandated to be part of the LSCBs, which placed a statutory requirement on the YOT’s social worker to make sure they were fully aware of safeguarding processes and procedures. This then cemented the welfare role into youth offending practice. As Dugmore (2012:139) argues, from this point it became “essential that YOT practitioners understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, particularly as they are often working with some of the most vulnerable young people and their families”.

The findings of the 2004 Audit Commission report entitled ‘*Youth Justice 2004: A Review of the Reformed Youth Justice System*’ was generally favourable indicating an improvement since *Misspent Youth* (1996). However, one area reported as still requiring attention included a necessity to address the wide-ranging needs of offenders including increasing contact with YOT workers, ensuring education/training needs are met, liaising with health and mental health support, ensuring substance misuse needs are met and appropriate accommodation needs are met. Again, this report suggested that youth offending practice is required to prioritise meeting welfare needs of young offenders, which it proposed can also be

achieved though more contact with the CJS, mirroring the impact of the former criminal care order.

In 2008 the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) produced a report, written by Solomon and Garside, auditing New Labour's reforms and found that despite some positive impacts, such as the streamlining of the multidisciplinary youth offending teams designed to meet the diverse needs of young offenders, there was a significant increase in the criminalisation of minor offences and custodial sentences of young offenders. The report concluded that;

Fundamental questions need to be asked about whether the youth justice agencies can really address the complex economic and social factors which are the cause of so much youth offending. Has the government placed too high expectations on the youth justice system and should it be clearer about its limitations? Are more effective solutions to be found outside the youth justice system in the delivery of co-ordinated services through mainstream local authority children's and young people's provision and more effective children's services? After a number of years of expansion, is it time to scale back youth justice and scale up social support? The time has come to reappraise the role and purpose of the youth justice system and to consider what it can realistically achieve in addressing youth offending.

(2008:11-12)

As a result of this report the New Labour government published the *Youth Crime Action Plan* (2008) which reinforced the relationship between social disadvantage and offending and highlighted how the longer young offenders are in custody, the more likely it is they will end up adult offenders. This point was supported by earlier research which argues that becoming involved with the CJS is in and of itself a risk factor for remaining in the CJS (McAra and McVie, 2007). Therefore, diversion from the CJS was prioritized and the YJB committed to an action plan to reduce the number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time - referred to as first time entrant (FTEs)- by 20% by 2020. (Bateman, 2014). This target had an immediate impact and was met within the first 12 months. However,

it has been argued that this has led to the population of the youth justice system being made up of a small pool of young people, referred to as 'persistent offenders' (McGhee and Waterhouse, 2007).

To help make assessments more effective, in 2007 the YJB implemented 'the Scaled Approach' which is a standardised methodology used by youth offending practitioners to assess risk of further offending and risk of serious harm.

Practitioners arrive at a 'score' for a young person which then determines the level of intervention required and is used to guide sentence proposal. However, the Scaled Approach has been criticised for its focus on potential future behaviours based partially on welfare concerns that young people have little control over (Pickford and Dugmore, 2012; Case and Haines, 2009). Similarly, Bateman (2009) argues that the scoring system guiding sentencing may reflect high welfare needs, as opposed to risk of offending and Paylor (2011) adds to this by suggesting this approach will result in net-widening based on vulnerability, rather than offending behaviours. One analysis of how well the Scaled Approach linked assessment with intervention by Sutherland (2009) found that the assessed level of 'risk' did not guide the planned or executed interventions and that "priority did not appear to be given to areas with the highest risk" (Sutherland, 2009;54).

Furthermore, it has been argued that the assessment processes exclude systemic risk factors which may influence offending behaviours such as poverty, marginalisation and discrimination and how these factors may interact (Goldson 2000; Muncie, 1999; Pitts 2003; Smith, 2005). O'Mahoney (2009) builds on this, suggesting that the future focus of the Scaled Approach excludes agency and motivational factors to offending.

### **Youth justice in the age of austerity (2009 – 2012)**

In 2007 the major banks collapsed which led to a global economic crisis. By the end of 2008 the UK government put in place the first of many austerity measures which increased social disadvantage. As austerity measures were put in place there was also a sharp increase in arrests of girls in the UK for crimes of violence (Arnall and Eagle, 2009). This was fueled by media reporting on 'ladette culture' which

constructed girls as behaving in alcohol fueled, violent manners. For example, a survey completed by the World Health Organisation found that 29% of girls between the ages of 11 and 15 from England and Scotland had been involved in a physical altercation in the previous 12-month period, which resulted in the newspaper headline, 'British girls among most violent in world' (Honigsbaum, 2006). However, this sensationalised media reporting excluded the finding that "boys reported more than twice the level of violence that girls did" (Sharpe and Gelsthorpe, 2009:197).

This also created a moral panic in the British imagination, which drew on constructs of gender and class. According to Cohen (1987) moral panics work by creating hegemony and therefore 'othering' those who deviate from the perceived 'norm'. For example, girls behaving in a violent manner contrasts with cultural norms of appropriate gendered behaviour. Therefore, girls in the CJS become 'othered'. The construction of such a moral panic is reflective of "a complex set of social relationships between the general public, institutions of social control such as the police and the courts, and young people themselves" (Brown, 2005:51). Hence, such moral panics are exaggerated, and therefore their perceived threat to society is symbolic (see Sharpe, 2009). This linking of female behavior and morality also speaks back to historical accounts of policing girls based on how they performed their gender and respectability politics (see Cox, 2003; Sharpe, 2012; Heidensohn, 1985; Worrall, 2000, 2008).

Superficially, 'ladette culture' was supported at the time by the statistical increase of girls being arrested (Arnull and Eagle, 2009). However, on closer analysis it has been proposed that this rise was more likely to be linked to changes in policy which focused on the prosecution of crimes previously dealt with outside the formal CJS (Arnull and Eagle, 2009; Sharpe, 2009). This did however direct the focus of the YJB to consider the impact of gender on practice.

This led to the Youth Justice Board publication of *Girls and Offending – Patterns, Perceptions and Interventions* (Arnull and Eagle, 2009) which summarised the risk factors for offending for girls, their offending pathways and made links between their welfare needs and offending patterns. The report recommended that

improvements needed to be made around how offending data is recorded, including separating out the genders “as when subsumed within the overall categories, girls’ behaviour cannot be adequately assessed” (Arnull and Eagle, 2009:90). Finally, the report recommended that there needs to be a commitment to the sustainability of gender focused programmes within YOTs, highlighting that the “ad hoc way in which programmes are developed and delivered may mean that goodwill, expertise and learning are lost in a professional sense when staff can no longer sustain their involvement, or move on, while those young women who may have benefited from the gender-specific intervention are denied the opportunity to do so” (Arnull and Eagle, 2009:91).

In May 2010, a hung parliament resulted in a Coalition administration of the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats, led by David Cameron as Prime Minister. This coalition government “adopted a radical neoliberal strategy to reduce the budget deficit in the form of austerity measures” (Yates, 2012:435). The focus of these measures included significant reduction to public spending and a push for deregulation and the privatization of public services. Puffett (2011) argues that these austerity measures impacted those already disadvantaged and in highest need, including children and young people.

During this general election, the Conservative party published its contract for young people where it promised to focus on rehabilitation for young offenders and crime prevention, targeting the more disadvantaged communities. However, in alliance with neoliberal values, this focus was not on what the state could provide but rather how the ‘Big Society’ could fill this gap. That is, the concept of the ‘Big Society’ justified cuts to social welfare and shifted “the responsibility away from the state to individuals, small groups, charities, philanthropists, local enterprise and big business” (New Economics Foundation, 2010:2). This was framed by the government as a way of “helping people to come together to improve their lives’ and ‘putting more power in people’s hands” (Cabinet Office, 2010).

Prior to this in March 2010 a new edition of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* was published. This guidance “sets out the requirements of all professionals working with children to share information and collaborate and the

roles and responsibilities of different organisations including criminal justice organisations” (Dugmore, 2012:139). In particular the report prioritised the need for the youth offending service and the children’s social care services to be working together at a ‘strategic level and at an operational level for individual children and young people’ (2010:76). Furthermore, March 2010 saw the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook published. This states that the role of the IRO includes;

Making sure that the child’s care plan addresses any unmet needs that may lead to offending and that, if appropriate, targeted services to prevent offending are provided. It is also important to consider the suitability of the placement in managing behavioural problems.

(DCSF, 2010:4).

Although the publication of these two documents suggests that the youth offending service are required to meet the welfare needs of young offenders, in May 2010 the Coalition government made the MoJ solely accountable for the youth justice service which, prior to this change had been shared between the MoJ and the Department for Education (DfE) (Grimwood and Strickland, 2013). This move was met with concern from prison reformers who suggested that removing the role of the DfE would also reduce the focus on the welfare needs of young offenders and limit the prioritisation of welfare led responses (Pemberton, 2010).

In the December of 2010 the Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle* was published, with a promise of a ‘rehabilitation revolution’. This paper highlighted a focus on prevention and diversion, restorative justice and an increase in out of court disposals. This paper suggested that services would not be delivered via the state before “testing where the private, voluntary or community sectors can provide them more effectively and efficiently’ (Ministry of Justice 2010: 137). This green paper also recommended abolishing the YJB and proposed the development of a ‘payment by results’ model. Yates (2012:439) argues that the proposal of the payment by results model “clearly coheres with the neo-liberal agenda of cost



cutting, extracting best value from constrained spending as well as facilitating market penetration”.

## **A focus on vulnerabilities (2012 – 2019)**

In 2012 the trial of the perpetrators of the Rochdale child sexual exploitation ring along with media reporting prompted an independent inquiry led by Professor Alexis Jay (2014) into the failure of the local authority to act on reports of abuse. Child sexual exploitation is defined as “the exchange of the sexual services of a child for commodities” (Cockburn and Brayley, 2012:659). Commodities include items which are both tangible (such as alcohol, gifts and money) and intangible (such as love and affection). The exploitative nature of these interactions includes the imbalance of power in relation to the immaturity of the victims’ physical, emotional, mental capacity and/or they are manipulated by their socioeconomic disadvantage (Chase and Statham, 2005). Hence, perpetrators of CSE tend to target vulnerable children such as those who are known to children’s services. Reports have been made that perpetrators will often target residential children’s homes to groom their victims (Loughton, 2012). This then puts children in care at greater risk of CSE.

Cockburn and Brayley (2012) examined how CSE and engaging in offending pathways interact, drawing from the data sets from a CSE specialist service provider and a local youth offending team from one East Midland city in England. Of this sample 38.2% of identified victim survivors of CSE were also known to youth offending and 75% of these were girls. However, statistically speaking male CSE victim/survivors were significantly more likely to offend than female CSE victim/survivors. Hence the authors argue that “the relationship between CSE and youth offending should not be reduced to a single-gender issue, but that gender differences should be considered when planning, research and interventions” (Cockburn and Brayley, 2012:698).

Cockburn and Brayley (2012) also found that victim/survivors of CSE were more likely to engage in criminal pathways from a younger age and were more likely to be repeat offenders. However, when they crossed paths with the youth offending

teams they were “typically recognised as offenders before they are recognised as victims” (2012; 698). It is also important to note that, much like other sexual assaults, a majority of CSE cases are hypothesised to be unreported (Jago et al. 2011). Cockburn and Brayley (2012:699) conclude that:

Whatever the initial cause, for many children CSE and youth offending seem to coexist in a state of twisted symbiosis, whereby the one exacerbates the other and vice versa. Thus, although CSE may trigger or exacerbate offending, offending may simultaneously trigger or exacerbate exploitation.

Up until this point it can be argued that CSE was not on the radar of youth offending practice (for example the YJB released a paper on risk factors for offending in 2005 and *Working with Girls* in 2009 and neither reports discussed CSE). However, in 2014 the YJB (in partnership with the Home Office) delivered training on awareness of CSE, delivered regional practice on working with girls and CSE (in partnership with National Offender Management Service) and developed “a new ‘Youth Justice Interactive Learning Space’ (YJILS) training module...specifically on working with girls and sexual exploitation” (YJB 2015:2).

In December 2012 a joint inspection by HMI Probation, Ofsted and Estyn published a report titled *Looked After Children: An inspection of the work of Youth Offending Teams with children and young people who are looked after and placed away from home*. This report found that

In the overwhelming majority of the cases that we inspected, the outcomes for the children and young people were poor. Children and young people were not always protected. Some had been assaulted or sexually exploited; some had themselves assaulted or exploited other children and young people. They had often been criminalised while in care for offences that would probably not have gone to court if they had been living at home. A significant number had gone missing at some point, some a substantial number of times. Their education had suffered and few were well prepared or supported for transition to adulthood.

(2012:7)

This report outlined the difficulties faced by youth offending teams in supervising young people in care who were placed in their local authority from different areas. It also found multiagency practice was difficult and practitioners felt that the work of YOT was not understood by other agencies. The inspection also found that, despite practitioners having access to the circumstances of the young people being in care, their placement and behaviours “there was little exploration, analysis or even acknowledgement of the impact on the emotional well-being of the child or young person or thought about how that needed to be addressed” (2012:8). This inspection also found that over two thirds of looked after children who the youth offending teams were working with were male. Therefore, it did not address how practice may differ for girls in care.

Two months later in February 2013, a Green Paper was published entitled *Transforming Youth Custody – Putting Education at the Heart of Detention*. This paper focused on the high rate of recidivism stating that 73% of young offenders reoffend within 12 months of their release. It highlighted the complexity and social disadvantages related to offending, with a particular focus on low educational attainment. This paper also recognised that young offenders often have social, emotional and health needs which should be considered. Again, it recommended the importance of Youth Offending Teams and Children’s Services working together to address the holistic needs of young offenders.

This report also identified the high number of young people involved with the youth justice system who were currently involved with or had histories with the care system. This therefore placed the government in a particular position as children in care are considered the responsibility of the state, who act as their ‘corporate parent’. As a result, the over representation of children in care in the justice system raised concerns around care being a criminogenic environment (Hayden, 2010). Finally, the Green Paper recognised how young female offenders come with a complex set of needs and that certain aspects of detention are at risk of impacting girls differently to how they impact boys. This is the first time gender differences are highlighted in government youth crime and social policy. Gender and its implication for offending and service intervention is raised in reports made by the

Youth Justice Board (see Arnall and Eagle, 2009 for example) however, this Green Paper is the first-time gender is considered in social policy.

In 2014 the YJB introduced AssetPlus to replace the Asset, which was described as addressing the criticism of 'future risk' based sentencing and assessed welfare needs more comprehensively. It was to be rolled out to youth offending teams over 2015-16. The AssetPlus focused on diversion and included new key policies on CSE (YJB, 2014). This aimed to improve "identification of risks of sexual exploitation or past abuse in the lives of children and young people; and will signpost practitioners to appropriate further assessment and support" (YJB, 2014). In 2014 the YJB also developed and implemented the 'working with girls self-assessment tool kit' to assist in identifying girls at risk of CSE (YJB, 2014) and in 2015 the YJB trained youth offending staff in child protection issues. Hence, it can be argued that post the independent inquiry led by Jay (2014) and Casey's follow up report (2015) CSE became and remains a significant area of practice for youth offending officers, specifically those working with girls.

In 2015 elections saw the Conservative party return to power, led again by David Cameron. In September 2015 the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove, announced a review into the youth justice system, led by Charlie Taylor. The aim of this review was to examine "whether the current system, which was created in 2000, remains able to meet challenges we face in 2015" (Gove, 2015). The interim report on the emerging findings of this report published in February 2016 found that the smaller custodial populations equated to a population which is made up of some of the most troubled and disadvantaged young people in the country, and therefore this puts pressure on frontline staff, who do not necessarily have the experience or skills to work with this demographic nor do they have sufficient training. This, the report suggests, has "been compounded by staff shortages in YOIs which have resulted in children spending too much time in cells and receiving inadequate access to health and rehabilitative services, or being looked after by members of staff who they do not know" (Taylor, 2016).

The final report published in December 2016 recommended “a new system in which young people are treated as children first and offenders second, and in which they are held to account for their offending, but with the understanding that the most effective way to achieve change will often be by improving their education, their health, their welfare and by helping them draw on their own strengths and resources” (Taylor, 2016:48). The report also states that “our aim should be to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century system that moves away from justice with some welfare, to a welfare system with justice” and once again recommended that the YOT system needed to integrate more with children’s services (2016:49). Moreover, the report highlighted how the needs of girls, especially those in custody, are different to boys and that this needs to be considered when working with them.

This same year the National Association for Youth Justice released an independent report entitled ‘*The State of Youth Justice 2015: An Overview of Trends and Developments*’. This report explored questions around the wider political context under which the youth justice system had developed and raised the issue of whether recent changes in policy and practice were actually the result of prioritising the wellbeing of young people involved with the law or simply the result of cost cutting related to a perceived need for austerity measures (Bateman, 2014; Bateman; 2015). For example, although statistically there are fewer young people in custody, given funding cuts the rehabilitative support these young people receive may not be sufficient. Furthermore, as the vast majority of youth offending is minor, Bateman (2015) argues that these offenders are at risk of ‘slipping through the gaps’ as more pressure is put on an overworked and shrinking law enforcement, due directly to cuts in public spending.

In 2016 the Prison Reform Trust published the results of an independent inquiry led by Lord Laming into the disproportionate number of children and young people in care in the CJS. The *In Care, Out of Trouble* (2016) report and the associated systematic literature review (Staines, 2016) focused on prevention, diversion and early intervention. It recommended prioritising working with families, using restorative justice programmes and yet again stressed the importance of effective joined up working with social care, youth offending, police and the wider CJS. It

also made recommendations for the role of the corporate parenting boards, first established in the *Children Act* (1989). Outcome Three of the *In Care, Out of Trouble* recommends that “good parenting by the State gives children in care the chance to thrive and protects them from criminalisation”.

The *In Care, Out of Trouble* (2016) report also refers specifically to working with girls who are in care and offenders. The report suggests that the needs of girls who are in care and involved with youth offending services are not being met partly due to the small proportion of the demographic but also due to negative stereotyping because of their gender. Interviews with girls for the inquiry illustrated that “they feel they are not taken seriously as victims of crime” (2016:15).

As a result, the report recommends that practice needs to be gender sensitive and that “this must include, at a minimum, ensuring that girls have access to support and supervision by female officers and staff” (2016;17). The report also recommends setting up of protocols to protect children in care from being criminalised.

These joint working protocols should also be aimed at ensuring through consultation with children and young people, regular equality analyses, continuing professional development and the use of peer mentors, that the protection of children and young people in care from criminalisation is gender-sensitive; in particular, that girls in care are protected from child sexual exploitation and that negative stereotypes about girls subject to child sexual exploitation are challenged.

(2016:22)

Although this acknowledgement is welcome, it also describes a complex situation for youth offending practitioners as frontline professionals working with girls in care. The research suggests that these girls will present with highly complex needs, vulnerabilities and significant risks, particularly to CSE.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided an historical account of the evolution of the youth justice system in England and Wales. It has highlighted how context is crucial when considering the social construction of youth crime and how the state responds to young offenders. It has also highlighted how the impact of sociocultural constructions of gender are often ignored in policy and practice. Because of this the treatment of girls in the criminal justice system is 'beset with myths, muddles and misconceptions' (Gelsthorpe and Worrall, 2009:220) which draw on sociocultural constructions of appropriate femininity and confuse 'perceptions of them as an offender'. It has also discussed how the power of these sociocultural constructions overshadows gender-neutral policies (Cox, 2003; Sharpe, 2012; Heidensohn, 1985). Furthermore this chapter has illustrated how throughout history political discourse has used youth crime to gain popularity which has encouraged a tension between the welfare and justice aspects of youth offending practice.

However, Urwin (2018:10) argues

Without a clear philosophical approach to underpin practice, the aims of a system are open to interpretation, which allows for different approaches to develop, each with the claim of being correct. This is what happened within youth justice, allowing two different philosophical approaches to develop in practice - a neo-liberal criminal justice view and a welfarist social justice view.

Because of this tension and the absence of an explicit philosophical approach, this can lead to ambiguity in the role of youth offending practitioner. For example, the importance of having a working relationship between YOTs and Children's Services is underlined in the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*, *Every Child Matters 2003* and *Youth Justice – the next steps 2003*. YOTs involvement in LSCBs was also made a statutory requirement by the *Children Act 2004*. And the working relationship between the two services is also foundational to the recommendations made in the *Working Together* guidance 2010. Yet, it continues to be an area of improvement recommended for effective practice as evidenced in the *Charlie Taylor Review 2016*

and the *In Care, Out of Trouble Review* 2016. When this is considered alongside the ambiguity of the role of the youth offending service, this raised the question of whether the lack of clarity could be impacting on the ability to effectively achieve joined up practice. The same recommendation is made a number of times, yet it is unclear on why this hasn't been established. Hence, does the emphasis on multiagency practice support or further confuse in the role of youth offending teams?

Finally, this chapter has illustrated that the implementation of neoliberalism coupled with the impact of austerity measures has led to population of youth offending clients being made up of young people with high complex welfare and interacting welfare needs and which further supports that clarity regarding the role of the youth justice officer is particularly paramount. It has also highlighted that girls who offend and girls in care who offend, present with particular welfare needs but how practitioners work with these needs is unknown. The following chapter will examine in closer details the welfare needs and offending patterns of girls who offend and girls in care who offend in England and Wales.



# Chapter Two: The welfare needs and offending patterns of girls who offend and looked after children who offend

## Introduction

The previous chapter provided a historical account of the youth offending system within England and Wales and illustrated the tension between welfare and justice, which continues to permeate contemporary policy and practice. It also examined how this has had a particular impact on girls and women throughout that history. This chapter interrogates this tension further, by examining the welfare needs and offending patterns of girls who offend and children in care who offend. Building from these sections the chapter highlights specific welfare needs and offending patterns of girls in care which have implications for how the youth offending team role is understood.

Firstly, this chapter provides a theoretical context on youth female offending. This first section of this chapter draws on theoretical literature from anglophone cultures. It then goes on to examine the literature on girls who offend within the United Kingdom and is broken into subsections titled demographics, complex trauma histories and welfare needs, relationship difficulties and attachment, peer networks, educational difficulties, mental health and emotional wellbeing, and substance misuse. The first half of this chapter closes with an exploration of the systemic response to girls who offend in England and Wales and argues that the needs of female offenders are complex and interact with offending behaviours.

The second half of this chapter begins with a review of the international literature of looked after children who offend. Again, this draws from anglophone cultures and highlights the few areas specific to girls in care who offend. It then goes on to explore what is known about looked after children who offend in England which is broken down into subsections titled demographics, trauma histories and welfare needs, care histories, criminalisation, relationship difficulties and attachment, peer

networks, educational difficulties, mental health and emotional wellbeing, and substance misuse. Areas that have been found to be specific to girls in care have been highlighted. It then concludes this chapter with an analysis of the systemic response to looked after children who offend, with a focus on girls in care. It argues that the welfare needs of female offenders become magnified when girls are also in care and that when this is not taken into consideration the state's response to girls in care who offend can exacerbate their welfare needs which may in turn contribute to further offending.

## Theoretical context - girls who offend

This section will draw on international literature from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. It will focus on theoretical understandings of youth female offending behaviour in order to provide a context for the following section.

Across international borders and throughout history, male offenders significantly outnumber female offenders. According to the Ministry of Justice (2015) women in England and Wales only make up 4.5% of the entire prison population. This is similar in New Zealand where women make up 7.2% of the prison population (Department of Corrections, 2019), in the United States making up 7% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017) and in Canada where women make up 8% of the federal prison population (Corrections Services of Canada, 2018). The numbers are slightly higher in Australia with women making up 20% of the prison population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Possibly due to the low number of female offenders, criminology as a discipline has historically largely ignored female pathways when considering theories of offending patterns and behaviours. Traditionally, most theories have examined male patterns of offending and simply applied this to female offenders. This exclusion of gender in analysis and theory production has been referred to as the "stag effect" (Bernard, 1964 as cited Chesney- Lind and Pasko, 2013:2). However, from the late 1960s-1970s feminist criminologists began to challenge the 'stag effect' and since then there has been - and continues to be - an increase in research into the gendered nature of crime and criminal pathways.

According to feminist thought, the patriarchal nature of society shapes how women and girls interact with the world around them, which includes how they engage with criminality (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Daigle et al. 2007; Schaffner, 2007; DeHart and Moran 2015). For example, feminist theorists such as Belknap et al. (1997) and Chesney-Lind (1989) argue that although young offenders may have similar traumatic histories their emotional and cognitive responses to these experiences may differ by gender (Garcia and Lane, 2010). Schaffner (2007:1231) argues that the impact on girls who have been victimised within the family home differs from boys because for girls the abusive experience “confirms their place within the gender hierarchy”. Chesney-Lind’s research (1989) reiterates this, proposing that the gendered nature of society disempowers girls, particularly girls who are victims of abuse.

Feminist criminological thought also includes the ‘masculinisation’ theory of female offending, which is based on ideas that gender as a social construct is ‘performed’ in certain ways and comes with certain ascribed behaviours (Heidensohn, 2012). However, the social construction and performance of gender still exists under the confines of the patriarchy. That is, girls may ‘behave like boys’ which would support the masculinisation theory, however they may be doing this in order to protect themselves and gain cultural capital. An example of this is Henricksen’s (2017) ethnographic study with female offenders which concluded “that young women apply a range of gendered tactics to establish safety and social mastery, and that these are framed by the limits and possibilities imposed by a street-based hypermasculine script” (2017: 1).

Hence, feminist criminologists often argue that it is *gender roles* which shape offending pathways, rather than gender per se (Heimer and De Coster, 1999; Steffensmeier and Allen 1996). Miller (2002) furthers this position by arguing that gender is both performed and fluid. Miller challenges dualistic thinking and suggests that looking at the intersections of race, class, sexuality, generation and how these exist within a hierarchy is better placed to understand female offending. Similar to Henricksen’s research, Miller found that moving between masculine and

feminine behaviours - coined as 'gender crossing' (2002:442) – can be used as a tool to negotiate safety for female gang members.

The developmental psychologist Gilligan (1982) claimed that the difference in offending patterns for juveniles is due to the way the genders manage difficult moral decisions which she argued is the result of the different ways in which girls and boys are socialised. For example, Gilligan proposed that moral development falls into two categories: care-based morality and justice-based morality. She suggests that girls are socialised into a care-based morality so when faced with difficult decisions they will consider conflicting parties and try to find a compromise. On the other hand, Gilligan suggests that boys are more likely to be socialised into a justice-based morality which when faced with difficult situation are more likely to see one party as right and the other as wrong. This theory assumes homogeneity between gender and moral development as it does not consider the impact of class, race, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, disability or age and their intersections.

In contrast, the Black feminist theory of intersectionality proposes that the sharing of a gender – and other identities - does not equate to similar experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). In her pivotal research Crenshaw highlighted how legal discourses and both feminist and anti-racist movements positioned individual identities as mutually exclusive. This – Crenshaw argues- results in the erasure of the systemic oppression experienced by Black women who experience multiple minoritized identities.

As the theory of intersectionality has developed its application has not been exclusive to race and gender but also includes the intersection of systemic oppression related to sexuality, class, disability, ethnicity, culture and age (Nash, 2019). This links back to Miller's (2002) research that challenges dualistic thinking when considering gender roles and female gang membership. Hence, the theory of intersectionality provides a lens which highlights the "interconnectedness of structures of domination" (Nash, 2019:6). It proposes that oppressions are multilayered and therefore experiences of these oppressions cannot be isolated out from one another. That is, "intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression

cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (Hill Collins, 2000:18). An intersectional lens therefore assists in academic thinking when considering girls and women in the criminal justice system.

For example, not only do girls and women make up a smaller percentage of the offending population – as discussed earlier - but the criminal justice system is also deeply rooted in systemic racism. As David Lammy writes in his *Independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*, in England and Wales “despite making up just 14% of the population, BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] men and women make up 25% of prisoners, while over 40% of young people in custody are from BAME backgrounds” (2017:3). Lammy also notes that this over-representation is not unique to Britain but is also witnessed in the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The independent review highlights the complexities of this overrepresentation, noting how:

Many of the causes of BAME overrepresentation lie outside the CJS... People from a black background are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than those from a white background. Black children are more than twice as likely to grow up in a lone parent family. Black and Mixed ethnic boys are more likely than White boys to be permanently excluded from school and to be arrested as a teenager. These issues start long before a young man or woman ever enters a plea decision, goes before a magistrate or serves a prison sentence. Although these problems must be addressed, this cannot be done by the justice system alone. Prisons may be walled off from society, but they remain a product of it.

(2017:4)

What this last point highlights that the criminal justice system and its construction of crime and criminality cannot be divorced from the society in which it exists. As bell hooks (1984) argues, Western democracies are built on white supremacist,

capitalist, and patriarchal values and therefore the default - and privileged position - is always white, middle to upper class and male.

An example of this is Carlen's book *Women, Crime and Poverty* (1988). Carlen highlights how despite law-breaking being "evenly distributed throughout all social classes" (1988:4) the criminal justice system is overrepresented by the working class, particularly when it comes to female offenders. This research considers the intersection of the construction of gender, class, and race and how they influence a criminal justice response. From this analysis Carlen argues that women who offend are sentenced not on the basis of their behavior but on the court's assessment of them as women, mothers, daughters and wives. The baseline of this assessment is white, heterosexual and middleclass. As Carlen argues:

For the major differences between white collar and working-class crime, between men's and women's crimes, and between crimes committed by black and white persons, lie not primarily in the reasons, rationales and ideologies associated with the initial law breaking (although there are differences for each group) but in the differential rates and modes of their subsequent criminalization according to class, gender and race.

(1988:12).

In her analysis Carlen (1988) highlights the racism and class-bias inherent in legislation and welfare policies and illustrates how these interact with each other and with ideals of gender. Carlen argues that together these constructions "have a complex but malign influence on the mode and degree of criminalization of young women in care who break the law and/or step out of place" (1988:76).

Therefore, intersectional theory would argue that there is no hegemonic position when discussing 'girls or women who offend'. Lammy (2017) noted this complication in his independent review of the criminal justice system as he found that in England and Wales girls who were Black were less likely to be charged for crimes than girls who were White, but girls from mixed ethnic backgrounds faced the most criminal charges. This highlights that untangling race from gender – and

their associated oppression inherent in the criminal justice response – is an impossible task. And as per Carlen's (1988) research, when class is considered, these oppressions become further entangled.

Hence, by considering the criminal justice system from a gendered perspective only excludes experiences of BAME young women, of LGBTQI+ young women, of young women from different class backgrounds, of young women with disabilities and of young women from care. This does not suggest that girls who offend do not have shared experiences of trauma and face similar disadvantages that may put them at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system – as this chapter will go on to highlight – but rather how individual girls are constructed and the systemic oppressions and privileges they face may not be shared.

## **Girls who offend in the UK**

Internationally female youth offending behaviours typically peak between the ages of 12–15 and their criminal pathways tend to be shorter in duration when compared to their male counterparts (Aurnull and Eagle, 2009; Junger-Tas et al. 2003; Weatherburn et al. 2014). Offending patterns also commonly differ between males and females. For example, Smith and McAra (2004;3) found that 'there is a substantial difference between boys and girls in levels of serious delinquency, but a relatively small difference in levels of broad delinquency'. This is supported in the recent statistical analysis of arrests in England and Wales, which found that juvenile female offenders represent 49% of the overall youth offending population, but only 9% are prosecuted for indictable offences (YJB, 2018). In addition to this, of the girls who do commit violent offences, more are likely to have an existing relationship with the victim (Aurnull and Eagle, 2009). This suggests that there is often a domestic element in offending for girls. Furthermore, it has also been argued that desistance from offending can differ for the genders. Rungay (2004) argues that successful female desistance from offending comes down to the ability to claim an alternative prosocial identity, which is supported by a performed script, a sense of self efficacy and personal resilience.

The 2009 Youth Justice Board research which examined the Asset files of girls in Youth Offending Teams describes the profile of convicted female offenders in England and Wales as:

Predominantly White, between 15 and 16 years old, have been convicted of a violent offence and have received a Referral Order. They have no previous convictions: have had contact with social services during their childhood and generally experience dysfunctional family relationships. They have often been abused, witnessed violence in the family context and experienced significant bereavement and loss. Their family members are often involved in criminal activity and use drink and drugs. These young women either live with only one birth parent or neither. They are usually enrolled in mainstream school but are not attending education. They are bored, mix with delinquent peers and participate in reckless activities. They drink and smoke but do not use drugs. Convicted girls are often emotionally affected by both past and current circumstances: they may self-harm but probably will not have attempted suicide. They have inappropriate levels of self-esteem, are aggressive, angry, impulsive and easily led.

(Arnull and Eagle, 2009: 58-59)

Although this profile does not describe all girls who offend, it does provide insight into some of the welfare needs and risks that girls who offend in England and Wales may present.

In terms of sentencing, in 2017 the most common conviction for youth female offenders in England and Wales was summary offences such as theft (YJB, 2018). This is consistent with international conviction rates (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012). In the year ending March 2018, female offenders in England and Wales made up 17% of youth arrests statistics and were 19% of the first-time entrants (FTE) in to the criminal justice system, with summary offences also being the most common offences for FTEs (Youth Justice Board, 2019). During this same year 4,200 girls received convictions or cautions by the courts and reoffending rates



for girls was 28.7% (YJB, 2018). However, female offenders who were held in the secure estate in the England and Wales were more likely than male offenders to commit proven assaults (at 85.1, compared to 26.5 for males) (YJB, 2018).

In this same year ending March 2018, female offenders made up 4% of the youth custody population (YJB, 2018). Because of the consistently low number of youth female offenders receiving custodial sentences, in August 2013 female Youth Offending Institutions were decommissioned in England and Wales and since then any female offender under the age of 18 who is sentenced to the youth secure estate is held primarily in Secure Training Centres or Secure Children's Homes (Youth Justice Board, 2016). However, unlike male offenders, girls may also be held in adult female prisons (Allen, 2016).

In the year ending March 2018 the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPIs), defined as "any occasion when force is used with the intention of overpowering or to overpower a young person" in the secure estate had the highest rates for females, those aged between 10-14 and BAME groups (YJB, 2018:49). As previously mentioned, these same three groups had the highest record of assaults in the secure estate (which was perpetrated towards either another young person, staff members or visitors) and correlates with the use of RPIs. In addition, records of self-harm remained highest for female offenders in the secure estate, however the rates of self-harm increased in the overall population.

What this suggests is that although girls make up a small number of the overall youth offending population, the more serious offenders experience a high incidence of aggression and self-harming behaviours. Those in secure accommodation appear to be particularly vulnerable. These behaviours need to be understood within context of the trauma histories and welfare needs of these girls who offend. Having this context provides insight into why girls may behave in certain ways, what places them at risk of offending and what can protect them from offending.

### Complex trauma histories and welfare needs

The literature on girls who offend in the United Kingdom depicts young women who are likely to have multiple, complex and intersecting trauma histories and welfare needs. Delinquent behaviour in girls is often associated with experiences of poverty and socio-economic deprivation, trauma and sexual abuse, family breakdowns, loss or bereavement, poor mental health including engaging in self-harming behaviour, associating with delinquent peers (including older male offenders – who may also sexually exploit them) misuse of substances and difficulties with education (Smith and McAra, 2004; Batchelor, 2005; Sharpe, 2012; Arnull and Eagle, 2009).

The Newcastle Longitudinal Study found that traumatic family backgrounds are more likely to be associated with female offending behaviours than male offending behaviours (Kolvin et al. 1988). This appears to have remained the case almost 30 years later as according to recent research by Auty et al. (2017: 232) family risk factors for offending are more accurate predictors for female offending patterns than male offending patterns in England. When compared to boys, girls who offend in England and Wales are also more likely to have had experiences of being in state care or had contact with social services (Arnull and Eagle, 2009; Prison Reform Trust, 2016), suggesting they are also more likely to have experienced abuse and neglect within the family home.

McAra and McVie (2016) found that girls who were from economically deprived households and experienced poverty were more at risk of being involved in violent crimes. This is supported by Batchelor (2005) who examined the narratives and experiences of young women convicted of violent crime in Scotland and found that violent female offenders commonly experienced sexual abuse, family conflict and violence in the home.

Two-fifths of the young women said they had been sexually abused, usually by a member of their family. A significant amount of violence within the home was also reported, with two-fifths of the young women describing witnessing regular incidents of 'serious' physical violence between their

parents, most of which were attributed to their father's (and sometimes their mother's) alcohol abuse. The young women also witnessed physical violence between and against their siblings ('beatings' sometimes involving the use of weapons, such as majorette batons, bricks or belts), and two-fifths had been victimized themselves, usually by their parents, sometimes seriously.

(Batchelor,2005:364)

These findings are echoed by Sharpe (2012) who interviewed 52 British female offenders who had experienced violence, neglect and had witnessed domestic abuse. Of the girls 29% reported experiences of physical abuse within the family home and 15% reported histories of sexual abuse and rape. They also lacked stability in the continuity of the provision of emotional and practical needs, which left them with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Home was not considered a safe or secure space and homelessness was experience by 29% of the girls. This was due to being thrown out of the family home (often at aged 16) or the girls leaving to escape abuse perpetrated towards them or their mother.

International research on the long-term impact of trauma suggests that children who have experienced trauma, particularly sexual assault trauma, are at greater risk of experiencing further trauma in the future (Widom, et al. 2008: DeHart and Moran, 2015). One explanation for this may be that exposure to trauma can lower sensitivity to risk (Wiig, et.al. 2003). For example, Smith and McAra (2004), who applied a gendered lens to data from the longitudinal research programme examining pathways in and out of crime for youth in Edinburgh, found that girls who engage in levels of broad delinquency attributed these offending behaviours to experiences of victimisation and being more comfortable with risk taking/being in risky environments. Hence, due to the high chance of having experienced trauma in childhood, girls who offend are highly vulnerable to experiencing further trauma.

Furthermore, the profile of behaviours of victims of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in England and Wales mirrors what research suggests is the profile of behaviours of

girls who offend. For example, in 2011 the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre published a report based on research which suggested that children who were victims of CSE often went missing from home, were disengaged with school and had experienced bullying, and at times behaved in aggressive, chaotic behaviours. They were also more likely to be female, however the report stressed that the number of boys may be unreported. As discussed, absconding from home, being bullied, truanting from school and displaying aggressive behaviours are also commonly experienced by female offenders.

Cockbain and Brayley (2012) recognised the link between these profiles and compared the data sets of youth offending teams and rates of exploited children in one English local authority. They found that there was a relationship between offending and experiences of child sexual exploitation, although the study was unable to specify the exact nature of the relationship. Gender was included in their analysis and the authors suggested that girls who offended were much more likely than their male counterparts to be *recorded* as being victims of child sexual exploitation. However, the male victims of CSE were more likely to be arrested more regularly and be engaging in offending behaviour from an earlier age. Although the nature of the relationship between CSE and offending remains unclear, what is clear is that girls who are offenders are highly likely to be at risk of being sexually exploited and vice versa.

This is not to suggest that exposure to trauma and abuse causes delinquency, as not all girls who experience these adversities engage in offending. Rather, the impact of having experienced trauma and abuse and the support they receive -or rather lack thereof -can put them *at risk* of engaging in offending. What's more, exposure to trauma, abuse and neglect may also impact on the girls being able to develop secure attachments, it may impact on mental health and sense of wellbeing and it may contribute to their substance misuse – all of which can put them at risk of engaging in offending behaviour, as this chapter will go onto illustrate.

### Relationship difficulties and attachment

International research suggests that adolescent girls who offend are more likely than their male counterparts to experience conflict with parents, rebel against boundaries and behave aggressively, particularly within step families (see Cenkovich et al. 2008; Lanctot and LeBlanc, 2002). Within the United Kingdom most violent offending perpetrated by girls is directed at someone who is close to them and with whom they have an established and often complicated relationship, such as friends and family (Arunll and Eagle, 2009). Compounding this, girls who offend may also identify as being victimised by the person who the court perceives as ‘the victim’ (see Larsson, 2019).

Girls who engage in offending behaviour are also likely than their male counterparts to have experienced difficult relationships with their parents – often their mothers - or primary carers. Sharpe (2012) found that conflict specifically in the mother-daughter relationship was associated with girls who offend. A third of the girls in her study had poor relationships with their mothers and difficulties arose regarding their mother’s substance misuse. Conflicts between mother and daughter in this sample also included concerns related to boyfriends (mothers or daughters as both were more likely to experience domestic violence). Disagreements with their mothers had a negative impact on the girl’s mood and behaviours and this lasted for a prolonged period. It is proposed that this can also put the girls at risk of processing this conflict in antisocial ways. For example, Sharpe (2012:61) argues that during this time of conflict the girls were ‘susceptible to behaving aggressively or subsequently provoked or irritated by others’. They were also at risk of relying on unhealthy coping strategies such as using substances or engaging in self-harming behaviours.

Studies have found that children who are persistent offenders also commonly have experiences of loss through death or termination of contact with significant relationships (Liddle and Solanki, 2002, Boswell, 1996). Most often loss is experienced by termination of contact with fathers (Sharpe, 2012). Similarly, Jacobson et al. (2010) found that 12% of imprisoned children in England and Wales are bereaved of a parent or sibling. Sharpe (2012) found that 27% of the female

offenders in her study had experienced multiple bereavements, including the death of a parent via homicide, substance overdose or suicide. Not only are these bereavements of primary caregivers, but the significant nature of this loss can be an added layer of trauma, for example by difficulties in making sense of and processing loss via suicide. Many of these girls also identified their grandparents as a primary care giver who provide physical and emotional security and safety (Sharpe, 2012). In these cases, the loss of a grandparent was particularly significant.

Taylor (2006) argues that it is helpful to take a cross disciplinary understanding of the role of attachment and belonging when considering offending behaviours of young people. Taylor (2006: 59-61) promotes a holistic understanding of attachment and belonging and suggests criminological theorists - such as Hirschi (1969) Braithwaite (1989) and Sampson and Laub (1993) who explore belonging and attachment and its role in desistence – are considered alongside developmental psychological theorist - such as Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978). By considering attachment and belonging holistically, this then extends beyond attachment to the primary caregiver and includes social institutions, significant relationships, professionals and belonging to peer groups.

### **Peer networks**

Associating with anti-social peers is a risk factor for both genders in engaging in offending (Piquero et al. 2005: Arnall and Eagle, 2009). However, the influence of the mix of gender on male and female offending patterns does not seem as clear cut. For example, Cernkovich and Giordano (1979) found that American male adolescents who associate with other antisocial males are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour and abuse substances, whereas female adolescents are more at risk in mixed gender groups. Caspi and colleagues (1993) support this claim in their research into offending for girls in single sex verses mixed gendered schools in New Zealand. This research found that that girls are more likely to become involved in antisocial behaviour when with male offenders. Furthermore, Haynie et al. (2005) found that having an antisocial boyfriend also was a risk for girls in the US in engaging in offending.

However, Arnall and Eagle (2009) found that most female offending in England and Wales was either co-offending with *female* peers or offending on their own. Yet other UK based research has found that associating with negative peers and anti-social boyfriends *does* appear to place girls at risk of being groomed into offending via association with criminal gangs. For example, Firmin (2011) conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with girls who were both victims of gang violence and involved in gang related offending across Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. The project found that girls who were related to, friends of or partners of gang members across the country were affected by gang related and serious youth violence and were more likely to engage in offending.

The Centre for Mental Health Report (2013:2) found that girls who experienced parental imprisonment, substance misuse and poor mental health were “around three to five times more likely to be involved in gangs than other females”. Additionally, experiences of abuse, particularly sexual abuse, witnessing of domestic violence and being bullied by female peers put girls at risk of gang membership. They were also more likely to “have histories of running away, poor educational performance, and exclusion from school than the average female youth justice entrant” (Kahn, et al. 2013:3).

According to Pitts (2013:29-30) ‘for many of these young women the gang appears to offer a way out of, and protection from, a difficult family situation: ‘real’ friendship: a sense of being appreciated and popular: excitement and money’. What this indicates is that the gang network is linked to experiences of belonging for these young women. Therefore, leaving the gang is a complicated process for socially disadvantaged young women in England and Wales as leaving means leaving their ‘support network’. According to this research when girls have managed to successfully exit from gangs this has often been when the girls have found the gang to no longer be a safe place for them. However, as established in the previous section, when an individual is exposed to repeated experiences of trauma, abuse and neglect they may become less likely to avoid or recognise risk and therefore what they consider ‘unsafe’ may be extremely volatile. This is supported by the Centre for Social Justice report *Girls in Gangs* (2014).

### Educational difficulties

Being engaged with education can act as a protective factor for young people and school can provide them with a sense of belonging, structure, routine and purpose (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Students may also experience academic achievements which can positively impact on their sense of self. School is also a space where young people can associate with positive peer networks and can develop positive attachments to teachers who believe in them and encourage them. Hence, when young people experience academic difficulties at school or bullying this may also lower their self-esteem. They may also have troubled relationships with teachers. All these factors put young people at risk of behaving aggressively, absconding and associating with antisocial peers which puts them directly at risk of engaging in offending.

In 2009 the Youth Justice Board published a report which found that a third of female offenders were enrolled in mainstream education, with an additional 9% enrolled in Pupil Referral Units. Girls between the ages of 14-15 were also most likely not to be attending school and those between 16-17 were most likely not to be enrolled in education or training and/or be employed. Of the girls involved with the youth offending service, 12% had difficulties with literacy, 10% had difficulties with numeracy and 10% had special educational needs. It was recorded that 9% of these girls had been bullied, whilst 12% were recorded as being bullies themselves. The Youth Justice Board also found that 15% of the sample had difficult relationships with teachers or colleagues (Arnull and Eagle, 2009).

Of the girls in Sharpe's (2012) research, 62% had left school before reaching the statutory leaving age of 16. Half of these had left voluntarily, and half had been formally expelled. Only 9 girls had GCSEs and the majority did not meet entry requirements for employment or different vocational training courses. Many had experiences of being bullied, which contributed to them absconding from school. They also reported not feeling that they were fairly treated by teachers. Experiences of being subject to special education provision was also common. Similar findings are evident in Scotland (see Batchelor, 2005). In addition, earlier



research by Graham and Bowling (1995) found that girls who did not enjoy school or felt behind their peers academically were more at risk of engaging in offending than boys who felt that way.

### **Mental health and emotional wellbeing**

As previously outlined, girls who offend are likely to have experiences of significant trauma, loss and bereavement. Arnull and Eagle (2009) argue that girls tend to process this by internalising their anger which is supported by the higher number of girls self-harming and attempting suicide in custody (Hawton et al. 2000; Youth Justice Board, 2008). In Sharpe's (2012) study 40% of the girls had self-harmed or attempted suicide. Similarly, Batchelor (2005:365) found that "experiences of self-harm were another common feature of the interview sample. Eight young women had attempted suicide and 12 had deliberately injured themselves, for example by cutting, on at least one occasion. Six reported taking their anger out on themselves in this way on a regular basis". Stephenson and colleagues (2014) also found that self-harm was common in girls who committed violent offences.

Despite this, only 8% of the female offenders in Arnull and Eagle's (2009) research had a formal mental health diagnosis (22% were described as affected by other emotional/psychological difficulties) and only 28% had had contact with a child and adolescent mental health team. This suggests that girls who offend are not accessing therapeutic support, which may increase their risk of engaging in risky coping strategies such as substance misuse and further self-harming behaviours.

As previously outlined, girls who offend are also likely to have been bereaved. Black (2002) argues that experiences of bereavement of a primary care giver without adequate support can increase risks of developing an insecure attachment and contribute to poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression. This is supported in earlier research which found that girls who have been bereaved of a primary caregiver are more likely to experience major or clinical depression in later adolescence (Reinharz et al. 1993).

Girls in the criminal justice system in the United Kingdom are also more likely than their male counterparts to be mistrustful of others, consider themselves to be victims of discriminatory treatment and have low self-esteem (Arnull and Eagle,

2009; Smith and McAra, 2004). Hammersley and colleagues (2003) found that when interviewing young offenders, female offenders who reported low levels of self-esteem were also more likely to misuse substances. Given that these girls may have experienced significant and multiple traumas and are unlikely to be engaged with any mental health support, it is probable that self-harming behaviours and substances are being used to self-medicate (Arnull and Eagle, 2009).

Again, not all young women who have low self-esteem, are diagnosed with depression or self-harm go on to engage in offending behaviours. However, when these experiences are considered within a context of a history of trauma, abuse and neglect, difficult relationships, experiences of loss or bereavement and insecure attachments, then risk factors for offending increase. For example, 31% of the girls in Sharpe's (2012:87) study reported that they offended because they felt that "no one cared about them and because they did not care about themselves". What this indicates is that having secure attachments can assist in building self-esteem and mitigate risk of offending. Therefore, it is the multi-layered experiences of disadvantage that can lead to fewer deterring factors to offending. Furthermore, if depression, grief and low self-esteem are not addressed, girls may turn to substances to self-medicate. For example, a Scottish longitudinal study found that the young women who had been bereaved of a parent tended to cope with this loss by using substances during adolescence such as drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, which can put them at risk of offending (Sweeting et al. 1998). Hence, the co-occurrence and interaction of disadvantage and trauma and the lack of appropriate support, can play into one another and contribute to the vulnerability these girls face.

### **Substance Misuse**

Many studies have linked substance misuse, in particular alcohol, with young women's offending behaviour in the United Kingdom (Howard League 2004; Arnull and Eagle, 2009; Sharpe, 2012; Batchelor 2005). The use of substances can have a direct impact on offending - such as theft of alcohol or theft as a means of affording substances (Sharpe, 2012). Intoxication itself can also lower impulse control and - despite being used to self-medicate - can magnify emotions and trigger traumatic memories. This may result in engaging in offending behaviours.

Of the girls involved with youth offending service in Arnull and Eagle's (2009) research, 11% felt that their substance use put them at risk of harm, 14% considered their substance use essential to coping with life, 13% reported that their substance use was detrimental to their lives, 24% linked their substance use to their offending behaviours with an additional 7% reported that they offended in order to obtain substances. These findings are supported in Newbury and Dingwell's (2013) research in which the female offenders believed that their offending would not have occurred had they not been drinking. Furthermore, half of the girls in Sharpe's (2012) research felt that their alcohol use contributed to their offending behaviours and a third felt that substances precipitated their offending. However, these girls also felt that their frequent intoxication was not problematic but rather "a means of providing excitement and sometimes structure in their lives, as well as temporary respite from boredom and poverty and exclusion" (Sharpe, 2012: 83-84).

Hence, it is important to contextualise this behaviour. That is, "for many young women, getting drunk was imbued with cultural and social expectations - which resonate throughout wider contemporary British society - that excessive alcohol consumption is a necessary prerequisite for enjoying one-self, or at least in behaving in ways that have become expected, even encouraged among young women" (Sharpe, 2012:70). However, as previously outlined, the majority of girls who offend are a highly vulnerable group who have complex and interrelated needs. These welfare needs also intersect with each other and cannot be treated - or indeed understood - in isolation. Although this behaviour may be culturally appropriate, the use of substances may also be used to self-medicate and manage difficult memories and emotions. This can lead to offending as a means of obtaining legal and illegal substances and being intoxicated can also heighten emotions around unresolved trauma, which may further result in offending behaviours.

### Systemic response

As discussed, offending behaviours for girls, particularly crimes of violence, tend to be perpetrated towards someone with whom they have an established and complicated relationship (Arnull and Eagle, 2009). Hence, these crimes are often domestic in nature. Research also suggests that there has been an increase in using the police to intervene in domestic disputes, which has resulted in the relabelling of the behaviour of girls as criminal and bringing more girls into the criminal justice system (Shape, 2012; Batchelor, 2005). Sharpe (2012:62) argues that the criminalisation of girls for domestic disputes in England and Wales has been ‘accelerated by the retrenchment of welfare services for adolescent girls and their families such that criminal justice responses to crisis have, for some families with teenagers, become more predictable than welfare assistance in the twenty first century’. Thus, behaviours that were once dealt with within the family home with community services support are now becoming a criminal matter and therefore bringing more girls into the criminal justice system.

Once in the criminal justice system, Arnull and Eagle (2009:5) argue that ‘there is still little evidence about “what works” with girls’. Their research suggests that girls who offend prefer to build relationships and to be in single gender spaces compared to boys who, the authors argue, prefer rules and structure. They go on to say:

If gender-mainstreaming is to be taken seriously then staff developing and delivering gender-specific programmes requires considerably more support than they currently receive. Much good work goes unshared or is unsustainable because it is reliant on the goodwill and energy of staff who deliver it in addition to their other tasks. Sustainability is a key issue in work with girls and for gender-specific programmes.

(Arnull and Eagle, 2009:91).

However, five years following this study, the message remained the same. In 2014 The Criminal Justice Joint Inspection investigated “what was happening to girls

within the criminal justice system, if their gender differences were recognised and if there was a different approach to work with girls” (HMIP, 2014:14). They found that although most youth offending teams identified that interventions designed for working with male offenders were not suitable for female offenders, how this played out in practice differed significantly. For example, the investigation reported:

We found that working with girls was often complex and that where promising gender-sensitive approaches had been developed, this was due to individuals who were committed to improving the lives and outcomes for girls and not through a nationally or locally led drive to recognise and meet their particular needs.

(HMIP, 2014:20)

According to this research it seems that the systemic response to girls who offend in the UK is sporadic and dependent on the individual professionals who become responsible for supporting them.

Batchelor (2005) also suggest that how the criminal justice system constructs girls who offend needs to be addressed. As this chapter has outlined, girls who offend often have multiple and complex welfare needs including experiences of physical and sexual trauma, troubled relationships, difficulties at school including being bullied, mental illness and self-harming behaviours, substance misuses, homelessness and loss and bereavement. Because these needs interact with each other and offending behaviours, the systemic response needs to be holistic and comprehensive. However, Batchelor argues that although girls may have complex welfare needs, they prefer to be recognised for their agency;

Young women are unlikely to engage with services that focus solely on their offending behaviour, or with workers who treat them as instances of some ‘problem’ or ‘disorder’. Despite (and sometimes in spite of) their difficult family circumstances, young women who offend tend to reject the label of

‘victim’, preferring to focus instead on their ability to make active decisions about their everyday lives. If we are to achieve positive change in the lives of young women who commit violent offences, we need to respect this agency by maximizing involvement and participation and making sure that young women are made to feel like valued partners with genuine potential and worth. (Batchelor, 2005:372)

Research by Hine and Welford (2012) also supports the claim that recognising the agency of girls who offend is important to understanding offending behaviour. This research drew from the narratives of young female offenders to examine how they understood their use of violent behaviour. The authors argue that the girls’ descriptions and motivation for their behaviour was best understood as resilience as it was specific to the social and environmental context. That is, “violence was often used as a tool for various situations such as protection, self-empowerment, social positioning, power and an expression of agency” (Hine and Welford, 2012:163).

For girls who offend however, agency must always be understood within the context of systemic oppression. Although female offenders may be displaying agency, the decisional pathways available to them are often limited. Pollack argues that the focus on agency, self-esteem and empowerment in the rehabilitation of female offenders is too psychological and individualistic and therefore:

risks obscuring the social conditions and contexts, such as sexism, racial marginalisation, and poverty, that may impact on reasons some women break the law. It also ignores the ways in which gender oppression intersects with racial and class oppression, an intersection that compounds and complicates the experience of being, for example female, poor and of colour. In addition, this perspective simplifies approaches to crime control, social policy and programming, by locating the sole cause of women’s criminal behaviour within their own psyche.

(Pollack, 2000: 81)

Hence, the behaviour of girls who offend needs to be understood within these contexts. That is, they need to be recognised for their agency, whilst also addressing their welfare needs and understanding the impact of their experiences of individual and systemic trauma.

In summary, the first half of this chapter has examined the literature on characteristics of girls who offend in the UK. What it suggests is that compared to their male counterparts' girls who offend are more likely to have experienced trauma within the family home, including sexual and physical abuse and have been witness to domestic violence. They are also more likely to have experienced loss and bereavement. They are more likely to not be attending school and are at greater risk of being bullied. They are more likely to have difficult relationships with their families and their peers. They are at greater risk of having low self-esteem, poor mental health and be engaging in self-harming behaviours. And are more likely to be using substances to self-medicate. Once they are involved with the criminal justice system, it is pure chance if the service they receive will be gender sensitive.

## **Looked after children who offend**

Due to the limited specific literature on girls in care who offend, the second part of this chapter will explore research on the welfare needs of all children in care who offend, and it will highlight research that has findings specific to girls in care.

Drawing from this it will argue that the welfare needs of girls who offend become magnified for girls in care who offend and are likely to have contributed to them being in care. How the system responds to these girls can be either protective or damaging.

## **International context**

This section will draw on international literature from anglophone cultures and will focus on the pathways, risks and protective factors of children in care and offending behaviours. It will take a particular focus on girls in care who offend.

Although the vast majority of children in the care system do not engage in offending (Darker et al. 2008), looked after children continue to be persistently over-represented in the criminal justice system. This is consistent internationally

(Prison Reform Trust, 2016; Mendes et al. 2014). For example, in the UK less than 1% of children are taken into care, yet almost half of the young people in custody have histories of being in care (Prison Reform Trust, 2016).

Even following the reductions in young people facing custodial sentences from 3000 in 2006/2007 to 1000 in 2016 (Fitzpatrick and Williams, 2017), there remains a continued over-representation of looked after children in custody and the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Prison Reform Trust, 2016:12). Fitzpatrick and Williams (2017:2) argue that this is evidence of a systemic failure in providing sufficiently supportive services to children with care histories, particularly “when we consider that a mere 2 per cent of children are in care specifically because of their own behaviour”, with the vast majority being in care due to abuse and/or neglect.

Internationally it has also been found that children in care who offend are more likely to engage in offending behaviours from a younger age, receive a custodial sentence or be placed on remand and are less likely to receive bail compared to offenders not in care (Schofield et. al 2014; McFarlane, 2010; Ryan, et al. 2007). Compounding this, internationally once children in care come in contact with the criminal justice system, they are also more likely to reoffend (Ryan, 2016; Huang et al. 2015). McAra and McVie (2007) refer to this as a recycling of the ‘usual suspects’. Again, internationally care leavers and adults with care histories are over represented in the adult prison system and this is magnified for female offenders (Taylor, 2003; McFarlane 2010; Mendes et al. 2014). This underlines an overall system failure to support some of the community’s most vulnerable individuals.

Children in care who offend are also likely to have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect which can put them at risk of developing significant mental health issues and behavioural difficulties, including impulsivity, aggression and substance misuse (McFarlane, 2010; Wanklyn et al. 2012; Goodkind et al. 2012; Ford et al. 2012; Malvaso et al. 2017). These behavioural difficulties can also lead into offending and result in charges of assault or property damage (Mendes et al. 2014). Furthermore, the use of substances to self-medicate difficult emotions and memories can also result in offending behaviours through lowered impulse control and offending to



fund substance use (Mendes, et al. 2014). This has been found to be to be significant for children and young people who have experienced sexual assault trauma (Coleman and Stewart, 2010).

Previous research based on case file analysis has found that children in care who offend and children in care who do not offend have higher reported incidence of maltreatment when compared to young offenders who are not in care (see Schofield et al. 2014). However, there may be some under-reporting of maltreatment in the histories of offenders not in care compared to those in care.

Malvaso and colleagues (2019) who examined the needs and characteristics of young offenders and compared this to their level of involvement of child protection, found that young offenders who are taken into state care in South Australia present with more complex welfare needs than those who had no contact with children services. This study also found that offenders who had no history of involvement of children's services were more likely to be male, whereas offenders who had historical reports from children's service and been taken into care were more likely to be female. Girls were also reported as having the "greatest number of familial risk factors, including parental criminality and problematic substance use, as well as experiencing household conflict...[including] poorer relationships with their mothers" (Malvaso et al. 2019: 172)

In England and Wales, Redmond (2015) found that a third of boys and 61% of girls in custody had histories of being in care. This is also evident internationally. For example, research in NSW Australia found that of children in custody, 28% of boys and 39% of girls had previously been in care (Wood, 2008). Hence, there is a complex interplay between experiences of trauma, abuse and neglect, being in care and gender that places girls in care at greater risk of engaging in offending and for offending to become more serious and entrenched. However, because looked after girls who offend make up such a small proportion of the overall youth offending population, "there are concerns about the extent to which the needs of looked after girls are addressed in the criminal justice system" (Prison Reform Trust, 2016:15).

## Looked After Children who offend in England

According to statistical data published by the Department for Education, in the year ending March 2018 there were 75,420 looked after children in England. Of these children 56% were identified as male and 44% identified as female. The largest group of looked after children were between the ages of 10-15 year (39%). Those aged 16 years and over made up 23%, those aged between 5-9 year made up 19%, those between 1-4 years made up 13% and those under 1 years old made up 6%. The ethnicity of 75% of looked after children were reported as white. In the same year the primary need recorded as the reason for coming into care was predominantly 'abuse or neglect'. Almost three quarters of the children in care were placed in foster care. Secure units, children homes and semi-independent living arrangements housed 11% of children in care and 6% were placed with parents. Unfortunately, data on the split of gender and placement type is currently not available.

Rees (2011) found that children who go missing are at greater risk of engaging in offending and being harmed on the streets. There were 70,250 missing incidents in the year ending March 2018. This was from the 11% of children in care, so on average 6.1 missing incidents per child. Almost half of all missing incidence were from children placed in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living arrangements with 29% from foster placements. A missing from care incident is defined as "a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (for example school) and their whereabouts is not known" (DfE, 2018). In addition to this 3,880 looked after children also had an 'away without authorisation incident'. This is defined as "a looked after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be, and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police". Furthermore, although Department for Education (2018) report does not provide a gendered analysis of children missing from care, previous research suggests that girls in care between the ages of 13 and 17 are more likely to be reported as missing (Biehal, et al. 2003:10).

In this same year the Department for Education (2018) reported that 4% of children aged 10 years or over - and who were looked after for at least 12 months - were convicted or subject to youth cautions or youth conditional cautions during the year. Looked after children who have been looked after for at least 12 months were five times more likely to offend than all children. However, as highlighted, this data only records offences by children who have been looked after for at least one year. This means that children who are repeatedly returned home then re-entered into care are likely to be missing in this data set.

### Looked after girls who offend

In 2019 Lancaster University was awarded funding by the Nuffield Foundation to complete a 27-month project which aims to examine the pathways of looked after girls who offend. So, although current knowledge of offending pathways of girls in care is limited, this is a growing and developing areas of interest. However, an early finding from a literature review completed for this project suggests that there may be an underrepresentation of the care histories of adult prison populations and that this is likely to be due to challenges faced by locked institutions in identifying those histories (Fitzpatrick, Hunter, Stains and Shaw, 2019).

At the time of writing however there were no official statistics that record the offending rates, pathways and behaviours of female offenders who are also in care. However, Arnull and Eagle (2009) found that 37% of female offenders do not live with their birth parents and 52% of girls in the youth justice system will have had contact with social services, which is at greater rates than boys who offend. Of the female offenders who were in care 19% were on voluntary agreements and 13% were on the child protection register. Girls who are in custody are more likely than their male counterparts to have care histories (Redmond, 2015). For example, Summerfield (2011) found that of 1000 young people in custody in the UK, over a quarter of the boys and half of the girls had been in care. Having a history of being in care, particularly residential care, is also evident in 31% of the adult female

prison population, compared to 24% of the male prison population (Prison Reform Trust, 2015)

Girls in care in the UK are more likely to receive their first conviction between the ages of 16-17 and have committed 6 or more offences within this age bracket (Arnull and Eagle, 2009). Girls who are offenders and also in care are more likely to be repeat offenders and are more likely to associate with offending peers. However, there was no difference in the types of offending behaviour between female offenders in care and female offenders not in care.

Girls in care who are also offenders are more likely than female offenders not in care to have significant emotional and psychological difficulties, engage in self-harming behaviours and have a history of using class A substances such as crack cocaine (Arnull and Eagle, 2009). Girls describe using this to help come 'to terms with past events' (Arnull and Eagle, 2009:63).

Hayden and Graves' (2018) longitudinal study examining pattern of offending with children in care found that girls who offended in care were more likely than boys to have records of offending behaviours before coming into care. They are also likely to be in care for abuse, neglect and family substance misuse.

### **Trauma Histories**

Drawing from an analysis of case file data of a sample of young people made up of 33 looked after children who were also in the youth offending service, 32 looked after children not involved with youth offending service and 35 young people involved with the youth offending service but not in care, Schofield and colleagues (2014) compared rates of experiences of negative parenting, defined as witnessing domestic violence, if parent/s had misused substances and/or if parent/s were involved in criminal activity. Exposure to all of these can be experienced as a psychological trauma. The authors found that negative parenting was most common for looked after children who were also offenders. This group was also more likely to have experienced abuse and neglect. Hence, there is a complex

interplay between experiences of trauma in the family home and offending (Taylor, 2006). For example, Minty and Ashcroft (1987) found that almost half of the boys in their sample who were in care due to inadequate parenting engaged in criminal pathways as adults.

The majority of children in the care system have histories of trauma, separation and loss which may be displayed in “a range of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, including anti-social and offending behaviour” (Schofield et al. 2014: 22). Therefore, offending can sometimes be a symptom of unaddressed trauma and emotional needs. Similarly, transition points - such as initially going into care or transitioning from care to independent living - can be a difficult time for children in care and can pose a risk to engaging in offending (Schofield et al. 2014). As a result, offending behaviours of children in care needs to be understood within this context of welfare needs and care histories. Despite this, however most children in care do not offend (DfE 2018). As discussed, exposure to trauma -without appropriate supports to assist in processing this trauma – can result in emotional, psychological and behavioural challenges. This means that rather than exposure to trauma being a risk factor to engaging in offending behaviours, what is crucial is how the needs are addressed after being exposed to trauma. In which case, with the provision of effective trauma informed support, being in stable long-term foster care can be *protective* for young people (see Schofield et al. 2014). Likewise without the provision of trauma informed support, being in care can also be a risk.

#### **Trauma histories of Looked after girls who offend**

Taylor (2006) found that offending behaviour in residential care was understood by young people as ‘letting off steam’ and often related to past experiences of trauma. Interestingly, this was more common for girls in residential care. However, this does not suggest that offending behaviours in boys in care is not linked to ‘letting off steam’. Rather it indicates that perhaps the girls in Taylor’s study were more self-aware of their behaviours and able to articulate this.

As previously discussed, exposure to trauma leaves victims/survivors at risk of further trauma. Girls who offend are also more likely than non-offenders to have experienced significant trauma, as are children in care. Therefore, it is presumed that girls who offend who are also in care are significantly vulnerable to further trauma. This is evidenced in the findings from Berelowitz (2013) who concludes that girls who are in care and girls who are offenders are also the most at risk of becoming victims of child sexual exploitation (CSE). This is supported by Pearce (2009) who argues that risk factors such as being in care, truanting from school, having learning difficulties, drug and alcohol problems, and experiencing poverty can make children particularly vulnerable to CSE. Hence, there is a high likelihood that girls in care who also offend have experienced significant trauma and are at risk of further traumatisation.

### Care histories

Schofield et al. (2014) found that the age young people were taken into care was significant to their risk of engaging in offending. Looked after children who were also offenders were more likely to be taken into care after the age of 10. These findings support earlier research conducted by Sinclair et.al. (2007) who also found a difference in outcomes for children who were taken into care below the age of 11 – categorised as ‘adolescent graduates’ - and those who came into care after age 11 – categorised as ‘adolescent entrants’.

Both these studies also found that the type of placement was significant to engaging in offending. Adolescents for example, were more likely to be placed in residential care. Some of these adolescents may have come straight from the family home into residential care and others may have had a succession of foster care placements before being placed in residential care (Schofield, et al. 2014).

Residential care placements are also where looked after children who had offending histories prior to coming into care are most commonly placed (Schofield et al. 2014). This includes secure accommodation. Secure accommodation is a local authority residential care provision which places both children who are engaged in offending behaviours and those considered highly vulnerable, often due to

behaviours such as absconding, putting themselves in risky situations and self-harming (Taylor, 2006). However, placing children who offend with children who are considered at high risk to themselves has received considerable criticism (see Harris and Timms, 1993).

O'Neill (2001) argues that the use of secure accommodation in England and Wales is also highly gendered. That is, girls in care are much more likely to be placed in secure accommodation for concerns regarding their perceived vulnerability and high welfare needs, whereas boys in care were more often accommodated for criminal behaviours. The girls in this study were also found to self-identify as 'bad', regardless of the reason for being placed in secure accommodation. Furthermore, as discussed previously, associating with antisocial peers can put young people at risk of offending, which raises the question regarding the ethics of placing girls considered vulnerable with antisocial peers. In addition, what this project also exposes is the continued policing of girls perceived as vulnerable ostensibly for their own protection (Sharpe, 2012).

Experiences of stability and permanency are also considered protective factors against offending for children in care. However, in comparison to foster care placement, residential care placements are unlikely provide a 'settled' environment, with frequent changes in staff and children leaving and coming into the home, including emergency short term placements (Berridge, et al. 2012). Achieving permanency for 'adolescent graduates' - who were more likely to come into care due to their difficult behaviour at school or within their family home – is expected to be as low as 20% (Sinclair, et al. 2007). It is unsurprising that looked after children who were also offenders are more likely to experience multiple placement moves (four or more) and less likely to experience stability in their placement (Schofield, et al. 2014) which exacerbates their risk of offending.

#### Care histories of looked after girls who offend

Johnson-Reid and Barth (2000) found that as child welfare needs increased for girls, so did their risk of engaging in offending behaviours in America. Hence, the authors

concluded that the increased welfare needs of girls in care puts them at higher risk of engaging in offending behaviours. Although smaller in numbers overall, girls in care in England and Wales are also more likely to engage in offending and for that offending to become more entrenched and serious. This is evidenced by the higher rate of girls in care in custody than boys in care and the higher proportion of adult female populations having histories of being in care compared to the male adult prison population (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). However, as discussed currently there is limited knowledge of the unique pathways of girls who offend who are also in care.

### **Criminalisation**

Research suggests that the residential care units themselves place children in care at risk of being criminalised (Darker, et al. 2008; O'Neill, 2001; Shaw, 2015). This is due to reports of them relying too heavily on the criminal justice system for behaviour management (Darker, et al. 2008). For example, according to O'Neill (2001) some local authorities' policy documents include direction to report criminal damage in residential units to the police. Although these policies are in place to arguably protect staff and other residents, the consequences of such policies is that looked after children enter the criminal justice system for behaviours that would not result in criminal intervention for children living in family homes (Taylor, 2003). According to Taylor (2003), these types of policies highlight a systemic lack of understanding of the impacts of trauma and an intolerance of 'challenging' behaviour.

Shaw (2015) highlights how far removed children's homes are from the 'family unit' and suggests that the routine police presence creates a highly scrutinising environment. Shaw goes on to argue that 'the youth justice system is in fact viewed by many practitioners as a useful and necessary adjunct to the care system' (2015:11). However, despite this being flagged as a concern, this appears to be a tricky area to change. For example, in 2016 The Howard League for Penal Reform report '*Criminal Care*' found that children in residential care continue to be criminalised at excessive rates for minor issues due to the overreliance on the police to manage poor behaviour (Shaw, 2016). It is important here to note that the



criminal records of young offenders in England and Wales does not get wiped when they become adults, as it does in other countries (Sands, 2016). Hence, the consequences of their criminalisation are lifelong.

The findings of Narey's (2016) independent review of children's residential care contests that criminalisation of residential care. Narey argues that, although some care homes may rely too heavily on the criminal justice system as behaviour management, the vast majority do not and are more likely to adopt a restorative justice approach. Narey (2016:38-39) also states in the report that:

To compare children in [residential] homes to the wider population of children, most of whom have experienced the love and stability of parental care, is to misunderstand the plight of children living in care. We should expect that children neglected, abused and damaged, as so many have been, to comprise a relatively large proportion of children subject to criminal proceedings.

In 2017 Staines provided a response to this report. Staines argues that Narey ignores the evidence that -given the correct circumstances- care can be a protective factor against offending for children who have experienced abuse and neglect. Hence, Staines argues, "experiences while in care can either mitigate or contribute to young people's involvement in offending behaviour" (2017:104).

As this section has outlined, many factors contribute to whether care mitigates or contributes to a young person's risk of engaging in offending behaviours. For example, the older a child is brought into care, the more vulnerable they are to engage in offending behaviours. Some of these children may already be involved in offending. Older children and children presenting with challenging behaviours are also more likely to be placed in residential care homes, which can present further interrelated risks, such as young people going missing, disruption to education and training, moving away from established support networks, having difficult relationships with staff and mixing with children already engaged in risky behaviours. Compounding all of this, residential care homes may be more likely

than foster care to rely on policies that encourage the use of the criminal justice system to manage disruptive and challenging behaviours.

### **Criminalisation of looked after girls who offend**

What appears to be similar across anglophone cultures is that placement type is highly significant to girls in care and engaging in offending pathways. Sharpe (2012) found a link between disrupted placements, being in residential care and risk to offending for girls in England. Research based in the US provides similar findings, linking residential care with female offending behaviours (Ryan, et al. 2010; Goodkind et al. 2012). Research outcomes are the same in Australia (Malvaso and Delfabbro, 2015).

However, further research is required to understand the nuances of this link. For example, it is suggested that girls may be more sensitive to disruption of placement, lacking secure attachments and unstable living environments (Malvaso, et al. 2017).

This does not mean however that being in care criminalises girls. But again, rather it suggests that there is a gendered element regarding experiences of trauma, abuse and neglect, how this is addressed by the care system. And as Staines (2017) states, looked after girls are overrepresented in the criminal justice system to a greater extent than looked after boys, and this is an area that requires further investigation.

### **Relationship difficulties and attachment**

Some theories suggest that the link between negative and inadequate parenting and engaging in offending is best understood through considering the role of attachment and attachment theory. Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) for example, argue that having problematic or insecure attachments to primary care givers in early childhood can have negative consequences such as feelings of low self-worth and experiences of anxiety and depression. This may increase the risk of offending.

Developing secure attachments is considered of utmost importance for children coming into the care system in England and Wales. It is argued children in care who

are able to develop secure base relationships with professionals and carers are less likely to engage in offending and anti-social behaviours and are more likely to develop empathy and resilience (Schofield, et al. 2014). However, the bulk of research around secure attachments in care has focused on long term foster care (see Beek and Schofield, 2004, Schofield and Beek, 2014). Taylor (2006: 59) argues that “whilst it is certainly possible for quality attachments to develop in the context of care, the appropriate care conditions clearly need to be in place in order for this to occur”. In addition, children who have developed insecure attachments are going to need longer to develop trust in relationships. Therefore, the conditions to develop quality attachments include placement stability and security and continuity of not only care provision, but the individual providing the care, which for many children – especially those in residential settings – is often not achievable.

However, children who have insecure attachments to their primary care givers can develop relationships to other individuals in their lives which can put them at further risk. For example, Weatherburn (2001) argues that when parent – child attachments are weak, young people are at risk of forming strong relationships with delinquent peers which can put them at risk of engaging in offending. Furthermore, when taken into care young people can lose contact with their established support networks to whom they may be securely attached. This can also put them at risk of engaging in offending (Blades et al. 2011). However, they may also lose contact with delinquent peer groups and therefore this can be a protective factor.

The narratives of children in care and care leavers support the importance of having trusting relationships with professionals and carers when taken into care (Schofield et al. 2014: Taylor, 2006). Research which interviewed 23 children in custody in England reported that being in care created risks to engaging in offending when children had poor relationships with professionals responsible for their care (Blades et al. 2011). Sinclair and colleagues (2007) argue that developing healthy attachments for children brought into the care system is paramount to minimising harm and promoting resilience and that having relationships with carers and professionals remains important regardless of the type of placement the child is in

or the age they are taken into care. However, Taylor (2006) found that children in residential care had difficulty developing healthy relationships and secure attachments with those responsible for their care. The narratives of the children in this research highlighted that not being able to develop these relationships meant the young people felt as though 'nobody cared' about them or what they did.

Taylor (2006:116) argues:

If individuals feel that nobody is bothered about them, they may in turn feel that there is no-one to be bothered about, nobody whom they should worry about letting down. Being enmeshed in secure and supportive relationships can raise young people's self-esteem whilst making them more sensitive to the opinions of others. This is regarded as highly protective against offending behaviour.

Although the participants in Taylor's study reported difficulties in building these relationships in residential care, it was not impossible. Five young people in this study reported having a positive relationship with one member of staff. Similarly, Schofield et al. (2014) found that when children in care felt that the staff in residential units *genuinely* cared for them, as opposed to simply doing their job, they were able to build a secure relationship with them.

Hence, having healthy relationships and secure attachments to those providing care can be paramount for protecting against offending pathways. Furthermore, Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that healthy attachments formed beyond individuals responsible for providing care can also act as protective factors to engaging in offending behaviours for adolescents and adults. This can include attachments to social institutions such as the school, places of employment, and community organisations. Attachments and relationships are important individually and structurally and can differ at particular points across the life span. This theory also supports the risk of offending for children in care who are also not engaged with their school.

## Relationship difficulties and attachment of looked after girls who offend

There is currently little research on relationship difficulties and attachments of girls in care who offend. However, the female offenders in Sharpe's (2012) study describe feeling that no one cared about them or what they did, which left them susceptible to engaging in offending. As these feelings were also evident with Taylor's (2006) sample of children in care who offend, this suggests that feeling as though someone cares about you and can be trusted is particularly important for girls in care who offend.

## Peer networks

Developmentally adolescence is a period of growth marked by identity formation and includes testing boundaries (Coleman, 2011). Adolescence is also a time when peers and peer group behaviour have a stronger influence (Coleman, 2011). Furthermore, Polsky (1962) argues that adolescents who are institutionalised are more likely to be socialised by their peers. Hence, peer networks for children in care are particularly significant to their development and behaviours. Schofield and colleagues (2014) found that 62% of looked after children who did not offend in their study had contact with positive peers, whereas this was only found to be the case in 20% of looked after children who did offend and 18% of offenders not in care.

Hayden (2010) argues that the dynamics of residential care can reinforce offending behaviours, especially for older adolescents. As residential care in the UK is considered the 'last resort' it therefore is often home to children with some of the most challenging behaviours, including offending. Association with children who are already engaging in offending behaviours can pose a risk to other children in attempts to 'fit in' with their peers (Taylor, 2006). Research by Darker and colleagues (2008) suggest that the narratives of care leavers who had also engaged in offending behaviours, supports these findings. Participants in this longitudinal study - which looked at the case files of 648 children and young people and conducted interviews with care leavers - found that associating with children in residential care placements who were already engaging in offending behaviour influenced offending behaviours in other children. These findings are further

supported by the narratives of children in custody who had previously been in residential care (Blades et al. 2011).

Furthermore, Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) also found that 44% of children in 48 children's homes in England had been bullied by peers in residential care and another 14% had been sexually assaulted by peers. Experiences of being bullied by peers in residential care was also a finding in Taylor's (2006) research. Children in Barter's (2007) research reported experiencing conflict with their peers in placement. Hence, with the overreliance on the criminal justice system as behaviour management tool compounded by lacking a relationship with staff (Taylor, 2006), conflict with peers and experiences of bullying can put children in residential care at further risk of being criminalised. That is, children may offend to 'fit in' and avoid being bullied, or likewise they may 'lash out' and defend themselves against being bullied which may result in criminal charges.

#### **Peer networks of looked after girls who offend**

There is currently no literature on the role peer networks play in the lives of girls in care who offend. However, as discussed in the previous section, girls who offend and who do not have secure attachments are more susceptible to being lured into criminal gangs in England and Wales (Firmin, 2011; Pitts, 2013). It has been argued the gang offers these girls a sense of 'belonging'. As just outlined, children placed in residential care report offending to 'fit in', which can be understood as also seeking out a sense of belonging. Therefore, it is possible that girls in care who do not have secure attachments and are then placed in residential care with antisocial peers are at greater risk of engaging in offending as a means of belonging.

#### **Educational difficulties**

Internationally, children in care and young offenders are over represented in poor educational outcomes and poor employment prospects (e.g. Flynn, et al. 2013: Trout, et al. 2008: Hook and Courtney, 2011). In England and Wales, the Department for Education (2018) highlights that children coming into care have often faced significant disadvantage and that two thirds of children in care also

have Special Education Needs (SEN). Looked after children who are offenders in England, alongside young offenders not in care, are also less likely to be engaged in education training or employment and again more likely to have SEN, which includes learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties (Schofield et al. 2014). Children in care are also more likely than children not in care to be permanently expelled from school (DoH, 2003) and truancy and formal exclusion puts young people at greater risk of engaging in offending (McCarthy, et.al., 2004). Hence, there is an interactive relationship between being in care, experiences of education and offending.

However, Berridge (2007) argues that the link between being in care and low educational attainment – which puts young people at risk of offending - is much more nuanced than a simple cause and effect. The author argues that relying on simple statistical data which correlates being in care and education, can exclude the impact of abuse and neglect and socioeconomic disadvantage experienced prior to coming into care. That is, children who have experienced abuse and neglect within the family home may already have poor attendance and lower grades. This may be the result of having to care for younger siblings or parents or it may be a way to hide injuries from teaching staff and peers (Taylor, 2006).

This point was further confirmed in the Sebba, et.al. (2015) study which found that being in care can provide a protective factor regarding educational outcomes for children taken into care at an early age, as with the right placement these children may experience stability, which allows them to fully engage with their education. It also suggests that “care may benefit later admissions, but it does not fully reverse the damage that may have been done” (2015:5). The report highlights that school changes and placement changes can negatively affect the educational attainment of children in care and that children in residential care were found to have poorer outcomes than children placed in foster care and kinship care, likely linked to the lack of stability residential care can offer, as outlined in the previous section. Shaw (1998) also found that children in residential care were less likely to be engaged in education, compared to children in foster care and the residential care

environment was a barrier to outside school hours study. Taylor (2006) found that for children who were already struggling with school when taken into care, being placed in residential care could encourage further truanting and offending through associating with anti-social peers who are not engaged in education.

These findings were also supported by earlier research conducted by Jackson and Martin (1998) who interviewed 38 care leavers who had performed strongly in their educational achievements. They argue that what assisted these children in care to achieve so well was them meeting early educational milestones, having a primary carer who prioritised the value of education, having a stable placement with minimal disruption and association with peers who were also high academic achievers. Taylor (2006) argues that experiencing achievement in school and having positive relationships with staff has the potential to build the self-esteem and confidence in children in care and provide them with future goals, which can protect against engaging in offending pathways.

#### **Educational difficulties of looked after girls who offend**

All the 10 participants in Taylor's (2006) study who reported that being in care had had a *positive* impact on their education were female. Of these girls, two reported that being in care had improved their education simply by being able to attend school, which was not possible for them when living in the family home often due to parentified caring responsibilities. Furthermore, eight of these girls also reported being securely attached to their foster carers and when they were taken into care the majority were able to remain at their school and had minimal placement moves. This meant that the disruption to their lives and their attachments was reduced. This study also found that the girls "who enjoyed school and did not have disruptive behaviours and/or learning difficulties were more likely to regard teachers as an additional source of support" (2006: 131), which highlights the link between attachment and engaging with education for young women.

Of the 10 young people who had secure attachments in Taylor's study (2006) 9 of them were girls. Three of those girls had been in trouble with the police. However,



all had either received a qualification, completed college or were engaged with further education with two enrolled in university. Taylor (2006:143) argues that “whilst not all of these young people were roaring successes at school, they had all been attending school for the most part and were encouraged to do well”. This links back to previous section that suggests it is important to girls who offend and children in care that they feel someone cares about them. This can be directly applied to their educational success and being encouraged by having someone believe in them and their abilities. Furthermore, 16 of the 18 young people in custody in this study were engaged with some form of education and “when discussing future plans, eight of the ten young women claimed that they intended to go to college, compared to just two of the young men” (2006: 139). Taylor argues this motivation for girls to continue with their education may be linked to the higher rates of desistance of offending for young women.

### **Mental health and emotional wellbeing**

The English national survey of the mental health of young people in care - which interviewed carers, teachers and young people in care - found that 45% of children in care had a diagnosable mental health disorder (Ford et al. 2002). Of the children living in residential care, around two-thirds were found to have a mental health disorder, which “compared with a half of those living independently, and about four in ten of those placed with foster carers” (Ford, et al. 2002:xii). Compared to children in foster care, children in residential care were twice as likely to have anxiety disorders, four times as likely to have depression and were much more likely to have conduct disorder.

Furthermore, this survey found that children in care who were assessed as having a diagnosable mental disorder were also “over five times more likely than those with no disorder to be in trouble with the police (26% compared to 5%)” (Ford et al. 2002:67). Of the sample, 10% had been in contact with the youth justice service which was a more common experience for children recently put in care, older children, children living independently or in residential care and those with conduct disorder or emotional disorders.

When comparing data on recorded mental health diagnoses and contact with CAMHS, Schofield and colleagues (2014) found that 49% of their entire sample had mental health concerns. When comparing the different groups within the sample, 41% of the looked after children who were also offenders had recorded mental health concerns as did 34% of the looked after children who were non-offenders and 25% of the offenders who were not in care. This supports government findings that suggest that half of children in care have a mental health concern (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015).

However, as this is based on recorded data only, there is the potential that groups which are 'harder to reach' in terms of accessing mental health services to gain a formal diagnosis - such as the young offenders not in care - may be underreported. For example, the priority of a youth offending officers working with a young people on community-based order is not necessarily getting a mental health assessment. Rather it is addressing their offending behaviour and ensuring they complete the order set out by the courts. However, when young offenders are in custody their mental health is more easily assessed. When assessed young people in custody are found to have significant mental health concerns, particularly girls as outlined in previous section (Berelowitz and Hibbert 2011).

Given that both young offenders and children in care who offend are likely to have had experienced trauma, abuse and neglect it is understandable that these experiences may have had an impact on their mental health. The 2015 report released jointly by the Department for Education and the Department of Health suggests that experiences of abuse and maltreatment can have a negative impact on looked after children's health and wellbeing. Furthermore, having secure attachments and healthy supportive relationships is also linked to feelings of positive self-worth and self-esteem (Howe et al. 1999). Therefore, if children do not have secure attachments or supportive relationships, they may be at risk of developing negative self-worth and low self-esteem, which can impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

### **Mental health and emotional wellbeing - looked after girls who offend**

Taylor (2006) found that it was predominantly girls in her sample who spoke about their offending behaviours in terms of 'letting go of some anxiety and emotions'. Participants also disclosed they self-harmed as a tool to processing difficult emotions. All of these participants were female. However, Taylor does not suggest that male offenders in care are not also impacted by difficult emotions. Rather, as Taylor suggests, this finding may be reflective of the girls feeling more comfortable in discussing their emotions, particularly with a female researcher.

Compounding this however, as discussed in the previous section, according to statistical data girls in custody are more likely than boys in custody to self-harm. Therefore, this indicates that the girls in care who are also offenders are likely to have significant mental health needs and to be coping with this through self-harm.

### **Substance Misuse**

Children who are in care and of leaving care status are more susceptible to using substances as a coping strategy (Ward et al. 2003). Once again, this makes sense if this is taken within the context of troubled relationships with families, insecure attachments, experiences of trauma, abuse and neglect. However, as previously discussed, being in care can also be a safe space that allows children and young people to process their trauma and develop secure attachments. Children in care who are able to develop secure attachments and build healthy relationships may be less likely to seek out substances as a way of managing difficult emotions and memories.

In Schofield and colleagues' (2014) comparative study, the case file analysis suggested that 48% of looked after children who were also offenders had recorded problematic use of substances, 41% of offenders who were not in care and only 10% of children in care who were not offenders. Given that it is probable that children in care who offend are likely to have been taken in to care at an older age, be placed in residential care, not have any secure attachments and have

experienced abuse and neglect, this makes sense. Also, as the authors point out “some of this alcohol and drug use was related to offences, such as drug dealing, possession of drugs and stealing alcohol, while other use was described in files as associated with coping with emotional difficulties” (Schofield et al. 2014:139).

### **Substance misuse - looked after girls who offend**

There is currently no literature on the substance use of girls in care who offend.

However, as discussed in the previous section, girls who offend are also likely to use alcohol which can have both a direct and indirect impact on their offending (Arnull and Eagle, 2009). As suggested above, substance use is more likely to be problematic for children in care who offend and young offenders, than children in care who do not offend. Therefore, it can be presumed that girls in care who offend are also at risk of substance misuse.

### **Systemic response**

Day’s (2017) interviews with 19 looked after children who were also involved with the youth offending service, suggest that services tend to focus on the young person’s behaviour as problematic, rather than trying to understand the underlying cause of their delinquency. Narratives of the interviewees highlight that as children in care they have often experienced abuse, neglect and trauma and have mixed feeling about being put in care. They also report feeling powerless over their circumstances. Their anger and frustration that is the result of these feelings is often directed towards their social workers or residential care workers, with whom they lack trust. Day argues that this is the ‘perfect storm’ for them to turn to their peers as a way of trying to regain control and forge their identity. This can lead to risky behaviours such as engaging in offending, substance abuse and absconding. Day argues that policy and practice needs to reconstruct how it make sense of the offending behaviours of children in care and consider this with an understanding of the impact of trauma. This is of particular significance to residential care.

In support of this, Darker et.al. (2008) argue that the risks children in care face of offending are complex, cumulative and interactive. They also argue that the care

system needs to be more effective in supporting child in care who are already offenders when entering care.

In 2014 Mendes and colleagues' produced a report based on a three-year study with children leaving care who were also involved with youth offending services in Australia. This study involved interviews with 15 care leavers who were also young offenders and interviews and focus groups with 77 professionals and stakeholders. The resulting report recommended that practice and policy need to be trauma informed if the over-representation of children in care in the criminal justice system is to be effectively addressed. The authors argue that "the impacts of trauma not only increase the risk of offending but can create barriers to desisting from offending. For example, where the capacity to navigate interpersonal relationships is compromised, there may be difficulties accessing formal and informal supports or other potentially beneficial experiences such as education, training, pro-social relationships and employment" (Mendes et al. 2014:45). Therefore, it is key that practitioners and policy makers understand the role experiences of complex trauma plays in offending behaviours and that response to these behaviours minimise any retraumatising and promotes healing.

In 2017 the Youth Justice Board also published a 9-page report title 'In-Brief: Trauma-informed youth justice'. The report concluded that;

Youth justice practitioners are not usually mental health experts. However, they need to understand the impact of trauma and be able to put young people's behaviour in context and recognise stress reactions.

(2017:9)

However, although a trauma informed approach is welcomed, this report did not consider the impact of intersectional identities, such as gender on the role of trauma and offending.

Fitzpatrick (2017) argues that given the limits on what is known about girls in care who offend, taking a systemic approach that is gender neutral may lead to these girls being further marginalised and unnecessarily criminalised. Fitzpatrick

(2017:134) argues that ‘whilst females and males share some prior experiences of victimisation and trauma, girls also have distinct needs and may be assessed and managed by state care and control systems in very different ways’. Hence, approaches to working with girls in care who offend needs to be gender responsive and trauma informed and - as Fitzpatrick argues - diversion from the criminal justice system should be a priority.

## Conclusion

What this chapter has outlined is that the trauma histories and welfare needs of girls who offend are magnified for girls in care who offend. Both groups are likely to have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage, abuse and neglect, not be engaged with education, be at risk of CSE, have experiences of bullying and have difficulties with emotional wellbeing, mental health and misuse substances (Berridge, 2007: Darker et al. 2008: Blades et al. 2011: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2011: Taylor, 2006). They are also both likely to have difficult relationships and insecure attachments with their primary carers, have been bereaved and feel as though there is nobody who cares about them (Taylor, 2006: Sharpe, 2012).

However, what makes girls in care who offend distinct from girls who offend is their vulnerability to *how* children’s services respond to them. How the care system responds to them can be protective or can place them at greater risk of offending and criminalisation. Looked after girls who offend are likely to have been taken into care at an older age, have had multiple placement moves and be in residential care placements, which can place them at risk of offending. On the other hand having positive and secure relationships with their carers can provide girls with an opportunity to develop healthy and secure attachments, which can be protective against engaging in offending pathways. These relationships can be therapeutic and allow space for healing and processing trauma. However, secure attachments appear to be difficult to develop in the contemporary British residential care system.

The following chapter will examine the literature which looks at how youth offending practitioners experience practice with girls in care who offend.

# Chapter Three: Youth offending professionals' perspectives

## Introduction

At the time of writing there was no known UK based research examining youth offending practitioners' perspectives on working with female offenders who are also in care. There is however a body of international research which examines practitioners' experience of working within the youth justice system, practitioners' experience of working with girls who offend and practitioners' experiences of working with offenders who are also in care or leaving care. Therefore, this chapter will summarise what is currently known about these three areas and will argue why it is important to examine practitioners' perspectives on the intersection of youth offending practice with female offenders who are also in care.

The literature drawn on for this chapter comes from the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. The data from these papers are drawn from interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and surveys. All papers examine practitioners' perspectives. Some will be more or less relevant to British context as systems will differ between anglophone cultures. Practitioners include professionals working with young offenders in general, female youth offenders, children in care and care leavers.

This chapter opens with an examination of practitioners' perspectives of general youth offending practice. Building on this, the following section will examine practitioners' perspectives of working with girls who offend. This section will argue that what practitioners consider as challenges to youth offending practice in general becomes magnified when considering work with female offenders.

The final section of this chapter will examine practitioners' perspectives of working with young offenders who are also in care. The body of this research is small and does not highlight gender difference. Themes in this section will again build on the previous two sections and highlight how being in care can add further

complications to how practitioners consider their role within youth offending practice.

The conclusion will argue that practitioners' perceptions of youth offending practice becomes much more complicated as welfare needs of young offenders' increase. Female offenders are considered to have high welfare needs, which are described as interpersonal, psychological and emotional. Youth offending practitioners are then expected to adjust their practice to address these needs, which they argue they are not resourced or trained to address. In addition, children who are in the care system are also considered as bringing complex welfare needs to practice, which are also required to be addressed by youth offending practitioners. However, this work can be further complicated by multiagency practice.

### **Practitioners' perspectives on youth offending practice**

This section draws on literature from the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada. All studies gathered their data by conducting interviews with practitioners. The practitioners included youth offending team staff, youth probation officers and community youth justice staff.

The themes that have emerged from this literature include how practitioners conceptualise and put into practice the care and control aspect of their role, how an understanding of the young offenders' history influences practice and perceptions, addressing needs and picking easy targets, the role of relationship-based practice and experiences of working with organisations.

#### **Care and control**

As discussed in chapter one, finding a balance between care (addressing welfare needs) and control (managing risk of offending) is foundational to youth offending practice. This is different to the adult criminal justice system which is far more focused on individual responsibility, punishment and crime control. How youth offending practitioners achieve balancing care with control in their practice is not straight forward. For example, research suggests that the risk of offending and the welfare needs of young offenders can be difficult to separate and compartmentalise as they may be intertwined and influence each other (Haqrnee



et.al., 2014). Furthermore, Fitzpatrick and Williams (2017) argue that “an increasing emphasis by governments on the need for management and control of ‘risky’ offenders leaves little space for probation practitioners to address welfare needs, and indeed contributes to the conflation of risk and need” (2016:5). It is fair to say that this is tricky terrain for a youth offending practitioner to navigate.

One theme in the literature around practitioners’ perspectives of the care and control aspect of their role examined how authority and power can be reconciled with practice being welfare focused. Umamaheswar (2012) who conducted 20 in-depth interviews with experienced youth probation officers in Toronto, Canada found that probation officers used their authority as a tool to help build relationships with the young offenders they worked with and to assist them in taking responsibility for their actions. For example, when discussing their role with the young people they worked with, practitioners in this study described the mandated nature of attendance and the conditions of the court order as boundaries which they had no control over. Therefore, if the young person breached the conditions on the order and had to face the repercussions, it did not negatively impact the professional relationship. In doing so, the practitioner sets themselves apart from the wider criminal justice system and places themselves as powerless in these decisions, therefore aligning themselves with being a support as opposed to an authority. By doing so they reconciled the tension between care and control and conceptualised these as complementary aspects of their role, rather than contradictory.

However, Pearce (2016), who conducted interviews with 10 youth offending officers from three different teams in England, found that practitioners in this research were unable to reconcile this tension. These practitioners described their “justice roles and responsibilities” (2016: 112) as inhibiting them from meeting the high welfare needs of trauma-exposed young offenders. The subtext of this point is that participants’ in this research considered ‘justice’ and ‘welfare’ as conflicting aspects of their practice. Where possible practitioners reported that they were able to manage their frustration by ‘adapting the rules’ and making ‘allowances’ (2016:112) for trauma-exposed young offenders.

Another theme from the literature suggests that the individual values of youth offending officers have an influence on the style of intervention, how much focus is placed on crime control and how much is focused on meeting welfare needs. For example, Schwalbe and Maschi (2009) who conducted online surveys with 308 youth probation officers in the United States found that practitioners “who strongly endorse punishment would emphasize accountability in their interventions and might make fewer contact with youths” (Schwalbe and Maschi 2009: 364) and those “who strongly endorse treatment would more strongly focus on the rehabilitative aspects of supervision and would devote more time to each case”.

Marshall (2013; 147) completed an ethnographic research of one youth offending team in southern England. This research included interviewing 22 youth offending team staff and the author found that some practitioners would sometimes use rewards for young people to engage them in youth offending sessions, whereas other practitioners felt that because their attendance was court ordered the use of rewards was inappropriate. This suggests there can be discrepancies in how practitioners conceptualised the responsibilities of the young person and their role. The latter group for example, placed more onus on the young person and their autonomy. They also placed the youth offending service in a position of authority, whereas the former group considered encouraging attendance as a part of their role and conceptualised the youth offending service as having a softer, more enabling approach to young offenders. Hence it can be argued that the type of support a young person will receive from the youth offending services will depend on the how the youth offending practitioner conceptualise their role and responsibilities and the role of the young person.

However, attempts to standardise practice to avoid such differences are also not without their pitfalls. Practitioners in Marshall’s (2013) ethnographic research offer a critique of the standardised risk focused practice used in England and Wales. They argued that standardised practice can be overly focused on meeting targets and recording information, which can result in less availability to attend to planning and executing individualised needs based interventions and may hinder practitioners’ use of their professional discretion.

### **Understanding the young person's history and welfare needs**

A further theme in this literature suggests that having access to the life circumstances of young offenders, specifically those who had experienced trauma, may influence practitioners' perceptions. For example, Umamaheswar (2012) found having an understanding of the circumstances of the context of the offence and the history of the young offender allowed practitioners to develop a sympathetic approach which was non-judgmental. Taking this approach was reported as key to gaining the young person's trust.

Furthermore, practitioners who had access to the young offenders' histories described them as victims of circumstances and resilient, rather than simply 'bad'. Umamaheswar (2012: 1169) argues that having access to their histories "permits the officers to play down their authoritative positions; instead, they take on the role of an attentive listener, one who makes an effort to focus on the strength of the youth's positive attributes and traits". However, it was noted that this needed to be weighed up against remembering the victim of the crime in order to retain a balanced approach.

Similarly, Maschi and Schwalbe (2012) found that youth probation officers adjusted their practice with young offenders who had a history of exposure to trauma or stressful life events. Having knowledge of their clients' exposure to trauma was more likely to result in treatment-orientated interventions. However, Pearce (2016) found that practitioners' perceptions of the abusive histories of trauma-exposed young offenders could influence practitioners' response in one of two ways. On the one hand some practitioners felt that having the young people's histories of abuse allowed them to be sympathetic and compassionate in their response. On the other hand, practitioners found that this information led them to 'view these offenders as more challenging, dangerous and 'untreatable'" (Pearce, 2016:128).

### **Addressing needs: lacking training and picking measurable targets**

Haqrnee and colleagues (2015) conducted interviews with 29 youth probation workers from 8 offices in Toronto, Canada. Practitioners in this study reported that they were more likely to address needs which were considered easier to measure and identify and less complex. For example, school attendance was considered a

more straightforward need than for example “attitudes, peers, and personality needs” (2015:44). That is, school attendance was considered a tangible and clear goal. As the more interpersonal and psychological needs were deemed difficult to measure, they were understood as challenging to address and therefore not prioritised by practitioners.

Furthermore, changes in interpersonal and psychological needs can take time to show improvement. Practitioners in Umamaheswar’s (2012) research reported that they can experience feelings of frustration and hopelessness with the minimal progress made by young people with complex emotional needs. Hence, how long the order is and how achievable the goals are within that timeframe may also impact how practitioners prioritise needs.

Practitioners may also come across working with young offenders who have experienced trauma. This can include working with young people who have been exposed to trauma in the past and/or present and may also include managing young people’s reaction to experiences of trauma, such as symptoms of PTSD or mental health associated difficulties. However, Holloway, Cruise, Morin, Kaufman and Steel (2018) found that although youth probation officers in the United States were able to identify trauma within assessments and include trauma specific responsivity factors, working with trauma is not included within the case plan. Therefore, this study suggests that youth offending workers are adjusting practice to accommodate the needs of trauma-exposed youth but recovering from trauma is not considered a need in itself.

Practitioners also describe not feeling adequately trained to address the more complex (often emotional) needs of young offenders (Haqrnee et al. 2015). The literature also suggests that youth offending staff within the United Kingdom feel that they have limited skills in working with trauma (See Wilson and Hinks, 2011; Talbot, 2010; Pearce, 2016). This may offer insight into why practitioners may pick ‘easier’ and more measurable targets to address.

### **Relationship based practice**

It is well established in the international literature that having a strong professional relationship with young offenders is considered key to the desistance process (Umamaheswar 2012; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Mason and Prior, 2008; Rex, 1999). However, building this relationship may take time as McLeod (2007;285) argues that 'clearly achieving a constructive relationship with some teenagers is the work of many months, or even years, and will not easily be achieved in a regime where brief interventions are the norm' (as cited in Shaw, 2012; 365). Therefore, youth offending practitioners are faced with a further contradiction which they will need to reconcile in practice. Effective practice requires a strong professional relationship yet building these relationships takes time, however timeframes are bound by court orders which are based on the offence itself.

Youth offending participants in Pearce's (2016) research note that having a positive and consistent relationship with trauma-exposed young offenders is central to good practice. They also describe three main benefits that the youth offending services provide to trauma-exposed young offenders; teaching empathy, providing positive, consistent relationships and helping to meet basic needs. The relationship was also considered a model for the young person to support change and to work with the families and wider support network.

However, due to experiences of trauma often at the hands of adults, young people may have a distrust of professionals and therefore building this relationship and working with them may be difficult. Hence, trauma exposed young people may initially push back against this relationship, so practitioners are encouraged to remain "consistent and boundaried" (Pearce 2016:108). Again, this is something that will be time dependent. Furthermore, difficulties with emotional regulation was also considered as an aspect that needed to be managed in practice and could act as a barrier to building effective relationships.

### **Working with other organisations**

Another theme to come out of the literature was the importance placed on working with other organisations in order to meet the complex needs of young offenders

(Umamaheswar, 2012; Marshall, 2013; Pearce, 2016; Haqrnee et.al. 2015).

Supporting young people in engaging with other services is not only constructed as meeting the needs of young offenders but is also considered as encouraging motivation to change and providing the resources to lead a prosocial life.

However, working with other organisations brings its own complexities. For example, practitioners in Marshalls (2013:139) research reported that they had difficulties working with social services:

As one practitioner bluntly put it “social workers that do their jobs, that would be helpful.” The general feeling was that there was a real deficit between the two services, who were not working together, and social workers were refusing to take on any young people that were YOS-involved.

Youth offending practitioners in this research describe feeling better able than other welfare focused services to negotiate work with young offenders with complex needs. Practitioners in Pearce’s study positioned themselves as being more able to manage the ‘volatility’ of trauma-exposed young offenders when compared to social services and child and adolescent mental health. Similarly, Haqrnee and colleagues (2015) found that youth offending practitioners in their American research felt torn between directly intervening in meeting the complex needs of the young offenders or referring them to more specialised services.

Compounding this, Haqrnee et al. (2015) identified a ‘pushback from community agencies that were unwilling to work with challenging and resistant clients’ (2015;43). These authors concluded that there was a lack of access to programmes which address identified criminogenic needs. And - like other community agencies - schools were reluctant to accept young offenders due to history of behaviour issues and poor academic performance. This was particularly significant for older offenders and those who had not been in formal education for some time.

## Youth offending practitioners' perspective on youth offending practice with girls

This section draws on literature from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. All studies -with the exception of one (see Lanctôt et al. 2012) who completed questionnaires - gathered their data by conducting interviews with practitioners. The practitioners included youth offending team staff, youth care workers working with young offenders mandated to residential care, workers from juvenile justice teams and related programs, and youth probation and parole officers.

The themes in this section build on the themes highlighted in the first section. What becomes evident is that the challenges that practitioners highlight in discussion around general youth offending practice become amplified when working with girls who offend. In fact, it is these 'challenges' which are described as dominating youth offending practice with female offenders. For example, the balance of care and control becomes complicated with contrasting ideas around female offenders being vulnerable victims or active agents. Furthermore, rather than just understanding a young person's history, as identified in the first section, when discussing practice with female offenders these histories become needs which are then required to be addressed in practice. Curiously however working with organisations does not come up as a dominate theme.

### Care and control: vulnerable victim or active agents

An established theme in the literature is that practitioners find troubled girls more 'difficult to work with' when compared to their male counterparts (Baines and Alder, 1996; Alder, 1998; Bond-Maupin et al. 2002). As a result, practitioners describe a reluctance to work with them, in preference for male clients (Baines and Adler, 1996; Bond-Maupin, et al. 2002; Gaarder et al. 2004 and Lanctot, et al. 2012).

When analysing practitioners' descriptions of working with female offenders, practitioners either constructed girls as vulnerable victims who needed protection (care response) or active agents who were calculating in their difficult behaviour (control response). For example, despite being reluctant to work with girls and drawing from negative stereotypes to describe their behaviour, Australian

practitioners in Baines and Alder (1996) research felt more protective of female offenders. This suggests that these girls were constructed as vulnerable victims to some degree. Whereas Gaarder et al. (2004) found that American practitioners described girls as 'needy', 'manipulative', 'promiscuous', 'liars', 'criers' and able to play the system by playing their 'victim card'. The girls' families were described as 'irresponsible' and 'trashy'. These girls were constructed as active agents in their offending behaviours.

Compounding this, the intersection of race and class also informs the sociocultural construction of female offenders and directs the focus of the delivered interventions. For example, Miller (1996) found that youth probation officers in a Los Angeles County were more likely to recommend punishment-orientated interventions for African-American or Latina girls and treatment orientated interventions for white girls. Hence, "in the interpretation of girls as 'criminal' or as 'in need of treatment,' race appears to be quite significant." (Miller, 1996: 233, as cited in Bond-Maupin, et.al., 2002).

In a later US study, Bond-Maupin and colleagues (2002) interviewed juvenile probation and parole officers across one juridical district in a southwestern state of America. This district is considered one of the most disadvantaged in the nation and Hispanic/Mexican-American youth make up 70% of the youth within this county. Practitioners in this study described white girls as 'worse' in comparison to their Hispanic counterparts. This was linked to their class privilege and sense of entitlement. As one participant put it "the 'rich' [white] girls are usually the ones who lack respect for authority and parents. They are the ones who will come in and leave with the 'attitude'" (Bond-Maupin et al. 2002:66). However, both of these studies which examine the intersection of gender, race and class are based in the United States.

From a British perspective, the Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) population and the CJS is a raising concern. In his independent review of the treatment of, and outcomes for, BAME individuals in the CJS, David Lammy states that his biggest concern is in regard to the youth justice system. The Lammy Review (2017) found that the number of BAME first time offenders in England and Wales rose from 11%



to 19% between the year ending March 2006 and the year ending March 2016. During this same timeframe reoffending rates of BAME young people rose from 11% to 19% and the proportion of BAME young people in custody rose from 25% to 41% (2017). In regard to the BAME population and the youth criminal justice system Lammy (2017:5) argues;

The [Youth Offending] system has been far too slow to identify the problem, let alone to react to it. There are isolated examples of good practice, including in some YOTs, but nothing serious or comprehensive enough to make a lasting difference. Unless something changes, this cohort will become the next generation of adult offenders.

In England and Wales, the majority of female youth offenders however are white working class (Arnull and Eagle, 2009). This is consistent with findings in the Lammy Report. However, charging decisions made by the police and the CPS suggest that black young women are less likely to be charged than white young women, but mixed raced young women are more likely to be charged. And once in the adult CJS, BAME women receive harsher sentences (Lammy, 2017). Therefore, the ethnicity of young offenders needs to be considered in a British context and its absence from the literature is significant.

British practitioners in Pearce's (2016) study described the influence that trauma histories had on their constructions of girls who offend. For examples, girls in this research were constructed as vulnerable victims and their troubling behaviours were considered a 'cry for help' (Pearce 2016:85). As this particular research was conducted in the UK, this may be reflective of the shift in focus around understanding the risk of sexual exploitation faced by troubled girls post the Rochdale independent inquiries (Jay, 2014), as discussed in chapter one. This shift may also highlight the influence that policy and media coverage may have on how practitioners conceptualise the behaviour of young people.

Furthermore, drawing on stereotypical gender norms to explain behaviour may indeed be the result of practitioners working in a system which does not acknowledge gender differences and therefore does not provide the space or

language to consider these differences. That is, practitioners may not have considered the complex interplay of agency and victimisation that these girls face by virtue of their gender.

### **Understanding and working with girls' history and welfare needs**

One theme which practitioners describe as being specific to practice with female offenders is working with families (Sharpe, 2009; Urwin, 2018). Although family work is included in general youth offending practice, practitioners perceive that family dysfunction has a “distinctive psychosocial impact” (Sharpe, 2009:265) on female offenders, particularly those they consider as entrenched offenders. This is supported by the high number of domestic disputes which bring girls to the youth criminal justice system in England and Wales (Arnall and Eagle, 2009). Therefore, although working with family dysfunction is common in youth offending practice generally, it is considered to carry specific challenges when working with female offenders.

Sharpe (2009) who interviewed 48 youth offending practitioners in England found that accessing support outside of the youth justice system for these girls and their families is described by practitioners as difficult. Social services are considered as the gatekeepers to accessing this type of support and practitioners in Sharpe's research describe social services as often restricting ‘access to help for many children and families in need’ (2009: 256). As a result, girls are considered as entering the criminal justice system by default as their parents/caregivers appeal to the wider criminal justice system for support when family dysfunction has reached breaking point. However, despite practitioners identifying net widening by police and courts as contributing factors to girls entering the CJS, in Sharpe's research (2009) youth offending practitioners were unable to acknowledge how the preventative arm of the current youth offending service in England and Wales also draws girls in.

As discussed in chapter two, exposure to abuse and trauma is correlated with engaging in offending pathway (Smith and McAra, 2004; Batchelor, 2005; Sharpe, 2012; Arnall and Eagle, 2009; Kolvin et al. 1988; Cockbain and Brayley; 2012) and many female offenders report significant histories of sexual assault trauma

(Corston, 2007). So, it is no surprise that practitioners highlight this as an area of practice which they are required to address when working with girls. Australian youth offending practitioners in Baines and Adler's (1996) research reported that sexual assault trauma was considered so significant amongst female offenders that practice with them included an assumption of prior sexual abuse, even if no abuse had been disclosed. This assumption was "used to explain young women's aggressive behaviour, their sexual activity, lack of hygiene, ineffective relationships" (1996:480). However, practitioners in this research reported feeling ill equipped and untrained in addressing these particular needs.

More than ten years on from this study Sharpe (2009) found that youth offending practitioners in England and Wales were reluctant to describe a link between experiences of trauma and offending as being gendered (Sharpe, 2009).

Practitioners in this more recent research repeatedly qualified how boys can be victims of trauma too. This may be explained by a shift in the wider cultural narrative of gender, illusions of 'equality' as discussed in third wave feminist discourse (Whelehan, 2000) and a more common cultural critique of hegemonic masculinity.

However, despite this seemingly gender-neutral approach, how the impact of trauma is expressed and how it influences offending behaviour, is considered gendered (Pearce, 2016). That is, practitioners felt that male trauma exposed youth were more likely to externalise their emotions and display this through aggressive behaviours whereas female trauma exposed youth were more likely to internalise their emotions and display this through self-harming behaviours (Pearce, 2016).

Youth offending interventions are also described as mirroring this gendered difference with the focus being on either managing aggressive behaviours for the boys or managing self-esteem issues for the girls (Pearce, 2016). This idea of gender appropriate expression of emotion is established in the developmental psychology literature which examines the gendered nature of socialisation (See Gilligan, 1982).

Low self-esteem is a common theme identified in the literature on practitioners' perspectives of youth offending practice with girls. Low self-esteem is discussed as

a risk factor to female offending (Sharpe, 2009; Pearce, 2016). As well as increasing risk of offending, low self-esteem is also believed to increase girls' vulnerability, particularly in relation to:

sexuality, including their involvement in 'inappropriate' sexual relationships (with older and/ or exploitative males), sexual risk-taking (engaging in sexual intercourse without using contraception) and teenage pregnancy.

(Sharpe, 2009:257).

When this behaviour is examined from a trauma lens as in Pearce's research (2016), participants constructed this behaviour as "seek[ing] emotional security" (2016: 86). Seeking emotional security through sexual behaviours was considered as being much more prevalent in trauma exposed female offenders than trauma exposed male offenders.

Sharpe (2009:257) offers a critique on considering low self-esteem to be a risk of criminality. Sharpe (2009) argues that taking this focus ignores the complex interaction of agency, victimisation and oppression faced specifically by girls (see Batchelor, 2005). Pollack (2000) further argues that focusing on self-esteem decontextualizes the social and political position of girls, individualises their experiences and associates their criminality with their own psychology:

As such, forms of oppression such as racism, classism and sexism are ignored and escape being understood as contributing factors in the lives of women in conflict with the law. Instead, the problem and the solution to the problem, lie within the individual woman herself.

(Pollack, 2000: 79)

Practitioners who are aware of these wider socio-cultural constraints may indeed find working on low self-esteem problematic in youth offending practice. Likewise, if female offenders are looking for 'emotional security' in risky relationships, as suggested in Pearce's study (2016), this raises the question of how youth offending officers address this within a criminal justice setting. It can be argued that meeting these kinds of needs requires youth offending officers to develop a professional

identity which is therapeutic in nature and goes beyond the traditional values and ideals of the criminal justice system.

### **Addressing needs: preferred targets and lacking resources/training**

Sharpe (2009) argues that welfare needs and criminogenic risk factors are considered one and the same for female offenders and, as a result, girls in England and Wales are drawn into the criminal justice system for their perceived vulnerability. This specific set of needs that girls are perceived to bring to practice will also inform interventions. For example, Corrado, et al. (2010) argue that female offenders are more likely to receive interventions which are welfare focused and not necessarily focused on desistance. Therefore, work with female offenders may present a unique conceptualisation of the relationship between welfare needs and crime control, which practitioners will be required to negotiate in their practice.

Furthermore, emotional needs, as previously discussed, are thought to be harder to address than practical needs by youth offending practitioners. And practitioners consider girls' needs as primarily emotional in nature (Baines and Adler, 1996). Hence, practitioners may feel uncomfortable and reluctant to work with female offenders who have been drawn into the criminal justice system with high welfare and emotional needs. For example, practitioners in Lanctot and Lachaine's research (2002) struggled with working with girls who engaged in sexual risky behaviours, such as selling sex or having experienced sexual exploitation (as cited in Lanctot et al. 2012).

More recent research on the other hand, suggests that this attitude may be shifting. Marshall (2013:180) reports that practitioners from one English youth offender service felt that male youth offending clients had more needs than female clients and were specifically in greater need of a positive role model. This may be linked to a wider contemporary focus on gender awareness and hegemonic masculinity, as discussed previously. Conversely, this study was ethnographic in nature and therefore may reflect the culture within that particular youth offending services itself as opposed to wider shifting values.

Lanctot and colleagues (2012) conducted questionnaires with 131 youth care workers in Canada working with young offenders mandated to residential care and found that practitioners reported a preference for clients whose gender they felt best matched their style of practice. For example, practitioners reported a preference for individual work versus group work or a preference for being welfare focused or criminal justice focused. They favoured working with clients whose gender they felt was more suited to their preferred style. That is, working with girls was a preference for workers who enjoyed “individual activities more than group activities, who felt at their best in a position to ‘mother’ clients, who reported specific abilities with regard to encouraging reflective thinking and who ascribe a lot of importance to the establishment of affective relationships with clients” (Lanctot et al. 2012:2245)

Hence, these practitioners displayed a preference for working with young people that required the least ‘adaptation’ on their behalf. This may be the result of practitioners’ desire to focus on their strengths. However, this method of practice makes many assumptions about gender and the interaction with criminal justice. For example, it suggests that female offenders’ benefit from maternal, individualised interventions which involve reflective thinking and are relationship based and by implication male clients prefer group work which is focused on desistance and criminal behaviours. Whereas girls and boys are much more diverse than this. For example, Arnull and Eagle (2009) found that group work with girls in the youth justice system in England and Wales had many benefits.

Furthermore, American practitioners in research by Gaarder et al. (2004) report that there is a lack of resources and training of youth justice practitioners regarding working with girls. This is also found in the British context (Arnull and Eagle, 2009; Sharpe, 2012). Hence female offenders may also present challenges for professionals which encourages them to not feel equipped to work with girls and consider this work more difficult.

Matthews and Hubbard (2008: 496) argue that by not providing youth offending staff with training and resources to meet the needs of female offenders and provide them with the “skills needed to formulate strong relationships and failing to

match girls with staff who respect and empathize with the challenges girls encounter, youth serving agencies may be recreating the type of relationships that have played destructive roles in the girls lives". That is, these authors question if girls' involvement with services such as the youth offending service are doing more harm than good.

### Practitioners' characteristics

Lanctot and colleagues (2012) explored characteristics that may influence youth justice practitioners' perceptions that girls are harder to work with. They looked at levels of experience practitioners had in supporting young offenders of both genders, individual education levels of the practitioners and their gender. They found that controlling for these variables provided a much more nuanced understanding of what informs these constructions. It also highlighted the importance of the practitioners' characteristics in completing work with female offenders.

Practitioners who had no experience of working with girls reported a preference for male clients, whereas workers who only worked with girls reported a preference for female clients, but to a lesser degree than the former group. Practitioners who worked with both male and female clients did not report a preference yet agreed that interventions with girls was more difficult (Lanctot et al. 2012).

It can be argued that practitioners who have more experience working with female offenders have had more opportunities to build skills in delivering gender specific interventions, which may be more focused on managing complex needs and involve negotiating wider welfare services. Having these skills may build the confidence of practitioners in working with female offenders and allow them to feel more equipped and resourced in meeting girl's needs. Therefore, these practitioners may be more willing to work with girls.

However, those who had experience working with girls did not have a less stereotypical view of them. In these cases, girls were still described as 'manipulative', 'sneaky', 'devious', 'superficial', 'hypocritical', 'jealous', 'vindictive', 'hysterical', and 'self-centred' (Lanctot et al. 2012: 2245). This may be reflective of

how much of their trauma history the practitioners were privy to (Pearce, 2016) or it may reflect the lack of less negative, stereotypical alternative constructions of girls who breach the acceptable codes of their gender in wider society.

Furthermore, the education levels of practitioners influenced their preference. Those who did not obtain a university degree preferred working with boys, whereas those who had a university degree had no preference of the gender of their clients (Lanctot et al. 2012). This may suggest that having access to an informed understanding of criminal pathways and the influence of gender stereotypes may enable professionals to consider practice differently and feel more competent in meeting complex gendered welfare needs.

Lanctot et al. (2012) reported practitioners in their study described 'affinities' to clients of the same gender for both male and female professionals. They described sharing a gender meant they could relate more to the young person's background and experiences, which made identifying needs and interventions easier. However, this assumes a hegemonic experience of gender. And in doing so it ignores the role of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and histories of trauma, which all impact offending pathways and how these offenders are negotiated and treated by the criminal justice system.

When working with the opposite gender male practitioners tend to view female offenders as active agents who presented a risk to their professional integrity via their overtly sexual behaviours (Lanctot et al. 2012; Umamaheswar, 2012; Baines and Alders, 1996; Bond-Maupin et.al., 2002). For example, Umamaheswar (2012) found that male youth probation workers tended to describe female offenders as behaving in sexually provocative manner and in Baines and Alders (1996;479) earlier work, male workers were concerned with "physical proximity, physical touch and the maintenance of an appropriate professional relationship with female clients". In Bond-Maupin et al. research (2002) these constructions of sexual provocateurs are described as using 'perfume, cosmetics and lipstick' deliberately to 'pull the wool over [male youth offending officers'] eyes' (Bond-Maupin et al. 2002:66).



On the other hand, female practitioners were more likely to view girls as vulnerable victims and empathise with them due to sharing a gender, which was felt to be positive aspect in relationship building (Baines and Adler, 1996). Female professionals also described the girls as being like daughters and feeling much more maternal towards them when compared to male offenders (Bond-Maupin, et al. 2002:67). Being able to 'mother' female offenders was also described as being an enjoyable aspect of practice for some female professionals (Lanctot, et al. 2012; 2245).

## **Youth offending practitioners' perspectives on youth offending practice with children in care**

This final section draws on the small body literature from the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States of America. Data was collected by conducting interviews and focus groups with practitioners. The practitioners included professionals working in teams who work with looked after children and care leavers, youth offending teams and youth probation teams, however the bulk of this research is gender blind.

What again becomes evident in this section is the challenges that practitioners highlight in discussions around general youth offending practice are magnified when working with looked after children and some of these areas crossover with discussions on working with girls who offend. For example, the balance of care and control is further complicated as practitioners' battle with ideas around welfare needs of being in care and the associated stigma. Compounding this, practitioners further report feeling that they lack training and skills in meeting the needs of young offenders in care. Working with other organisations becomes a more dominant theme when compared to discussions around working with female offenders. However, there is also discussion around the impact on practitioners in working with young people exposed to trauma, of specific relevance to female offenders in care.

### **Care and control**

Deficits in social capital, which for children in care includes limited support networks, can lead to wider negative stereotypes and discrimination by the

community at large. An example of this is the sociocultural construct which links children from the care system with 'trouble'. This results in children in care being considered as having high needs, lacking in empathy skills and displaying attitudes of entitlement (Taylor, 2003; Fitzpatrick and Williams 2017).

This sociocultural construction, coined 'careism', refers to the 'common labelling of children in the care system as mad or bad' (Morris, 2000:3). This can arguably lead to the further stigmatisation and prejudice against a population who are already socially vulnerable. 'Careism' can also have direct consequences for practitioners. Fitzpatrick, Williams and Coyne (2016) highlight this point in their research with key stakeholders in the criminal justice sector in England and Wales. They found that despite pockets of good practice and collective aspirations to improve outcomes for young people in care who are also in the criminal justice system, there 'remains a problem with stigma and stereotyping' (2016:13). As discussed in the previous section, stereotyping is also an issue when working with girls in the criminal justice system.

Despite being considered a 'risky' client group, some practitioners also consider the 'stigmatizing effects of identifying care leaver status' (Fitzpatrick and Williams, 2017;182). For these practitioners there was a need to balance recognising young offenders care histories with placing them in 'another box'. Fitzpatrick and Williams (2017) argue that this reluctance may also provide insight into why probation officers working with care leavers struggle to identify children with care histories.

### **Understanding and working with welfare needs of offenders who are also in care**

Young people in care who were also offenders are considered to have diverse complex needs, which present a challenge to youth offending practice (McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016). Children in care are also considered to lack a wider positive network of support within their personal lives (Fitzpatrick and Williams, 2017;182). That is, children in care are considered to have complex needs, yet limited support and hence the professionals working with them will be required to either fill these gaps in support within their own practice or refer them on to a service that has the capacity to do so.

A theme that was present in the literature around the needs of children in care who are also offenders was mental health. For example, Tarren-Sweeny (2008, as cited in McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016) argue that children who are in care and also involved with youth offending services are overrepresented in child and adolescent mental health. This is supported by Herz, Ryan and Bilchij (2010, as cited in Marshall and Haight, 2013; 82) who estimate that 56% of cross over youth in America also have mental health concerns. Although the mental health status of young offenders who are also in care is not data the UK currently collate, 45% of children in care are reported to have a diagnosable mental health disorder (Ford et al. 2002). When this is considered alongside studies such as Schofield et al. (2014) who found that looked after children who are also offenders have higher rates of mental health concerns than children in care who do not engage in offending, this suggest that in the UK the mental health status of offenders in care will be similar to that of the US.

McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden (2016) examined the perspectives of professionals in Ireland working with children who were in care and in the youth offending service, with a focus on addressing mental health needs. Practitioners in this research struggled with similar concerns around labelling as the probation officers working with care leavers did in Fitzpatrick and Williams' (2017) research. That is, McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden's (2016) participants reported they felt there was an over reliance on labelling young people with a mental health diagnosis to organise their complex presentation and that this could have an impact on how young people are viewed, disrupt engagement and delay interventions.

Furthermore, as discussed by DeJong (2010) the challenges that children in care and young offenders bring to practice can often go under-recognised 'as they experienced a combination of multiple 'lower level' difficulties that are below the clinical thresholds yet reflect greater impairment than others who do reach the threshold on a single psychiatric diagnosis category' (as cited in McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016:62). That is, children in care who are also offenders may not meet the requirements of a mental health diagnosis, yet they may still be managing poor mental health symptoms which require support. Without a formal diagnosis

they may not qualify for mental health services, in which case addressing these needs will become the responsibility of the youth offending practitioner.

### **Addressing needs: lacking confidence, resources and training**

Similar to working with female offenders, practitioners describe lacking confidence in addressing what they consider as the complex needs of young people from care (McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016). Practitioners in this research describe feeling overwhelmed, fearful of some of the young peoples' behaviour, frustrated and confused.

Practitioners also described feeling frustrated at a welfare and youth justice system which was limited in its ability to meet the complex needs of young offenders who were also in care. The system was described as 'simply not working and useless' (McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden 2016; 65).

As a consequence of this, practitioners may avoid asking about care histories as they may feel ill equipped or ill resourced to address what they considered could be the preceding welfare needs identified (Fitzpatrick and Williams, 2017).

### **Working with other organisations**

Much has been written about multidisciplinary and multiagency practice (see Frost et al., 2005; Frost and Robinson, 2012). As discussed in chapter one, good multiagency practice is often cited as effective practice in reports on working with children in care (Every Child Matters 2003 and Youth Justice – the next steps 2003; Working Together, 2010; The Charlie Taylor Report, 2016; In Care, Out of Trouble, 2016). However, although some of the themes to come out the research on multidisciplinary practice may indeed apply to multiagency work, multiagency work still faces specific challenges. For example, Frost et al. (2005:189) argue that 'practitioners from different disciplines are not usually expected to justify the conceptual base of their actions or interactions with clients in single-agency settings. In a multi-agency team differences potentially 'collide' as boundaries around specialisms are broken down. At this point, implicit knowledge must often be made explicit'. Hence, in order for multiagency work to be successful, strong, effective collaboration and communication is vital.

When collaboration and communication is achieved well, multiagency working can be beneficial for work with children in care as it can increase the provision of holistic care, prevent risk and improves service options in meeting complex needs (Frost et al. 2005; Lalayants and Epstein, 2005). However, communication is not always smooth. For example, not sharing a common language or terminology can cause conflict among teams made up of multiple disciplines (Frost et al. 2005). Furthermore, Walsh and Jagers (2017) suggest that communication is particularly difficult between child welfare services and youth offending services because of their seemingly distinct priorities.

Working with multiple agencies means that professionals will come from a variety of backgrounds and therefore have different approaches to their practice. This can also create differences in how young offenders and offending behaviours are conceptualised. For example, some practitioners may interpret 'challenging behaviours as a deficit in the young person rather than as a means of communicating underlying distress' (McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016; 65-66). Furthermore, how these practitioners interpret this behaviour is going to inform their intervention. As a result, these differences can cause conflict between the professionals.

Shaw (2012) conducted interviews and focus groups with 31 professionals from the British care and criminal justice system. This study found that children's social workers felt that offending behaviours within residential care homes was a continuation of how young people had previously behaved in the family home. In-care offending was then constructed as being 'the result of individual psycho-social deficits, precipitated by family background' (Shaw, 2012:361). The children's social workers in this research also discussed how they felt some young people in care consciously chose to engage in offending behaviours and were described as lacking resilience when compared to young people in care who did not engage in offending pathways. Hence, these children were constructed as initially victims of their family circumstances, but then when they continued to offend in care they become autonomous villains. Although the impact of residential care and the care system

was acknowledged at points, it was 'never seen as anything other than secondary to the agency of the young people' (Shaw, 2012;361).

In this same research however, practitioners from the criminal justice system were more likely to consider children in care as being unnecessarily criminalised. That is, they felt that children in residential care homes were being criminalised for behaviours that were unlikely to be criminalised in the family home. Hence, the criminal justice practitioners were more likely to consider the impact of the care system when it came to understanding offending behaviours and pathways.

Furthermore, children's social workers and criminal justice practitioners in this research were also split on their opinions of residential care home staff and their interaction with young people in their care (Shaw, 2012). Criminal justice practitioners discussed how they felt that residential care home staff at times could precipitate confrontation in how they managed difficult behaviour. The children's social workers did not offer this critique of practice. According to Shaw (2012;365) this 'unquestioning support is also perhaps indicative of a professional solidarity and affinity with other workers who are seen as battling some of the same problems.'

It is important to note that compared to youth offending practitioners, children's social workers may not have as much experience of working with young offenders. Hence their inexperience may colour how they view the young person's behaviour.

Child welfare practitioners and youth offending practitioners can also be divided in how they expect the criminal justice system should respond to offending behaviours. Social workers may expect the criminal justice workers to be punitive and authoritarian in practice, whereas this may be in stark contrast to how youth offending practitioners' understand their professional role.

For example, children's social workers in Shaw's (2012) research felt that children in care who continued to offend were not taking advantage of the support and opportunities they felt were being presented to them, such as engaging with services. These practitioners felt these children were responsible for their behaviours and Shaw (2012, 361-362) argues 'such expectations on the part of

social workers often went hand in hand with the absence of any real, productive relationship with the young people, inherent in the case management approach to intervention' and as a result, these workers felt that the criminal justice system's involvement in these young people's lives would deter recidivism and also 'serve as a 'wake-up call' to the 'realities' of life'.

However, youth offending practitioners in this same research discuss what they consider an overreliance on the involvement of the police and wider criminal justice system, 'which revealed a sharp divide in the attitudes and opinions of the distinct professional groups' (Shaw, 2012; 364).

Multiagency work also presents barriers to the logistics of coordinated practice. For example, issues such as coordinating the busy schedules of time poor practitioners and the need for physical space for meetings to occur can create difficulties which practitioners are required to overcome (Walsh and Jagers, 2017). Furthermore, the high turnover of staff in the children's social work teams can make it difficult to build rapport not only with the young person, but also the other professionals working in the multiagency network (Shaw, 2012).

Practice with young offenders in care is also not equal across different counties and local authorities. Walsh and Jagers (2017) found that different counties were at different stages of recognising cross over youth and implementing joined up practice in America and that this made it difficult to work across counties. Similar findings have been reported in the U.K. (Arnull and Eagle, 2009).

**Practitioner characteristics; vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress**  
It can be argued from these accounts that working with children in care and in youth offending involves managing complex needs in a system that is considered both inadequate in meeting these needs and under resourced. This work is further compounded by difficult multiagency communication and collaboration. As a result of this McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden (2016; 66) argue that the current system is both 'traumatised and traumatising'.

McElvaney and Tatlow- Golden (2016) who interview 26 professionals working with young offenders and looked after children in Ireland argue that practitioners'

experiences and psychological response to working with young offenders in care (feeling helpless, frustrated, incompetent) may be influenced by experiences of vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma, as coined by McCann and Pealman (1990), describes the psychological and interpersonal impact on professionals who develop empathetic working relationships with victim/survivors of trauma. However, an extensive examination of the extent and varied impact of vicarious trauma on professionals is beyond the scope of this literature review. Rather, it will focus on what is suggested about aspects of vicarious trauma in relation to working with young offenders who are also in care.

In the development and understanding of vicarious trauma, Figley (1995) coined the term 'secondary traumatic stress'. Whereas vicarious trauma is most commonly applied to therapeutic relationships, secondary traumatic stress more often applies to 'professionals who encounter persons who suffer grave trauma and personal damage but do not develop an ongoing empathic relationship' (Branson, 2019:3). Hence, it can be argued that the depth of the relationship youth offending practitioners have with trauma exposed young offenders in care will determine the type of traumatic response they may encounter.

McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden (2016:67) argue that trauma exposed children in care may unconsciously recreate their unprocessed trauma in professional relationships. That is, traumatised young people may transfer their difficult emotions onto the professionals that are around them which may result in countertransference. This can lead to 'splitting' professionals between 'good' and 'bad' in an attempt to control anxiety and stress (Conway, 2009; McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016). If this unconscious processing is not recognised by professionals it can impact how they interpret the young person's behaviour and how they engage with other professionals in the multiagency network. For example, 'professionals may over-align with their client, engaging in conflict with other professionals or agencies who are trying to provide a service for that client.' (McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016: 67).

Furthermore, being the one person in the team who 'understands' the young person can also feel satisfying to the helping professional (Conway, 2009). Hence,



conflicts in communication and collaboration within multiagency teams may be about the young person's unconscious projection of unprocessed trauma which professionals are playing out, rather than the young person's needs. Because of this Conway (2009;18) argues that 'for multi-agency work to be effective in improving outcomes for looked after children, the psychoanalytic concepts of splitting and projection need to be integrated and applied at all levels of policy development and service provision'.

## Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has illustrated that the high welfare needs and exposure to trauma that girls who offend and children in care who offend present to the youth justice system complicate the work of the practitioners. This is compounded by the lack of clarity regarding the role of the youth offending service and its prioritisation of addressing welfare needs or criminogenic needs. As this chapter has highlighted, because of this lack of clarity, practitioners have to individually negotiate this work. Training in working with girls and working with children in care is also limited, as are resources which can further inform practitioners' experience. This can lead to practitioners lacking in confidence in addressing complex needs. This is further confused by multiagency work, where services may have different expectations of the YOS.

It is suggested that this variable and uncertain approach to practice will have an impact on girls in care who offend. However, how practitioners in a English context construct their work with girls who are also in care and how they manage addressing complex welfare needs is currently unknown. This research will address this gap in knowledge.

# Chapter Four: Methodology

## Introduction

Thus far this thesis has outlined the history of the youth justice system in England and Wales and examined the development of youth offending policy, highlighting the swings between prioritising the welfare needs of young offenders and their punishment. It has also examined how this tension has become complicated in austerity Britain, where the youth criminal justice system has seen a reduction in the overall number of offenders, yet those remaining within the system are considered to have considerable welfare needs. This can include being in state care. In particular, this thesis has outlined the complex and interrelated welfare needs of girls who offend in England and Wales. It has also argued that despite the limited literature examining the welfare needs of girls in care who offend, it is expected that these needs will be significant. As a result, the youth offending practitioners working with female offenders who are in care will need to negotiate within their practice the tension between meeting significant and complex welfare needs alongside administering court orders in relation to offending. At the time of writing, how youth offending practitioners' experience and manage this tension in practice with this particular group of young offenders remained unexamined.

This methods chapter will firstly outline the aims and objectives of the research and discuss the conceptual framework in preparation for the study. It will then illustrate how the research questions were addressed by the study design and justify the choice of method. The final section provides information on the analysis of the data and a description of the dominant themes.

## Aims and objectives

This research firstly aimed to contribute to developing a deeper understanding of how youth offending practitioners construct the welfare needs and offending needs of female offenders in care and what they consider as their professional role in addressing these needs. Secondly, it aimed to place these findings in wider debates

around the care and control dichotomy evident in youth criminal justice policy and practice.

In order to achieve this the project examined how frontline youth offending practitioners understand welfare provision in their practice, how this is balanced within their assessments, interventions and evaluations and how histories of being in care and gender ideals inform their work at each stage. The findings provide an in depth understanding of the youth offending practice with female offenders in care and highlight any organisational barriers which will contribute to informing future policy and practice.

## Research questions

In order to investigate how the youth criminal justice system responds to young women in care and how this response is gendered, this research asked the following questions;

1. What do youth offending practitioners consider to be the welfare and offending needs that female offenders in care present?
2. What challenges do youth offending practitioners face when working with female offenders in care?
3. What do youth offending practitioners consider as effective practice when working with female offenders in care?
4. What are the implications for the future of frontline youth offending practice?

## Conceptual Framework

As discussed in the introduction, I identify as a radical social work academic and a feminist. My feminist values align with the Black feminist theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Hence, my position as a researcher is informed by both radical social work principles and values and feminist inquiry which applies an intersectional lens.

Radical social work is a push back against neoliberal agendas, the decline of the welfare state and the managerialism of social work practice. At its core it places

social work in a political sphere, aligns itself strongly with social justice ideologies and is grounded in a belief that western capitalist societies are built on the exploitation of the working classes, of which social work plays a role (Turbett, 2014). Whereas mainstream social work theory and practice is often “based on a view that the way society is organised is beyond the scope of the profession, and that practice is about maintaining people within the economic and social system...they generally follow a course that seeks to change the individual within their environment, or within the immediate environment that the person occupies (for example, their home or their family) so they can cope better” (Turbett, 2014:29). Mainstream practice which supports individuals to “adapt to the status quo” (Dominelli, 2002:61) is described by radical social work as distracting the profession from wider structural inequalities and can also undermine “the emancipatory and progressive intent of social work” (McDonald, 2006:91).

My alignment with radical social work values influences how I understand crime and offending behaviours. That is, I believe that the majority of offending behaviours are born from experiences of structural inequalities and individual traumas and how they interact. I also believe that structural inequalities can also be experienced as traumas – such as the experience of racism - and that these inequalities are inherent in patriarchal, white supremacist, capitalist societies. I also believe that we should not simply ‘expect’ that children who have experienced traumas will inevitably cross paths with the criminal justice system. So, from a radical social work perspective, rather than supporting individuals in adjusting to an unequal system, I believe that it is the system that needs to adjust and that social work has a role to play in this.

My position as a feminist with a focus on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) aligns with these radical social work values and principles. The Black feminist theorist bell hooks’ (1989) states that contemporary, Western society is built on the foundation of imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism and the patriarchy. These are also the foundation of the systems social workers work in and includes the criminal justice system. Intersectionality, as coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), examines how

intersectional identities of individuals are linked to power and inequality. In Crenshaw's critical analysis of gender and race she argues that the "intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (1989:140).

Hence, at the heart of feminist inquiry is an analysis of the construction of power and knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2012) and in alignment with this, feminist research methodologies aim to trouble hierarchies of power (Oakley, 1981; Cotterill, 1992; Wolf, 1996). Feminist criminologist Presser (2005:2067) argues that feminist researchers "are sensitive to our place in such hierarchies, so we disclose the multiple, historically specific positions we hold in relation to both study questions and participants". In doing so, feminist research methodologies recognise that researchers "write ourselves into the analysis" (Gilgan and McLeod, 1999:185). This can be achieved by being transparent about values and reflexive of how the researcher is positioned.

Therefore, my personal values as a feminist who aligns with Black feminist theory and my position as a radical social worker inform the epistemological foundation of this research, which is social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Burr, 2015; Stratton, 1997). In echo of feminist methodological approaches, a social constructionist approach recognises the active role the researcher plays in how meaning is created (Stratton, 1997), which places further significance on being explicit about my values and reflexive about my position as a researcher.

Social constructionism is based on the idea that there is no one 'truth' but rather that realities are socially constructed and influenced by shared assumptions and wider cultural ideals which are specific to particular context. It, therefore, "insists we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world" (Burr, 2015:3). This aligns with the Black feminist theory of Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Hence, social constructionism opposes empiricism and positivism. From a social constructionist perspective, there are no universal truths. Therefore, assumptions and what is considered as knowledge is constructed, dependent on context and is maintained through social interactions.

Context is also culturally and historically specific and “sustains some patterns of social action and excludes others” (Burr, 2015:5). As a result, social constructions are bound up in dynamics of power. And what is constructed as knowledge is also bound up in dynamics of power. That is, knowledge can only be created by those whose voices are valued within a particular context. Hence, power creates knowledge and knowledge creates power. Foucault (1982) refers to this as the power knowledge relationship. Taking a social constructionist perspective troubles the power knowledge relationships as it provides a critical lens to this process of construction.

Social constructionist research and theory is also divided into micro and macro social constructivism. The former refers to the analysis of individual discourse and language, whereas “macro social constructivism acknowledges the constructive power of language by seeing this as derived from, or at least bound up with, material or social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices” (Burr, 2015:26). Presser takes this perspective further and argues that “the researcher’s goal is not to emancipate the authentic story of the narrator—none exists—but rather to expose as much as she can of the relations that influence the construction of the story that is told” (Presser, 2005:2087).

When considering Presser’s (2005) position alongside Lypsky’s theory of ‘Street Level Bureaucracy’ (1980) this suggests that an analysis of youth offending practice is important as not only does the youth offending practitioner role hold power – they are the ones who put policy into practice - but in performing this role they draw on social constructions which are rooted in culture ideals, such as the dichotomy of care and control and appropriate gendered behaviour. That is, despite youth offending practitioners being bound by certain guidelines – such as court orders – they are still afforded flexibility in their description and interpretation of how court orders unfold. How they perform their role of youth offending officers, how they construct the welfare and criminogenic needs of female offenders in care and how they consider their role in addressing these needs holds power.

Therefore, the conceptual framework of this project is social constructionism. My position as a feminist who aligns with Black feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks 1989) means that I understand mainstream social constructions as embedded in capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchal values. My interest as a researcher is in how youth offending practitioners construct their practice with girls who are also in care as this requires them to navigate constructed “intolerant norms” (Pilgram and Rogers, 2008). As I also position myself as a radical social work academic, the analysis also needs to consider practitioners’ experiences within the context of contemporary Britain.

## Study design

In alignment with the conceptual framework and concerns raised, the method chosen for this research is semi-structured qualitative interviewing and thematic analysis. Burgess (1984:102) refers to qualitative interviewing as “conversations with a purpose” as they allow the researcher to harvest greater depth of meaning. As this research focuses on participants’ experiences including constructions of gender and constructions of working with complex welfare needs from a criminal justice perspective, qualitative interviewing provides a “roundedness in that data” (Mason, 1996:41) which is difficult to achieve in methods such as surveys or questionnaires.

Furthermore, although qualitative interviewing provides participants with the freedom to develop their narrative, narrative interviewing was considered a less suitable method of gathering data compared to semi-structured interviewing. Having a semi-structured interview meant that the data collected was specific to the research questions, but the interview was simultaneously flexible and provided space to explore responses in greater depth (Whittaker, 2009). This decision was made as this research focuses specifically on the experiences of professional practice with a particular group of young offenders and asks participants to talk through case examples of working with girls in care. The research is also interested in examining specific tension in practice identified in the literature. Therefore, semi-structured interviewing was deemed more suitable as the content was bounded by a specific area of practitioners’ professional experience.

The methodology most suited to the research questions and the epistemological and theoretical framework was felt to be thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During the decision-making process for the methodological approach, grounded theory was ruled out as this project is embedded in the literature, whereas a classic grounded theory proposes that the researcher should “at first, literally ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:37). I note that grounded theory has progressed since its foundation and led to the development of different variants of grounded theory such as constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) argues that not having prior knowledge of the literature is unrealistic in contemporary research. However, this project is heavily linked to themes that have been identified in the established literature. Therefore, thematic analysis felt more suitable.

A benefit of thematic analysis is its flexibility as it is not tied to any specific theory or epistemology and can therefore be applied to a range of approaches. It is argued that the theoretical freedom of thematic analysis creates a useful and flexible research tool, “which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:5). As outlined, this research takes a constructionist framework and is concerned with how meaning is socially produced and reproduced (Burr, 2003). Hence, the method most suited to this research is more specifically “constructionist thematic analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:85)

Constructionist thematic analysis is not primarily concerned with individual meaning and psychologies but rather it aims to investigate the structural and sociocultural context which enable individual accounts to make sense (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method of analysis allows for the exploration of themes and connects them with wider sociocultural constructions. It is because of this that the boundary is thin between constructionist thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and strands of discourse analysis, such as Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008). However, as this project is not concerned with the micro analysis of language, but rather is aiming to examine much broader themes, constructionist thematic analysis as a methodology was chosen.



Thematic analysis is researcher led while capturing participants' voices and ideas. The researcher is active in both identifying and selecting themes most relevant to the research question itself which highlights again the significance of the transparency of the researcher's assumptions and values (Holloway and Todres, 2003). This also aligns with the feminist theoretical positioning of this research and the epistemological underpinnings of social constructionism, as outlined earlier.

Hence, in order to answer the outlined research questions, this research proposed to conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews with youth offending practitioners who had experiences of working with female offenders who were also in care. In order to minimise disruption to their day to day practice participants who agreed to take part in this study were given the option of having a face-to-face interview or being interviewed over the phone. The dynamics of telephone interviewing is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The gathered interview data would then be analysed using thematic analysis.

### **Familiarising myself with the field in England**

As I did not have experience of working as a youth offending practitioner within the United Kingdom, it was recommended that I speak to some local practitioners about the study to see if my proposal would be a viable project worth pursuing. So, drawing on the established relationship that the School of Social Work at UEA had with the local youth offending service, I emailed a team leader and set up a time to talk informally to three local YOT workers who had experience of working with girls in care. Two practitioners were male, and one was female. I considered this an early stage pilot, which assisted me in designing the interview schedule. Prior to this pilot I had familiarised myself with some of the issues that I had recognised in the early literature search, however given that I did not have practice experience in the U.K., this meeting illuminated areas of practice that I had not considered. For example, the three practitioners in the pilot raised issues such as how they perceived their role to be misunderstood by social services, how they felt their own professional training did not necessarily equip them with the skill required to work with complex welfare needs, and how the youth offending service tended to be ingrained with

sexism in its approach to working with young people. Hence, the interview schedule was developed based on themes that had come out of the early literature review, the research questions themselves and critically what was discussed in the initial pilot.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for the study was granted through the University of East Anglia, School of Social Work Research Ethics Committee (see appendix C, D and E). Once research governance had been approved by each of the three local authorities and I had been given the contact details of potential participants (discussed in following section) I emailed the potential participants information sheets explaining the aims of the research (see appendix F) and invited them to take part in the project. Once they had agreed in a reply email a date was set up for the interview.

## **Voluntary participation**

Participation in the interviews was specified as being voluntary. However, potential participants were initially nominated by team leaders. Given the power dynamics of this relationship between practitioner and team leader, this raises the question of whether practitioners felt they could confidently refuse to participate. I was not privy to how the team leaders approached the members of staff they considered suitable for the project, rather I was provided contact details of individual staff members.

I attempted to manage this ethical consideration by reiterating voluntary participation when inviting practitioners to participate in the study. So, after receiving the list of names of practitioners I emailed each potential participant, introducing myself and outlining the project and making sure I emphasised that their participation was voluntary. All practitioners agreed to participate in the study, however one practitioner stopped replying to my emails. They had agreed to participate in the study but did not confirm a date for the interview. Ethically I had to decide how many times I would send them a follow up email. The team leader of this youth offending service had also asked me to let them know if I was having

trouble with practitioners getting back to me. However, after I got no response to my second follow up email, I decided not to contact them again as I took this as their way of not wanting to participate. I did not feel it was appropriate to go back to the team leader.

In hindsight, I would have preferred to have attended each youth offending service myself and given each team an overview of the project and my contact details. I would have done this to ensure that the practitioners' participation was based on an opportunity to discuss the study with the researcher and that their participation was voluntary.

### Consent

As discussed above, although agencies had agreed to participate via research governance, interview participants were also given the opportunity to provide their individual consent verbally, which was recorded prior to the commencement of the interview. Participants were also reminded prior to the interview that they had the right to end the interview at any point and could withdraw from the study up to 3 days following the interview.

However, the interviews also asked participants to discuss cases of working with girls in care. This meant discussing the lives and histories of young women in care who did not give their consent to participate in this research. I have considered this carefully and in depth. The primary way that this project has balanced this ethical concern was through anonymisation of personal and identifying information and the focus taken in the interviews and data analysis. That is, the focus of this research is on the experience of practitioners and their practice as youth offending officers. The young women they discuss have been described in the findings chapters very carefully to ensure that their stories provide context to the accounts of the practitioners and are not the primary areas of analysis. Rather the findings chapters focus on how the practitioners construct these young women and their professional role in working with them and I have been mindful of keeping this project within these boundaries.

## Confidentiality

In this project confidentiality needed to be considered regarding both the interview participants but also the girls whom they discussed in their work. When interviews were conducted the researcher knew the full names and contact details of the participants. This was not the case with the identity of the girls the participants discussed. In some cases participants used the first names of the girls, but many practitioners used pseudonyms to protect their identity. Regardless of whether practitioners used pseudonyms or not, all names and places were anonymised when interviews were transcribed and any references to confidential or identifying information has been removed in the findings chapters that follow. In addition to anonymization, when quotations were selected for the findings section, no participant's views have been discussed in such detail that their identity - or the identity of the girls they worked with – could be deduced. Inevitably, however participants reading the thesis - or subsequent publications- may recognise their own words and accounts of cases, but I have worked hard to ensure that these are recorded accurately and treated respectfully, and with the purpose intended in the project of informing and improving future practice.

## Emotional impact on participants

With the focus on the practitioners' experiences, the interviews asked them to discuss how they felt about their professional roles. I was aware that this might elicit emotional responses in participants - as youth offending practice can be emotionally challenging and the literature suggested that the girls under discussion during interviews are likely to have presented a range of histories of trauma as well as current vulnerabilities. Therefore, all interviews were prefaced with a reminder that practitioners could take a break if they needed. I also allowed space at the end of the interview for practitioners to debrief with me, which was not recorded. This involved me asking participants how they experienced the interview, to which the vast majority replied that they had found it interesting and that they were happy to have had an opportunity to 'reflect'.

### **Emotional impact on researcher**

As I had a history of working with young offenders and with young people who had experienced sexual assault trauma, I felt that this experience would provide me with resilience to hearing any distressing circumstances - but for any researcher there can be challenges in hearing difficult material and then going on to re-listen and transcribe this material. However, I had developed a strong and supportive relationship with my supervisory team and this allowed me to feel able to contact them if I felt distressed at any point during the data collection and analysis process.

### **Maintaining researcher stance**

There are also challenges for practitioner researchers in maintaining the researcher stance when participants are discussing case material. This ethical consideration was compounded by my history of being a youth offending practitioner. As this chapter will discuss, this position placed me as both an insider and an outsider which meant that it was critical that I remain aware of my assumptions around youth offending practice in order to maintain my position as researcher. This was helped by not having practiced in the United Kingdom, which meant that I was also a novice to local practice. Being continually reflective of my position is also consistent with a feminist theoretical framework and the epistemological underpinning of social constructionism.

### **Reflection on researcher position: Insider and outsider**

As discussed, taking a feminist and a social constructionist theoretical framework, it was essential that I reflect on my position as a researcher in this project. In doing so I used the Insider/Outsider framework.

Insider research is described as research conducted on samples of which the researcher is a member, whereas outsider research is described as research conducted on samples where the researcher is not a member (Kanuha, 2000). However, Dywer and Buckle (2009) argue that considering the membership of the researcher in binary insider/outsider terms is too simplistic to understand the range of experiences in qualitative research. That is "holding membership in a group does

not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference.” (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:60). Rather, they advocate for reflective research that examines the researcher as *both* insider and outsider.

This was my experience in conducting this research. I am both an insider – as I have experience working with the same client group – but also an outsider – as I had not practiced within the U.K. I am also female – which places me as an insider with all but one of the participants, but I am also clearly positioned as the researcher - which places me as an outsider. Therefore, my position as insider/outsider was fluid throughout the project, as I will go on to demonstrate.

Adler and Adler (1987) argue that being an insider provides the researcher with a level of legitimacy. Having worked in the Australian youth justice system allowed me to relate to the participants’ experiences of practice. For example, one interview opened with the participant saying how she may be interrupted at some point as she was trying to get a hold of a young person who had lost their fourth mobile phone. I was able to say how I remember similar cases and the difficulties in trying to locate young people who had a hard time keeping hold of a phone. This casual conversation helped me build rapport in that I was able to demonstrate shared experience. Dwyer and Buckle suggest that “the insider role status frequently allows researchers more rapid and more complete acceptance by their participants. Therefore, participants are typically more open with researchers so that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered” (2009:58). They also suggest that acceptance and automatic trust and openness is the primary advantage of insider research. I cannot comment on whether my combined insider/outsider position assisted my participants in trusting me as a researcher. However, it was common for practitioners to comment that they had enjoyed ‘being asked’ about their experience at the conclusion of the interview and all seemed to show a genuine interest in wanting to be informed of the eventual conclusions. At a later date, when disseminating emerging findings at a conference

open to the local community, one of the practitioners from the study attended and spoke to me afterwards wanting to know what the next stage was for the project.

Asselin's (2003) approach to conducting research with a group to which the researcher is an insider argues that the researcher must become aware of their own assumptions regarding the phenomena and 'bracket' these out. From my position as an insider I was aware that I had ideas that I developed as a practitioner regarding what I thought may become themes. However, my position as an outsider enabled me to reflect on these ideas and assumptions more easily.

Dywer and Buckle (2009) also argue that in insider research participants may not go into depth when explaining their experience, due to an assumption that the researcher as an insider already has this understanding. This was not the case in this project as I often asked for clarification, which reminded my participants that I do not have the same knowledge base as them and placed me simultaneously as an outsider. For example, I often asked for clarification of any acronyms used or any policies or laws that I was unaware of. I felt that this also helped even up the power dynamics as having not been a youth offending practitioner in England I was clearly placed as a novice and the participant were placed in the role of expert.

As I had had no experience of the YOS culture within England, the difference in practice styles or the difference in issues faced by practitioners this gave me 'fresh eyes'. For example, as a youth justice practitioner in Australia several years ago, child sexual exploitation was not something that I had dealt with, so this was something that I did not anticipate being so significant in interviews.

Being both insider and outside alleviated the dual challenges of being both a member of the group being researched and the researcher. That is, although I had a shared experience of working with female offenders who are also in care, not having experienced this in England allowed me to see patterns and connections from a wider perspective.

## Sample and recruitment

Drawing again from the established relationship my school had with the youth offending service, I contacted via email the head of the YOS in three local authorities – two shire counties and one London borough. None of these three local authorities were signatories on the *South-east protocol to reduce offending and criminalisation of children in care* (2014). The interviews were also conducted before November 2018 and so preceded the publication of the *National protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers* (Home Office, 2018).

In the initial email to the head of the YOS I provided information about the study and inquired if they would be willing to take part. Once agreed, I applied for and obtained research governance. Each local authority had a different research governance process to complete, but all involved addressing potential ethical issues and questions regarding the time to be taken by members of their staff. Two local authorities also asked for the interview schedule. The process of gaining research governance approval took approximately 4 – 5 months. After research governance was approved, I made contact with the team leader of each youth offending team. These contact details were provided to me by the head of the youth offending service. The team leaders provided the contact information for practitioners who fitted the criteria which qualified them for participation in the interview. The criteria were simply that they had experience of working with female offenders who were also in care.

I did not specify the gender of practitioner nor professional background. However, based on the pilot I anticipated that I would get an even gender split. Also, given that practitioners in the pilot study had said that there was a YOS policy in place which stipulated those with social work training should - where possible- case manage looked after young offenders due to their training in attachment and understanding of the children's service sector, I anticipated that the professional profile of the sample would be dominated by social workers.



### Characteristics of the interview sample

The sample was made up of 20 practitioners. This was the number of YOT practitioners willing to be interviewed from the three local authorities who had agreed to participate in the research. At this point I decided with my supervisory team to begin interviewing and conducting analysis of the data and see if data saturation could be achieved with this number, which it was (as discussed below).

19 of the 20 practitioners interviewed identified as female. I learned that there was a policy in place in these local authorities which recommended that all female offenders are case managed by female workers. Although this was not the case in the pilot authority, the predominance of female workers in the sample did reflect practice in the participating authorities.

In terms of their professional background, the sample was made up of 7 social workers, 4 probation officers, 3 youth workers, 4 with certificates in effective youth justice, 1 teacher and 1 police community support officer. The fact that a minority of the sample were social workers may suggest that the gender of the practitioners is considered more significant than practitioners' professional training background when working with female offenders in care.

The practitioners in the sample had between 2 and 13 years experience in practice, with an average of 6.5 years. All had worked with female offenders in care.

I did not ask the practitioners for any further information regarding how they identify, including their ethnicity. Although this research takes a Black Feminist theoretical perspective, this information was not something I was looking for from the practitioners themselves. Rather, the theoretical perspective is foundational to the overall research. It is this lens that has been adopted in the development of analysis and themes and it provides a context for the findings and discussion. Hence, the findings are understood within an intersectional framing of the world around the girls and the systems which they are a part of. So, rather than the individual identities of the practitioners themselves, this research explores how the youth offending services responds to the intersectional identities of girls who are in care.

However, as interviews were semi-structured there was space for practitioners to disclose how they identified and if they experienced their identity as affecting the work they were doing with the girls. Beyond the sharing of a gender identity, this happened on three occasions. One participant discussing identifying as a lesbian and that she felt having to navigate this in her own life gave her an awareness of gendered assumptions and boundaries which she brought to her general practice. Two other participants disclosed their ethnicity and religion. One discussed how she brought a Christmas meal to young offender in care on Christmas Day, disclosing that in her religion they do not celebrate Christmas. And the third participant discussed how she felt that sharing the same ethnic background and complexion allowed her to build a stronger relationship with a young woman she was working with (discussed in greater detail in chapter 5).

On reflection and given the diverse ethnicities of the girls discussed in the interviews (see below), asking practitioners directly about their ethnicity and if they felt this impacted the way they worked with the young women in care would have been helpful. This may have offered additional insights in some cases into how the girls and their relationships with the YOT workers were being constructed.

### **Characteristics of the girls discussed in interviews**

Participants could reflect generally on the range of their work with female offenders in care during the interview, but they were also asked to focus in detail on one particular girl and provide a more complete narrative account. This could be a previous, closed case or a current, open case.

The demographics of the girls selected by participants for discussion were varied. They were aged between 13 – 17 years old with the most common age being 15. In relation to ethnicity, one case discussed was of a girl of Asian descent, two were of mixed heritage (white British/Caribbean), three were described as black British, one was Hispanic, and one was described as European. The remaining 12 young women were described as White British. Two of the girls were described as identifying as lesbian.

In terms of the offending patterns of these girls, 14 of the 20 young women discussed were sentenced for assault charges. Of these assault charges, 8 were perpetrated towards care staff, four toward family members, including a mother, and two were perpetrated against peers. Other charges included criminal damage (all in the care home), arson with intent to endanger life, burglary, GBH, possession of a weapon, drug trafficking, and shop theft. Two young women were in or had been in custody, whilst the rest were in the community.

In terms of the care history of the girls discussed, 13 of the young women were in residential care at the time of the offending, four were in foster care and one had recently moved from foster care to residential care. One young woman was in secure accommodation, one was placed in special guardianship and one was in semi-independent accommodation.

Individual case histories showed complex pathways into care through troubled and often abusive family lives, in which loss and trauma dominated. Many girls had histories of sexual abuse. In one case a girl had been sexually abused by two family members who subsequently died. Her mother was a substance user and unable to look after her, so she came into care. Another girl whose mother was a drug user had encouraged her to use drugs, injecting her with amphetamines. This girl also had a history of attempted suicide and concerns were raised about sexual exploitation. However, despite these significant experiences of abuse and trauma many of the girls felt protective of their families – in particular their mothers and younger siblings - and would often abscond from placements to return home.

For some girls there had been clashes with family over religion and culture, leading to downward spirals; for example, for one girl from an Asian background conflict led to gang membership and risk of sexual exploitation. In another case a girl with mental health problems was sent to extended family in Africa where she experienced physical and sexual abuse, but her disclosure was not believed by her parents. Drug misuse, violence, mental health problems and sexual exploitation interacted and dominated these family histories. These girls also experienced significant losses via parents or significant guardians (sometimes grandparents) either leaving them or passing away.

Most girls came into care in middle childhood or adolescence. Offending behaviour for some had started prior to coming into care, most often in the form of shoplifting, but in many of these cases offending behaviours became more serious once in care, and often included assaults on residential staff. Attempts to distance girls from risky family members or peers sometimes led to remote placements in residential care which created its own problems, with girls running away, for example, or missing education and experiencing deteriorating mental health and self-harm.

Risks of violence, sexual abuse and exploitation often persisted in care as girls became involved with partners who threatened them. At times it was difficult for practitioners to know how to protect girls in these contexts. One girl who identified as lesbian ran away from her rural children's home to see family members and an older partner where there were concerns about sexual exploitation. Concerns regarding another girl's risk of sexual exploitation were so significant that to safeguard her the police put a child abduction warning notice on the older males she was witnessed associating with. Eventually this girl was placed in secure accommodation due to these ongoing safeguarding concerns.

The court decision that led to each girl's involvement with the Youth Offending Service could come at any point in these complex pathways, with a referral order in most cases being a first contact with the criminal courts. However, one of the girls first contact with the YOS was following a custodial sentence for arson with intent to endanger life. As is discussed in the findings chapters below, these multiple interacting factors presented many challenges in supporting girls to overcome past trauma while managing current and future risks of victimhood and offending.

## **Data collection**

The 20 interviews were conducted between November 2017 and May 2018. Interviews lasted between 1 hour and 12 minutes (shortest) and 2 hours and 40 minutes (longest).

### Telephone interviews

All participants were given the option of an interview by telephone or a face-to-face interview. Based on previous UEA research with professionals (e.g. Dickens et.al. 2015) it was anticipated that telephone interviews would be more acceptable as they are flexible and minimise disruption to work schedules. However, it was possible that individuals might prefer a face-to-face interview.

The participant information sheet (Appendix F) which had been emailed to the interviewees prior to our contact stated that *“The interviews will predominantly be conducted via telephone, however if you’d prefer a face- to-face interview this can be arranged”*. The wording of this suggested that from the researcher’s perspective interviews which are conducted via the telephone is preferred. Given the power dynamics between researcher and participant, this may have left participants less likely to request a face-to-face interview. I did attempt to balance this in our first contact by reiterating that interviews could be face- to -face if that suited them better. However, all chose telephone interviews, with some participants telling me that this method would suit them better given that they may need to reschedule at the last minute. This happened on two occasions.

This highlights one of the main advantages of telephone interviews – the flexibility in terms of time efficiency that it offers both participant and researcher (Dinham, 1994; Block and Erskine 2012). Telephone interviews are also considered cost effective (Miller and Salkind, 2003) and can provide access to a wider sample.

However, telephone interviewing has also been critiqued in the barriers it presents to accessing a representative sample (Block and Erskine, 2012). For example, not all individuals have access to a telephone, nor do all individuals feel comfortable using a phone for interview purposes. In this research with practitioners the latter concern was overcome by offering participants an option of face-to-face interviews and the former concern was overcome by participants having access to work phones to complete the interview.

Block and Erskine (2012) point out that telephone interviewing can also present difficulties related to the lack of visual communication. For example, Block and

Erskine (2012: 434) argues that the “anonymity provided by separation may either amplify or minimize the subject’s desire to express himself or herself in a socially desirable manner”. This separation and anonymity may also impact on the trust built between researcher and subject. However, research has also found that data collected in semi structured interviews is equally robust and detailed when comparing telephone interviews with face-to-face interviews (See Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004).

### Interview Schedule

After the informal pilot I began to design the interview schedule (see appendix G). This was based on the research questions, themes from the early literature review and the pilot. I also worked closely with my supervisory team in its development. Once this was complete, I designed an information sheet (see appendix F). The interview schedule asked practitioners to talk through a case they had worked on with a female offender in care.

During the first few interviews I tested the interview schedule and examined the transcripts with my supervisory team. The interview schedule worked well, with only one question needing to be changed. On the first version of the interview schedule I had asked participants if they felt the professional background of practitioners influenced their response to female offenders in care. However, this elicited a simple ‘no’ response, with no elaboration. I was unsure if this meant that the different professional backgrounds were genuinely thought to have no impact on practice, or if this was a reluctance to discuss professional differences to someone from outside the team.

For example, I also wondered if my position as a social work researcher created a power dynamic that became a barrier to discussing this area. That is, I had introduced myself as a social worker and said the research was a part of my PhD in Social Work. So, although I did not clarify this with participants, I wondered if they were worried that I would be biased in my analysis of the different professional backgrounds and approaches. I recognised that as the researcher I was in a position of power (Presser, 2005) as I would be the person who had the ‘final say’ in the

write up. I understand that social work and youth offending practitioners are often faced with negative public perceptions and are rarely publicly praised for the work they do. This may make some practitioners cautious about what they say (through fear of what I would do with that information). I again wondered if this could have been compounded by being asked by their team leader to participate in the research and if they felt they needed to represent their team in a positive light.

After discussing my concerns with my supervisory team, I decided to remove this as a direct question. As the interviews were semi-structured, this created space for different professional approaches to come up naturally in the interviews if the participants considered them important.

### **Transcription**

To maintain the confidentiality of the sample in this research and to protect all identifying information of the young women they discussed, I personally transcribed and anonymised all interview data. This also allowed me to stay close to the data, as listening again to the recordings in order to transcribe them accurately enabled me to engage with and reflect on the tone of voice and varied emphasis that is not always present in a typed transcript, giving me a fuller sense of the experiences being described by practitioners.

I decided that I would interview participants, transcribe the interview data and start the analysis simultaneously. This allowed me to immerse myself in the data and identify themes as I was still interviewing participants. I felt that this iterative process assisted me in my interviewing as I could ask later participants for more detail on topics that were evident in the wider data set.

### **Data analysis**

The data analysis was conducted over a period of eighteen months. According to Boyatzis (1998) researchers using thematic analysis are required to decide if themes will be identified at a latent or semantic level prior to data analysis. A semantic approach focusses purely on the identification of explicit or surface meanings given to the data. This approach “involves a progression from description, where the data have simply been organised to show patterns in semantic content, and

summarised, to interpretation, where there is an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:84). A latent approach includes going beyond the semantic content “and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies - that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:84). As this project would be exploring underlying ideologies and assumptions around gender, being in care and offending behaviours, a latent level of thematic identification is deemed more suitable. This level of analysis is also more compatible with a constructionist paradigm. Therefore, rather than providing a descriptive account of themes in the entire data set, this research provided a more in-depth account relating to ideas and experiences of YOT practice with female offenders in care.

Braun and Clarke (2006:87) propose that thematic analysis uses a six-stage model of data analysis. They outline these stages as 1. familiarising oneself with the data; 2. initial coding; 3. identifying themes; 4. reviewing themes; 5. naming themes; 6. reporting on findings. However, I found this application of this six-stage model to be too prescriptive as analysis was not always linear. My experience was possibly compounded by conducting interviews, transcribing interviews and analysing data simultaneously, as previously outlined.

To address this, I adjusted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage model. Rather than having six distinct stages, I broke data analysis into two main processes. I have termed these processes Data Management and the Abstraction and Interpretation. The Data Management process covered stages 1-3 of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage model. This involved organising and collating the data, initial coding and early identification of themes.

Abstraction and interpretation covered stages 4-6 of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage model. I did not move on to the abstraction and interpretation process until all interview data was completed in the data management process. Abstraction and interpretation involved identifying patterns and themes, reviewing themes and patterns and naming them. However, as mentioned, this was not a linear process as



emerging ideas about what may prove to be significant themes born from the interviews were a constant source of reflection and discussion with supervisors throughout the entire data analysis process.

The final stage in Braun and Clarke's six-stage model included writing the findings chapters.

### **Data Management**

The first step of the analytical process involved managing and becoming familiar with the raw data. After each interview was complete and prior to transcription, I reflected on my thoughts and took note of anything that had stuck with me. I used this process to hold myself accountable to principles of reflective practice and to identify any personal assumptions or biases. As I transcribed the interview, I also took notes of thoughts that emerged. Sometimes these were emotions or memories of my own practice but most of the time they were early ideas or questions. I was surprised when this happened as I anticipated during transcription I would be somewhat detached from the data. Once the interview was transcribed and anonymised in its entirety, I read through the transcript again to allow myself to become immersed in the data before I began indexing.

Seale (1999:154) says that "coding that fixes meanings too early in the analytic process may stultify creative thought... The early stages of coding are therefore more appropriately called 'indexing', acting as signposts to interesting bits of data, rather than representing some final argument about meaning". Therefore, once I had immersed myself in the data, I began constructing an initial index by hand. This involved listing what participants discussed in the interviews in the broadest of terms. I did this for the first 5 interviews and worked closely with my primary supervisor.

Whittaker (2009) argues that at this stage the researcher must decide if they are going to use emic coding which relies on the exact words and phrases of the participants or if they are going to do use etic coding. Etic coding is "devised by the researcher and usually relates to theoretical perspective that underpins the analysis" (Whittaker, 2009:93). However, as outlined in the study design, this

project took a feminist informed social constructionist perspective which considers individual constructions but places them within a socio-political context. Therefore, this initial indexing included emic *and* etic coding. Similarly, this research took a hybrid approach to data analysis as it is both inductive and deductive. Hence, codes were identified when the data said something directly related to the research question, related to the literature and/or was something meaningful that was evidenced within multiple data sets.

Once my primary supervisor and I felt confident that the initial indexing was fitting the data, I began using the coding software NVivo11. Recreating the index on NVivo11 also allowed me to see how much of the raw data was being coded using the index for every individual interview. This meant that I was able to review the index as I could see how much of the raw interview data was being coded, allowing me to ensure I was not selectively using data from particular interviews. I could also compare coded data from different interviews within the index.

Saldana (2009:8) describes this stage of coding as enabling “you to organise and group similar coded data into categories and families, because they share characteristics”. However, NVivo11 also enabled me to sort and organise the codes more effectively, which included collapsing some codes and creating conceptual hierarchies - with primary codes and subcodes (referred to as parent and child nodes on NVivo11).

After all interviews were coded, the index was made up of seven primary codes. This is outlined below:

|  |
|--|
| <b>1. Sample Description A: Practitioner Profile</b>                                 |
| <b>2. Sample Description B: Case Profile</b>   |
| <b>3. Individual Youth Offending Practice with Case: Working with the Individual</b> |
| <b>4. Individual Youth Offending Practice with Case: Working with other agencies</b> |
| <b>5. Making sense of the work: cognitive</b>  |
| <b>6. Making sense of the work: affect</b>   |
| <b>7. Youth Offending Policies and Practice</b>                                      |

Figure one

Within primary code there were multiple sub-codes. For example, under the primary code titled 'making sense of the work: affect' were the following sub-codes:

|  |
|--|
| <b>3. Making sense of the work: affect</b>       |
| 3.1. Feelings of frustration                     |
| 3.1.1. Individual work                           |
| 3.1.1.1. Impact of time on interventions         |
| 3.1.2. Systemically                              |
| 3.2. Feelings of empathy                         |
| 3.2.1. Empathising with girl                     |
| 3.2.2. Empathising with other workers            |
| 3.3. Feeling maternal                            |
| 3.4. Identification with girls                   |
| 3.5. Feeling protective of girls                 |
| 3.6. Rewarding work                              |
| 3.7. Gut reactions/unable to explain             |
| 3.8. Professional anxiety; working with risk     |
| 3.9. Attachment in the professional relationship |
| 3.10. Emotional labour                           |
| 3.11. Hopes for future                           |

Figure two

As the interviews were semi-structured, this created boundaries around the raw data, in that it was neatly packaged (Seale, 1999). This meant that the index tree was loosely reflective of the interview schedule. Having the raw data presented this way also meant that once I had constructed the index and coded all interviews, I could confidently move onto the abstraction and interpretation stage.

### **Abstraction and Interpretation**

The second stage of data analysis involved abstraction and interpretation of the data. In this stage I began to link the codes and look for themes related to the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006:82) argue that themes “capture something important about the data in relation to the research question and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set”. I found this stage easier to do by going back to working by hand. I exported the index tree from NVivo11 and printed all interview extracts coded to each primary and sub node. I then identified patterns and nuances within each node.

I worked through each code individually, analysing each interview extract. Using a set of highlighters, I examined patterns within the extracted interview data I had previously coded together. For example, in the sub-code ‘Feeling maternal’ as seen in the above figure 2, I had coded 8 extracts, drawn from 7 individual interviews.

I then examined these extracts and highlighted patterns and distinctions within the whole data set. I did this with all the codes and sub-codes and transferred them to movable post-it notes and placed them on poster sized paper so I could distinguish patterns and distinctions within the emerging themes. Doing this by hand, rather than using NVivo software allowed me to take a wider view of the themes that were emerging within each primary code and conceptualise the data.

Braun and Clarke (2006:91) argue that at this stage of reviewing the themes “data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, whilst there should be clear

and identifiable distinctions between themes”. This meant that some themes had insufficient coded data to qualify as a theme. Other themes were not distinguished enough from a similar theme to stand alone and so I collapsed them into one. This involved interpretation of data and so I worked closely with my primary supervisor.

Despite a relatively small sample size this iterative process of abstraction and interpretation of the data led to a saturation stage. At this point I found that themes were repeating themselves and that no new themes were emerging. So, I was confident in the robustness of the themes that I had identified.

As only one participant was male in the sample, during the data management stage I did not separate out this individual interview. At the interpretation and abstraction stage of analysis as theme were developing, I would refer to the codes that I had identified in this interview data. I found no significant difference in the themes that were developing, which furthered my confidence that the saturation stage had been met.

The three dominant themes: that emerged from this analysis were

1. The role of relationships
2. Youth offending work with girls
3. Multi-agency working

These were embedded within each other as represented in Figure Three.

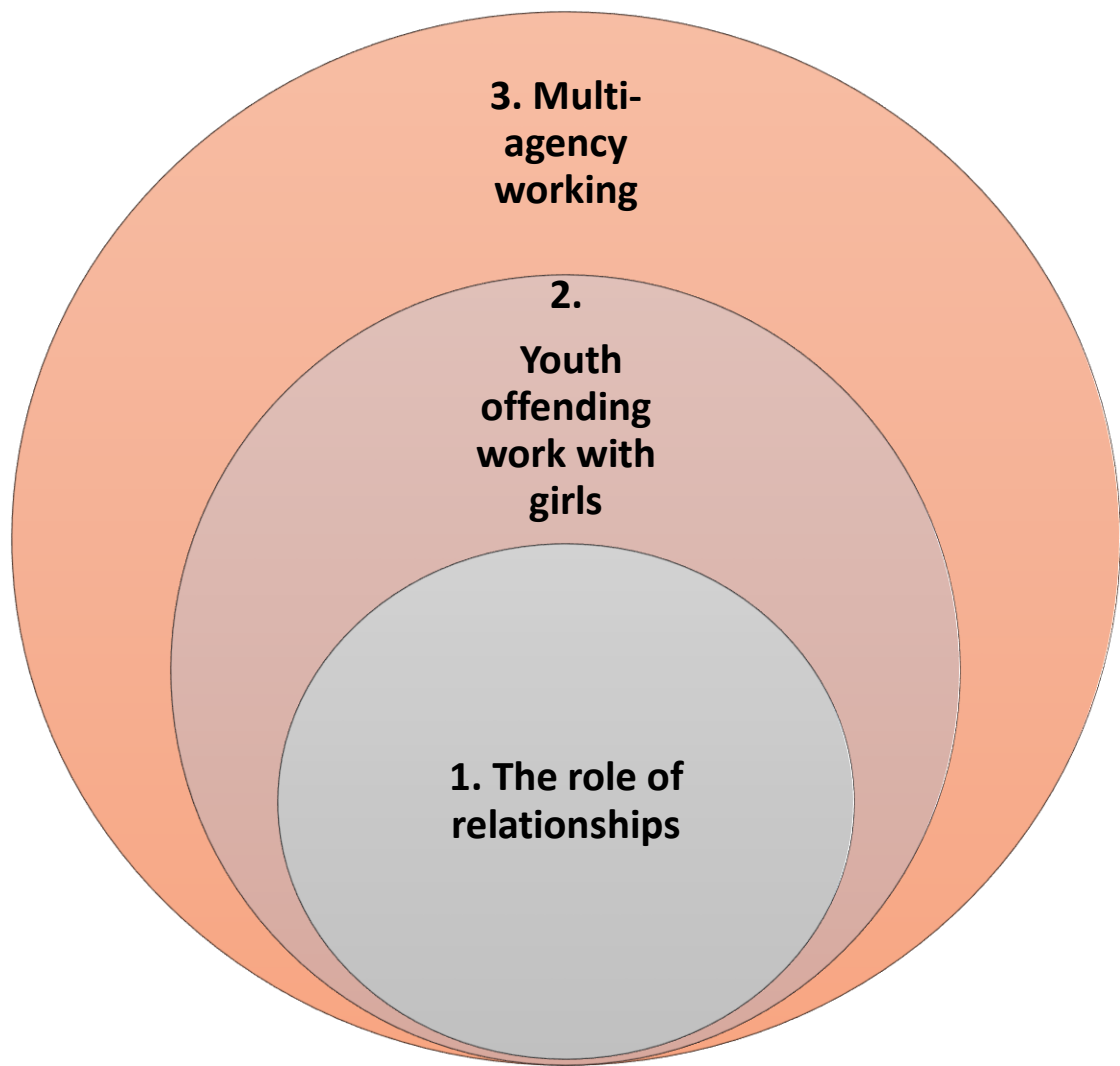


Figure Three

These three themes have been used to structure the three findings chapters that follow

The first of the findings chapter, *The Role of Relationships*, explores the significance of the relationships that were built with the girls and what relationship-based practice looks like for youth offending workers when working with girls who were in care. This was a strong, foundational theme and was discussed in all interviews.

The second chapter, *Doing Youth Offending Work*, focusses on how practitioners considered their individual role when working with female offenders who were also in care, how they experienced this role, what this work looked like in terms of addressing both welfare needs and offending issues, and how they made sense of it.

The final chapter, *Multi-Agency Working: Roles, Relationships and Perceptions*, explores the themes around practitioners' understanding of their role as youth offending workers in multi-agency networks when working with female offenders in care, and how they experienced multi-agency practice.

As the diagram suggests, these themes are closely related to each other and interact with one another. For example, the *relationship* becomes the basis for how practitioners experience and structure the *work* they do on welfare needs, but this also influences how they position themselves when operating within a *multi-agency* framework. This interaction and the relationships between these themes are reflected in the three findings chapters and will be integrated with implications for practice in the discussion chapter

# Chapter Five: The Role of Relationships

## Introduction

Relationship based practice is a conceptual framework and model of practice most often associated with social work (Ruch, Turney and Ward, 2010). It places the relationship with the service user as key to positive practice. Hence, it is at the heart of much welfare work with children and young people. What separates youth offending from other youth focused social services is its connection to the law, crime, punishment and the idea of 'rehabilitation' and 'deterrence'. It is also a mandated interaction. The young person is directed by the courts to engage with youth offending services with the aim of 'rehabilitation' and to reduce their risk of further offending. If young person does not attend, they risk facing further legal consequences. Therefore, the youth offending services (YOS) are a part of a young person's life as a direct result of their criminal behaviour. Hence, it can be argued that a young offender's mandated engagement with YOS is simultaneously their 'punishment' and 'rehabilitation'.

However, what has become evident in the interviews conducted for this research is that, although practitioners were not all social workers, relationship-based practice is at the heart of all youth offending practice, particularly with female offenders. This finding is consistent with previous research (Sharpe, 2012; Taylor, 2006; Umamaheswar 2012; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Mason and Prior, 2008; Rex, 1999). As the practitioners interviewed for this study highlight, the relationship with all young offenders is *essential* for practice, but it is specifically significant when working with female offenders from care and so therefore it can be argued YOT practice is necessarily gendered (also see Fitzpatrick, 2017).

It is important to note that the 'relationship' is constructed by practitioners in this study as being both gender specific and key to creating an environment where more traditional youth offending practice can be completed. Traditional youth



offending practice refers to specific work that is outlined on court orders and highlighted in the needs assessment - such as victim empathy and anger management. Although practitioners report that the relationship is important to practice with both male and female offenders, how relationships are built and maintained is thought to require a specific approach when working with female offenders. Therefore, how practice is conceptualised and managed is different when working with different genders:

I've learnt actually we are going to work with these girls differently. We are going to take into consideration the differences between the boys and the girls... And people would argue that you should treat them the same, and I was one of those people in the beginning but actually, I can see now, you can see how they are... what the differences are. – Participant 18

This quotation illustrates that practitioners learn to take a different approach to youth offending work when working with male and female offenders. Relationships were described as being essential when working with female offenders because girls were constructed as being more invested in having these relationships with their YOT worker:

I think the relationship is definitely key with working with young women. – Participant 12

My experiences with girls, I tend to find that they take a little bit longer to trust you, but they are more interested in a closer relationship. – Participant 10

Additionally, according to practitioners' accounts, it is the relationship that facilitates an environment where work directed by the courts can be completed. This connection is also discussed as being gendered. Although practitioners report that relationships are important in youth offending practice with young men, being able to complete the more traditional work is not seen as being dependent on having that relationship as much as it is with female offenders. As a result, it was difficult for workers to envisage being able to complete court directed work without an established relationship when working with female offenders in care. Although it

is not specified on court orders or recorded as a specific goal in assessments, building relationships was highlighted as youth offending 'work' in and of itself and described as essential for effective practice with female offenders:

Often the males are much happier just to come in and leave again. They don't need to have so much invested in the trusting relationship. -

Participant 20

Therefore, it can be argued that how practitioners construct relationship-based practice in youth offending work has gendered elements. It is gendered in how it is understood and how it is approached in practice. This chapter will examine how practitioners make sense of the dynamics of their relationships with female offenders from care and is broken down into three sections. The first section explores the engagement stage of building the relationships with girls in care. The second section examines how practitioners maintain these relationships and the final section considers how practitioners manage ending these relationships without causing harm. Each of these sections will explore what practitioners construct as essential at each of these stages.

## **I. Engagement: The foundation of relationship building**

It is important from the very beginning, the first impressions are very important, because you can lose them straight away. – Participant 18

According to practitioners the first step to building a relationship with female offenders from care is an ability to engage them. This section will explore what youth offending practitioners describe as being involved in the engagement stage and is broken down into five subsections. The first subsection examines how the mandated nature of youth offending assists practitioners in engaging young women. The second subsection considers how previous experiences of rejection can influence engagement. The third subsection explores how practitioners work with resistance to engaging. The fourth subsection considers the impact of time on the engagement stage. And the final subsection examines the professional skills which practitioners consider important during the engagement process.

### Mandated attendance and relationship building

Practitioners tended to report that one element in their work, which sets them apart from social services is that young people are mandated to attend the youth offending service. They are not choosing to attend, and they are aware of the consequences if they do not attend. Although arguably social services are also not a service that children in care have freely chosen to engage with, the expectations of the working relationship and the dynamics of service provision are different. This will be examined in greater detail in a later chapter, but at this stage, it is important to note how these differences influence the professional relationship. For example, the YOS are not responsible for removing a child from their family home nor are they the service with the power to give permission for reunification. Hence, the youth offending relationship is free of the responsibility for the decisions regarding placement and the birth family. Similarly, the YOS do not provide money or allowances, so the boundaries of the work and the working relationship are much clearer. As the following quotation highlights, these boundaries change the dynamics of the professional relationship:

I think with youth offending services, I think they know that we are not a money giving service, we are not an accommodation giving service... But they know that they are here because of the offence that they committed. I think attitudes are a bit more different because they are more, they know that if they don't comply, they will get breached. – Participant 10

Practitioners accounts also positioned the YOS as delivering a service that has been directed by the courts. In doing so they are not constructed as being responsible for making the decision that the young person must attend, which as with previous research (Umamaheswar, 2012), assisted them in building relationships:

We are not responsible all the time for those decisions that are likely to be contentious in terms of where they are going to be living, what they are allowed to do... well a part of their order, we are sometimes... but, we can defer a bit more obviously to the criminal justice system and say, look we are delivering this, this is the court's direction that you have to do this. – Participant 8

Removing a child from their birth family is also a decision of a court but is commonly seen as resulting from an intervention by the social worker and social service. As the above quotation indicates, this is different for the YOT worker. As the YOS are not positioned as having responsibility in initial court decisions, the relationship is not impacted, as it may be with social services:

I have got two other females on my case load at the moment and neither of them engage with their social workers. They, you know, they come to their YOT appointment possibly because they have to because if they don't they will end up in breach. But then at least when they are here, it opens more doors to sort of try and build those, really break down those barriers, whereas both of them just don't answer the front door to their social workers. And a lot of their communication is done thorough notes through the door and text messages and things, they don't actually meet them face-to-face. So, although the stakes are higher really with the YOT worker because if you don't come, you might end up back in court, but while they are here you have got that opportunity to maybe see them face-to-face. –

Participant 20

As illustrated above, the boundaries set out within the criminal order which require young people to attend appointments can be a helpful first step in building an effective relationship. This space provides practitioners with the opportunity to engage young people in face-to-face contact. However, the criminal orders cannot require a young person to build a positive working relationship with their youth offending officer. Rather, young people are just required to attend appointments. Hence, how the youth offending officer approaches the task of engaging young women in particular was said to require both certain key skills and an understanding of each young woman's experiences and needs.

#### **Working with previous experiences of rejection**

Key to engagement for practitioners was understanding that female offenders from care presented to the YOS with previous experiences of rejection. This finding is also supported in the literature (See Cenkovich et al. 2008; Lanctot and LeBlanc, 2002; Arunll and Eagle, 2009; Sharpe, 2012; Liddle and Solanki, 2002, Boswell, 1996;

Taylor, 2006). This rejection was at least two-fold. Being in care and an offender meant that they were likely to have experienced rejection from their birth family, which in many cases was ongoing and something that needed to be managed within the professional relationship (discussed in later chapter in further detail). Additionally, rejection by services and other professionals was also commonly experienced by female offenders from care. This experience of rejection may be the result of multiple placement moves, multiple changes in social workers or not feeling heard by the courts. For YOT practitioners they felt that this meant that they started out in engaging female offenders from care on 'the back foot':

Courts have told them you have got to come to youth offending, so you kind of start off on a back foot because it's sort of like you know you have been ordered by the court to come to the YOT. And sometimes, if for example maybe there is a grudge between the victim and the young person and they still may be denying part of the offence but they still have to come to us because they have been found guilty...There can be difficult sort of barriers to get over before you even start doing work with someone. – Participant 17

This quotation illustrates how having many different professionals in and out of a young person's life can impact on engagement and relationship building. It also speaks to the mandated nature of the young person's involvement with the service and how not feeling that the sentence fairly reflected the crime could influence engagement. As highlighted by Larsson (2014), female offenders are also often victims of crime and may perceive themselves as a victim within the circumstances of the offence. Therefore, it could be argued that this sense of injustice may be more likely to influence relationship building specifically with female offenders. However, the young person is still mandated to attend appointments, which provides the practitioner with face-to-face contact. So, despite starting on the 'back foot' practitioners still have space to work through these barriers.

Additionally, practitioners report that because of previous experiences of rejection young women can have difficulty trusting professionals. The importance of building a trusting relationship is also consistent with research which includes the narratives of children in care and care leavers (see Schofield et al. 2014; Taylor, 2006; Day,

2017). As indicated below, this can be a further barrier that YOT workers need to overcome:

Not a lot of them trust anyone. Really, they don't trust anybody, for whatever reason that is, whether it's they've been known to social care for a long time and have been let down, or their past experience within families, it's hard to have a stranger telling you what you think needs to change really. – Participant 3

Practitioners found that, as a 'stranger', earning young women's trust takes time and they may resist engaging with them until this trust is built (see Shaw, 2012).

### Working with initial resistance

It was important for practitioners to understand how previous experiences of rejection and relationship difficulties with services, professionals and birth families influence the behaviour of female offenders from care and their reluctance to trust and engage. As a result, YOT workers reported needing to manage this within their practice. For example, accounts suggest that practitioners would often spend the first few weeks or months in sessions not doing any 'traditional work' with the young person, but rather just being present with them. This is highlighted in the following two quotations:

The first initial bit was trying to get her to speak to me [laughs]. Which took a couple of weeks. Because obviously she'd been through a couple of... she hated the social worker with a passion. Social worker was a really nice lady, it was just, you know she held her personally responsible for having to move care homes every time rather than seeing it was her behaviour that led to, led up to those placement breakdowns. So, she was very distrusting of professionals...So initially we just sat and we did jigsaw puzzles and we didn't speak about offending or anything else we just sat there in silence for about 3 sessions and then eventually I asked her a few things about home and she showed me on google earth where she came from and her road and her street and that got her talking about her life and we kind of went from there but it took a long time to build up. – Participant 5

The first point, the first 18 months that we had erm... that was really hard work. And she wouldn't really engage with anything or any kind of format. There was no kind of getting around that and I think that was just to do with her own resistance to engaging and not wanting to open herself up to another professional. - Participant 2

As referred to above, this process was time consuming. Simultaneously however, it is constructed as an essential process to go through in order to create an environment where the young woman could learn to trust the practitioner. Once the trust is there this allows space for the more traditional work, or 'interventions', to be completed.

As illustrated below, the trust building process could not be forced and it needed to go at the girls' pace:

It can be a really slow process and not an easy thing for them to do, so you can't rush that, you have to do it at their pace and on their terms as well. - Participant 20

This gradual process of getting past initial resistance at the pace of the young women appears to contradict traditional ideas around work in youth offending. Because of the mandated nature of the work, engagement is often considered the responsibility of the offenders themselves. They are mandated by the courts to attend the youth offending services and complete certain 'behaviour change work'. Therefore, non-engagement can be constructed as lack of motivated to change and in breach of the conditions of their criminal order. Yet in the accounts given by practitioners, the resistance to engaging in youth offending work is almost expected from female offenders and engaging them was most certainly constructed as the responsibility of the worker themselves. No participant described the resistance to engage as lack of motivation to change. Rather this resistance is described as self-protection and a justifiable response to experiences in the girls' background. For example, in the quotation below initial resistance was conceptualised as a response to the young woman's previous experiences of rejection and linked to issues with trust:

The way she presented to us at first was... it was, she was quite resistant to everything, so everything we put in place she was quite resistant to and we understood it that she is testing us to see if we were, would we still be there. I think she has got a lot of history of rejection. – Participant 8

In addition, the practitioners' ability to reflect on the working relationship in retrospect allowed them to construct resistance as something that could be overcome using their professional skill set. Accounts highlight that with time and patience practitioners could build a sense of trust which became the foundation of the working relationship. Once trust was built, the relationship was described as very strong:

I think, from my experience, and I have had some really difficult younger women I've worked with, and I think that the relationship has taken longer to build than with a male, but I think you can build really good relationships. – Participant 12

Furthermore, when working with girls in care the relationship was described by practitioners as foundational to be able to complete 'effective' work:

I find if you can establish a good relationship with girls and if you have them for a long period of time you can end up doing really effective pieces of work with them. – Participant 13

As indicated above, the impact of time was reflected on as key to relationship building with female offenders. Effective relationships are established over a period of time and therefore can be limited by shorter orders.

### The importance of time

Practitioners report that the more frequent or extended the contact is between themselves and the young women, the more likely they are to build trust in their professional relationship. This is evidenced by accounts which suggest that girls on longer orders or girls considered more at risk and therefore given more intense orders, provide practitioners with the 'luxury' of time. Hence, time was considered essential to building effective relationships and practitioners struggle to work out how to build these same relationships with girls on shorter orders:



Taking time... it is a bit of a luxury because it is a 12-month order, to take time to build the relationship first. If she had a 3-month order I wouldn't have had that luxury and then you are much more focused on trying to get the work done, and tick those boxes. But because I know that it is a 12 month order I have had time to really slow it down and take slow steps I think, which really helps because had I charged straight in there and tried to get on with some of the work I just don't think, I don't think she would have engaged at all. – Participant 20

Being able to take time in building these relationships at a slower pace was described as being particularly necessary for work with girls in care:

I think you need more time than sometimes you get because we are restricted by the length of their order...But I think it takes more time with young females than it does with a male. I don't know what it is, it is just my experience. - Participant 12

Hence, the initial stages of building a relationship with female offenders from care can often be fraught with frustration as the process cannot be forced yet is bound by a timeframe dictated by the court. This frustration is also described as often being something that is specific to working with female offenders and may assist in giving insight into the professional discourse that 'female offenders are harder to work with', bringing into question if it is the female offenders themselves who are harder to work with or the inflexibility of the system around the female offender. Never the less, it is constructed in accounts as a journey for the practitioner and a test of their patience and professional skill set.

#### **The skills of listening, being honest and giving choice**

Building trust is a concept that is key to relationship based practice (Ruch et al. 2010). However, according to accounts in this study, it is also considered key to criminal justice work. The focus on the individual's motivation to change and the tasks prescribed by the courts to help achieve this do not necessarily include a process of interaction whereby the offender must learn to trust their worker and the service they have been mandated to attend. However, the practitioners in this

research describe building trust with female offenders from care as the foundation of these relationships and essential to complete tasks referred to by the court. Once again practitioners considered the impact of previous experiences of rejection and therefore positioned themselves as having to prove to the young women that they too will not end up rejecting them. In order to achieve this, workers described the importance of listening and being honest. Additionally, practitioners described that giving the young women some choice and control over the sessions can also assist in building the relationship. The skills of listening, being honest and giving choice within sessions complement each other in allowing the young women to be heard and feel valued, which can further assist in developing trust.

Practitioners' accounts suggested that female offenders from care may have experienced limited power and choice in their lives. Having someone listen to their wants and needs was constructed as empowering. This is underlined by the importance of being honest, genuine and sincere, which speak to a recognition that these young people may have been let down by services in the past:

I think the girls in particular can smell a rat from a mile off. You have got to be genuine you have got to be sincere and you have got to really listen and show that you are listening. I think that is probably the most important. –

Participant 6

Being reliable and following through on offers of help was also constructed as gaining trust in the relationship:

Just being open, not make promises you can't keep or do anything about. If they go back to court and they want to know what will happen, well I might not be able to tell them what's going to happen. I might be able to tell them what I think might happen, but making sure that they understand that that's my opinion, that might not happen. I suppose the issue is honesty. –

Participant 3

Building on listening and being honest, practitioners' accounts highlighted the importance of giving girls some control over the sessions. This demonstrates to girls that they are listened to and also empowers them by giving them a sense of agency

and letting them set some of the boundaries, such as how long the session will be, where they will be held or what youth offending work they will focus on.

Empowering female offenders with a sense of agency is important given that there are not many areas of these young people's lives where they have much control. Therefore, having some choice within YOT sessions also assists in engaging them and helps build trust. However, this did mean that practitioners were required to be flexible in how they approached sessions and completed 'work' with the girls:

I'd take three pieces of work with me and I'd get Katie to pick which one we were going to do. Because then that gave her an element of control in it, rather than say if I turned up today and said 'Morning Katie, today we are going to do victim work' she would just turn around and tell me where to go. Whereas if I turned up and I said, 'Right ok, these are our three choices we've got victim work, thinking and behaviour work or whatever which one do you want to do' she would then pick and she'd get on with it. –

Participant 5

Being flexible to some degree about time was also part of working in a negotiated partnership:

Even the one girl I finished with recently, she'd always give me a time when she'd come in and she went 'I'm going to be gone in half an hour' and I'm like OK. She just feels like she needed control of the situation. She'd be like I'm going to be gone by half past and I'd be like alright then, and we'd sit and talk and she'd always be there longer than half past, until she remembered that she said that at the beginning and then she'd be like right I'm going now and that'd be it, she'd be off. But that's just her way of trying to control the situation. – Participant 3

In summary, this section has suggested that what practitioners describe as important when engaging female offenders from care is an understanding that the girls will come with experiences of rejection and that this will inform how they respond to services, such as initially being resistant. Practitioners' accounts make sense of this resistance as a justifiable response to the girls' history. They also

report that getting through this resistance and the girls being able to trust their YOT worker can take time, which can be difficult when working with female offenders on short orders. Practitioners accounts illustrate that building this trust will involve listening and being honest and giving the girls as much control and agency over the sessions as they can.

## II. Maintaining Relationships

I think for us we needed to be consistent and firm and reliable in order to meet her needs arising from rejection. – Participant 9

Once female offenders are engaging with their youth offending worker and initial trust has been built into the relationship, practitioners then are faced with maintaining the relationship. This section will examine what practitioners consider important in maintaining the professional relationship and is broken down into five subsections. The first subsection considers the significance of providing the young woman with a consistent worker. The second subsection examines how the relationship can be protected if the conditions of the criminal order are breached. The third subsection explores the importance of ‘never giving up’ and how practitioners link this to the young person’s history. The fourth subsection considers how practitioner manage anger and strong emotions that the young women may express and the final subsection considered how practitioners navigate the trauma histories of the young women in the relationship.

### Consistency of worker

With the aim of not repeating previous experiences of rejection by services, practitioners’ accounts emphasised the importance of ‘sticking with a case’. Having a consistent worker was important in the initial engagement stage, but it became vital in maintaining the relationship:

I think consistency of worker was the main thing. And I think, I don’t really know, to be honest, I just think that was the main thing for her. Whether that was me or whether that had been another worker, I think as long as she’d have had that one person that she knew that she could go to, that they were

going to be there regardless of if she missed an appointment or was breached, then she would carry on kind of engaging at that level. – Participant 2

She's had lots of changes of social workers, I think she's got the rejection from her mum, so we were really quite clear from the beginning that she was just going to be...erm we were going to respond with never going to change her worker. – Participant 9

This importance of having a consistent worker was reported by multiple practitioners throughout the study and is supported by previous research (see Taylor, 2006; Sharpe, 2012). In some accounts the decision to keep the same worker was described as an autonomous choice made by the individual practitioner (and supported by supervisors/managers). In these cases, practitioners spoke about holding on to young people, even when they were moved out of area, and having a consistent worker was described as key to being able to sustain trust and allow the young person to feel secure enough to do the 'work'. The following is an example of individual worker discretion in holding onto a case:

I had a conversation with my manager at the time and felt quite strongly that I needed to remain as her case manager because I have been the constant erm and you know, that was agreed. So, I am still her case manager and I think that in a sense pays dividends as well. It's that continuity isn't it, and that consistency. – Participant 14

As indicated, this process involves discussing this decision with management. And the inclusion of managerial support validates the decision.

Holding on to cases was discussed in some practitioners' accounts as being important to the worker themselves and indicates a personal and professional investment in the relationship:

Because of some of the underlying issues with her I was only really comfortable if I was the only one seeing her. I didn't really want to give her to one of my colleagues to see without preparing her for it and all that kind of stuff, so it meant that I could only really see her. – Participant 13

In addition to this, other accounts suggest that keeping the worker consistent was not an individual worker's decision, but rather was in accordance with YOS policy:

Basically what it is, in our YOT... basically, what we do is keep the cases. So, when a young person is picked up in prevention and we work with them, we continue working with them until they go through the service. They are not, we have consistency in worker and also the family will also have consistency of worker as well. – Participant 11

Although described as YOS policy, this practice was highlighted as being particularly significant to work with female offenders from care. This reflects practitioners' construction of female offenders as having more invested in the working relationship and suggests that because of previous experiences of rejection, having a consistent worker is especially important when working with them. Offering these young women a stable, consistent relationship with a professional was emphasised as important not only for the working relationship but also for the development of the young person themselves.

It was important for continuity with Karen because of the moving around so much to kind of keep that one particular relationship going. That is one of the things we obviously do with all our young people but particularly it's different with girls, the importance of that, of keeping that continuity, and in particular any LAC child anyway because they have so many different professionals come in. – Participant 18

However, this policy did not appear to be consistent across all teams and local authorities, as some practitioners discussed case examples which were referred into their area from the 'home YOT'. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the home YOT did not follow the same practice principle of maintaining a consistent worker. In addition, some practitioners cited examples of young offenders being moved out of area and that this became a hindrance to being able to build a positive working relationship with them. In these cases, keeping the same worker was not seen as an option the practitioner had control over.

### The role of breaching and protecting the relationship

If a young person commits further offences during the course of their order, then this was a breach of the conditions of the order and they would be returned to court. It is then up to the court to decide the consequences of this breach. However, they may be advised by the youth offending officer. In relation to adhering to certain conditions of the order, such as attendance at sessions with the YOS, workers were able to exercise some discretion in breaching young people. In these cases, many practitioners discussed trying to avoid breaching orders where possible, particularly when welfare needs were evident. In such instances, breaching was constructed as something that was negative and a last resort as practitioners did not want to further criminalise young people. This was a delicate balance for youth offending workers to contend with. On the one hand the workers may have empathy for the young person and not want to breach them, but if the decision was out of their hands because of significant lack of attendance which made breaching inevitable, they then felt a responsibility to try and explain to the court the impact of their welfare concerns:

I try not to breach them to be honest, but that's probably just me, particularly if I know they've got welfare issues, and I suppose that's a debate between welfare and like punishment isn't it really, that fine line. Because I know at they are going through. I know they are finding it hard. Then, if they are kind of... and they will push boundaries and not turn up to anything, then we have to breach them, we have to send them back to court and explain to the court that they are not complying with the order... But then having that fine line of explaining, having an understanding of why they have breached their order, because they might be homeless or because they don't want to go back to their placement because of whatever reasons and if they don't go back to their placement they are not going to get reminded of their appointment with youth offending team, you know, it's explaining all those kinds of things. Any anniversaries they might have, the time that they were taken into care or family member died or you know taking all that into consideration...it's a lot, it's hard and to explain that to the court for

them to consider that actually they are trying, it's just external circumstances aren't helping. – Participant 3

This highlights how this worker values not breaching young people, particularly when there are welfare issues present. However, this focus on welfare and the ethics of breaching orders can depend on the individual practitioner. As indicated in the above account, the decision to breach an order was constructed as being down to personal values of the YOT practitioners. For example, 'It's probably just me' suggests a perception that other YOT workers might be more punitive in their approach. This welfare-punishment binary will be discussed further in a later chapter but at this stage, it is important to note that it is evident for an individual worker - and possibly at case level - and can influence the decision to breach young people.

The following quotation illustrates a case where the practitioner saw themselves and the YOS as being more focused on welfare and social care were perceived as not being considerate of the welfare needs of a female offender in care on bail, but rather were punitive in their response:

It's like they found her guilty before she was even tried basically...you know in this country we're not guilty until found guilty, are we?! And she was acquitted in the end, but I think the social worker had that view of this is what she's here for, very authoritarian not understanding. In the end she breached her bail and considering what she was going through she was doing really, really well. I think it was just like she'd left her tag a little bit and it was nothing too extreme, she just had a tantrum and stormed out the house, it wasn't that... and she, the top manager she wanted her remanded and it was like, what!! And she ended up being remanded! – Participant 1

This illustrates how practitioners often constructed the work they were doing as caring and welfare focused, contrasted in particular with children's services staff.

On the other hand, in some cases of high vulnerability, breaching orders was constructed as a protective tool that practitioners could use when they considered the young woman to be 'at risk'. This meant that the young woman was brought back to court and the intensity of contact could be increased with the intention of



mitigating risk. In accounts where breaching was used as a protective tool, the risk the young women were in was generally not described as risk of further offending, but rather risk to themselves and was linked directly to their vulnerability. In these cases, the concern with further 'criminalising' the female offender was outweighed by her vulnerability. However, practitioners did not make this decision lightly and it did create a moral conflict for some, due to their limited choices.

We were quite worried about her...she'd disappear for like 3 weeks, that was the longest that she had disappeared. She came back, she had said that she was being held against her will but she was known to proposition boys or men, basically at her group home that she was in, and so they were kind of concerned because they thought that she'd bring in men off the street and put the other girls at risk in the house. And so, we had to keep trying to find her a safer place where she wouldn't be as vulnerable to the guys. And so there really wasn't much offending behaviour work going on, because we were so busy trying to safeguard her from CSE and the violence from the guys and girls actually and so she finally she committed another offence which was when she stole some makeup and things like that, and for her own safety and I felt horrible about doing it, but I had to take her to the court, we breached her, took her back to court and she wound up in custody and I thought that was kind of crap because, because we couldn't keep her safe within the community. - Participant 15

As evident above, some practitioners described frustration as they felt that breaching orders were not ideal, but sometimes it was the only option that remained to them, especially when the care system could not find a 'safer place'. The safety of the young person was paramount, and breaching was constructed as a tool to achieve this, even though custody was the result.

Although most practitioners struggled with this, some regarded the breaching process more positively, as indicated by the following practitioner. Again, this difference reflects how personal values can influence the breaching process, with control seen by some as a necessary part of a caring relationship:

When this young person stopped engaging, I think you know disengaging when you know the risks and you know they are vulnerable but there is nothing you can do about it, and it is that kind of, is justice punitive or welfare? But actually it's a thin balance where, like for example for my young person we breached her. We put her on tag and that could be seen as punitive but at the end of the day that was such a protective factor for her. For me in some cases, I would love to say you know what, put them on tag for 3 months, because I know they would adhere to that and we would have some control and we would know where they are and that they are safe. – Participant 11

Hence, breaching as a protective tool can also ease practitioners' anxiety by providing sanctions that can increase the young person's physical safety. This gives the practitioners 'more control' but is described as reflecting their concern within the professional relationship. However, it does raise questions around the justification of the restriction of liberties.

When taking a girl back to court was unavoidable, practitioners discussed how this process did not necessarily damage the trust that they had built. In fact, practitioners' accounts report that in particular, some female offenders from care appreciated having these boundaries and an awareness of the consequences of their actions. Practitioners felt that these boundaries were something that had been either missing or inconsistent in some of these girls' lives. For example, they spoke about having no boundaries within birth families, which may be internalised as not being cared for, or experiences of inconsistent boundaries within residential care homes, which may have been experienced as uncaring and unjust. Therefore, if the boundaries of the youth offending service were consistent this showed female offenders in care that they were cared for and boundaries were considered fair and predictable:

I think the boundaries of YOT, she quite liked them, she knew what she could do and that there would be a consequence if she didn't do it. And I think that had been lacking in her life before that, in terms of her family life

and things she just sort of did what she wanted and there was never any consequence for it. – Participant 2

These clear boundaries were described as helping with maintaining relationships. Pearce (2016) also found that consistent boundaries are important when working with trauma exposed young people. They also meant that the YOT worker was not seen as being responsible for making the decision to breach the order, and therefore by sticking to the boundaries of the legal system the relationship would not be negatively impacted.

### Never giving up

When young people breached their orders, continuing to work with them allowed trust to be sustained within the relationship and demonstrated to young offenders that even if they reoffended the worker would not give up on them. In doing so practitioners felt this counteracted previous experience of rejection, which was considered especially significant to those who had experienced multiple placement moves for poor behaviour. Hence, the YOT worker demonstrated to the young person that even if they did commit further offences, the worker would not walk away or pass them on to a colleague. This is similar to the rationale given for the importance practitioners placed on providing a consistent worker:

She'd been so used to people giving up on her in terms of foster placements breaking down, the family not wanting her there, you know any relationship that she'd built, even within her friendships never really lasted very long. So, just too always be that person, constantly like either ringing her up or seeing her for appointments, I think it was that that made the difference. And had she ended up working with, you know a different person every time she moved to a different placement I don't think we'd have got as far with her as we did. – Participant 2

This consistency of worker and the availability of the relationship during changes of care placements, regardless of the girls' behaviour was thought to be particularly valuable:

I think also enabling her to feel that actually she wasn't being judged that you know we were taking everything into consideration and yep, she might have a blip and she might have another offence and we would go to court and you know, but her relationship would carry on as it was before, you know, that we treated her fairly. – Participant 4

In addition to the benefits of holding onto cases as a sign of commitment, practitioners reported often going above and beyond what may be considered as a traditional youth offending practice. The decision to do this was again, reported as being left to the discretion of the individual worker. The examples given often placed the youth offending worker in an advocacy role. Their actions were then constructed as being in the best interest of the young woman and 'picking up the slack' where other services had let them down. Workers had a sense that adequate support was not being provided by other services involved and therefore because of the strong relationship the YOT worker had built with the girls, they would individually go beyond the requirements of their role and provide this extra support:

When I dropped her off to the semi-independent unit there was nothing in there and I was really fuming with social care because if you say you're going, this is the accommodation then make sure she had got something... there was nothing! Luckily there was a market around the corner so I used my own money in the pound shop and got her all the basics she would need, food and stuff like that for the weekend. And so, like when I was leaving her, I said to her I am going to have to leave you now and I will try and contact the unit, just to make sure you are alright over the weekend and then I will come see you on Monday. – Participant 16

Here again, the YOT worker positions herself as more caring and reliable than social services staff. The above extract also illustrates the emotional labour the YOT worker manages in this work, feeling frustrated on behalf of the young person, but also anxious about her. This is further evidence of the professional and personal investment that practitioners describe having in the relationships they build with young offenders.

Advocating on behalf of 'their' young person, going the extra mile, also demonstrated to the young person that they are cared for. The following quotation is another example of this in context of a young person who had completed her order:

I'd seen her at court a couple of times and she'd come over and said 'I've been trying to get hold of probation and no one ever rings me back and I'm worried that I'm going to be in breach', so I like, even since April I've continued to send emails to them just to say I've seen Cheryl this is the situation at the moment. But as far as I'm aware I don't think she's been seen by probation since she was transferred over to them. And you know that's not through any fault of her own. – Participant 2

Providing this extra support beyond the order raised questions when young offenders were transferred to adult services such as probation. In these instances, workers reported how this transfer to the adult criminal justice service can be a shock for young offenders as they may have become accustomed to a service such as YOS, which is flexible to their circumstances. Adult services on the other hand do not have the time nor capacity to do things such as actively remind young people of their appointments and this may indeed be against their policy. Once a young person turns 18, they are transferred to probation and they are considered responsible for themselves. As a result, in a context perceived as less effective and more punitive, practitioners report they can 'fall down' quickly.

I think the problem is, is that because we are working with children effectively, and although we are an enforcement agency we are looking at welfare and the holistic side of it and I think some really struggle with the punitive side of probation... So they find it a little bit of a shock that they won't take their excuses or let them off if they aren't on time or you know. We are a little bit more accepting - if they don't come in perhaps they can come in tomorrow to make up for it. Whereas probation are a bit more punitive and I think they find that a shock and I do think quite a lot of them breach quite early on when they get transferred to probation because they

find it difficult and they don't get the help and support that we kind of provide. - Participant 12

It is important to note that in this sample the transfer to probation was not a common experience in work with female offenders in care. Hence, this may not be an issue practitioners considered when reflecting on their practice. However, it does raise questions about how those who are transferred to probation are disadvantaged. When this is coupled with the experience of children who are simultaneously leaving care, this period can be seen as very difficult for young people and a time that often lacks support. As discussed in the literature review, because a child turns the age that society has constructed to mean 'adult', does not necessarily mean that emotional development aligns with this. This is especially significant when children have experienced complex trauma. Unlike the adult criminal justice system, the youth offending services are seen as more considerate of this within practice.

Practitioners reported having to manage young people's complex emotions over time and within the relationships they had built with them. This was reported as challenging at times and also more complex when working with female offenders from care. In maintaining relationships youth offending workers reported having to make sense of dealing with both young people's anger and their difficult backgrounds and sensitivities.

#### **Managing anger and strong emotions within the relationship**

Practitioners' accounts construct their relationships as being a safe place for female offenders to express their frustration and emotions. That is, emotional outbursts were considered positive, as they were reflective of how comfortable the young person felt within the boundaries of the professional relationship. Practitioners did not consider these outbursts as genuine threats, nor did they consider them personal. Rather, they saw a female offender who was struggling with regulating her emotions. They also reported that by not treating these outbursts as a genuine threat the situation did not escalate and therefore once the young person had calmed down there was space to apologise and the working relationship was not

risked. This also provided room for a discussion with the young person around emotional regulation:

If I got upset every time some young person threatened me or got aggressive with me I couldn't do my job. I think it's recognising what is a real threat and what is somebody struggling to express themselves, or get themselves out of a situation they find difficult talking about. So, if you went to talk about family with Katie she would get aggressive or threatened to get aggressive. It wasn't that she was actually going to hit me, it was her way of saying 'I don't like talking about this'. But I think that comes with building up a relationship with people and knowing what difficult subjects for them are and what easy subjects to talk about are. - Participant 5

Hence, it is the quality of the relationship that allows the worker to recognise the difference between a threat and problematic emotional regulation. That is, accounts do not suggest that YOT workers should have to put up with abusive or threatening behaviour, but rather the quality of the relationship will protect a worker, as they will be able to judge what is a genuine threat and what is not. Simultaneously, according to practitioners' accounts it is the quality of the relationship that provides the workers an opportunity to challenge poor behaviour and for these challenges to be taken on board by the young person. This relationship also allows space for anger to be expressed and managed and therefore becomes a gateway to completing the court mandated youth offending work. Without the relationship, trying to complete this work would be much more difficult:

She had had both myself and the social worker who was consistent workers for you know, almost 4 years. That was excellent in terms of building up relationships to the point where we were able to... she'd feel comfortable enough to scream and shout at us but then apologise afterwards and say 'I'm just really upset' or 'I'm angry' or be able to verbalise her emotions and what she was thinking and feeling but also to be able to trust us with stuff and enable us or allow us to challenge her as well and it... you know, even if she wouldn't necessarily accept it on the day, quite often what both myself

and the social worker would experience is that you know, when we went to see her the following week she would, she would say actually I've been thinking about what happened last week. - Participant 4

There were seen to be wider benefits of helping young women to find strategies to regulate their anger and strong emotions, as it interacted with their growing capacity to trust workers and therefore accept challenges to their behaviour.

### **Managing 'sensitive spots'**

As previously discussed, one key element considered essential when engaging female offenders in the professional relationship was being aware of the impact previous experiences of rejection on their ability to trust (see Smith and McAra, 2004; Batchelor, 2005; Sharpe, 2012; Arnall and Eagle, 2009; Kolvin et al. 1988; Auty et al. 2017; McAra and McVie, 2016). Having this understanding and background knowledge was also considered important in maintaining relationships. Having an awareness of previous experiences of rejection and trauma allowed practitioners to avoid triggering associated feelings in the young person. In practice this was managed by again giving girls a choice in what to focus sessions on and being aware of recent events that may have been difficult for them, such as recent contact with their birth family. This meant that practitioners needed to again be flexible in their session planning and sometimes meant that the young person could be unpredictable:

Sometimes she would walk out or terminate. Generally speaking, if you were going to hit a sensitive spot, she didn't even want to go there, do you know what I mean? So, if it was generic stuff she would be alright and she would have an opinion. If you just got that little bit too close, that is when the shutters come down. – Participant 18

Avoiding 'sensitive spots' was often described as being managed via communication with other services involved. For example, having knowledge of recent events prior to the session became critical information to have and highlighted the importance of communication with the care team staff. This will be discussed in a later chapter, but for this section it is important to note that practitioners actively sought



information in order to avoid discussing topics which were deemed difficult at that time for the young woman and might jeopardise the work and the relationship:

It meant that when I went to see her I already knew what the last couple of days had been like, what kind of mood that she might be in and I could then plan my work so that I wasn't going to do anything that aggravated her. -

Participant 5

In addition, a common account expressed by practitioners was that girls wanted to talk more than boys did, so that practitioners required greater knowledge of female offenders' 'sensitive spots'. That is, 'talking' as opposed to doing generic worksheets for example, involved more risk of accidentally touching on a 'sensitive' topic. Furthermore, talking was considered an intervention in and of itself. This highlighted the sense of a further difference in practice between male and female offenders:

I think girls, some of the girls or whatever are like talkers. They'd rather just sit and talk about things and talk things out than maybe some of the boys. They might want to just sit and do, just generally have a chat about stuff and they might feel better doing that than, you know doing anything else, you know than having a plan of what we are going to do. They might just want to sit and have a chat and you probably get more out of that than actually doing anything else. – Participant 3

To summarise, accounts suggest that having a consistent worker is key to maintaining relationships with female offenders from care. Additionally, having boundaries set by the wider legal system meant that the youth offending officer was less likely to be held personally responsible for things like breaching. Therefore, the relationship was less at risk. Moreover, continuing to work with the young women when their orders were breached reinforced trust in the relationship and mitigated feelings of rejection. Practitioners also described these relationships becoming places where female offenders in care were able to express their frustrations and could accept challenges from their YOT worker. This further supports the point that the relationship becomes a gateway to being able to

effectively complete more traditional youth offending work with girls in care. However, once orders were complete then the professional relationships needed to come to an end. The following section will examine how practitioners manage ending relationships with female offenders from care.

### III. Ending Relationships: Keeping the Door Open?

I think if a young person is still asking for that support and they can identify why, it would be a real shame that just because the order ends that we've got to stop. – Participant 5

This final section explores how practitioners feel about the ethical dilemma ending relationships with female offenders with extensive experiences of rejection presents to them. It is broken down into three subsections. The first subsections consider the role of 'attachment' in the professional relationship. The second subsection examines how practitioners manage ending the relationship and the third subsection explores the role of ongoing support post the criminal order.

#### The question of 'attachment'

Workers were aware that the behaviour of some female offenders might indicate fear of loss, such as being overly dependent on the worker or reoffending when the order is near completion. In their accounts, this is often described using the concept of attachment (see also Schofield et al. 2014). As discussed earlier in this chapter, frequency of contact and longer orders assisted YOT professionals in building relationships with female offenders from care. Although frequency of contact assists in building relationships, it can be difficult to manage when ending relationships. This is highlighted below, which illustrates that in this case suggesting reducing frequency of contact as the order progressed caused anxiety for this young person:

I said to her last week, she had a review I said look yeah you can go from weekly to fortnightly now; No, I don't want to; Ok but you've done really well; Yeah I know but I'm used to seeing you every week and I want to keep it that way. – Participant 5

The paradox here is that the more the girl improves her behaviour, the more likely the supportive contact will be reduced. Practitioners closely considered the ethics of this process and the potential negative impact this could have on female offenders.

Practitioners grappled with being proud of building good relationships and supporting the young person to trust them as a professional, but then having to manage ending the relationship. This is indicated in the following two quotations:

I did, in supervision raise those concerns that she may be over attached in the relationship that she had with me and that she might struggle to end that, which was the reason we were offering the voluntary appointments and I wonder now whether her cancelling those appointments and then reoffending, whether that had an impact on her reoffending. I think that she, when she finds somebody that she trusts, she finds it very hard to let go of that person. So, I don't, I don't think she would have been, she wouldn't have done the work if that relationship wasn't there, but I am not sure that she was able to let go of that really. And I am not sure that that is a positive for her. – Participant 10

I found it really difficult to encourage her to let go. She became really, really attached to me. She would, you know try and cuddle me on site. If ever she was in any trouble she'd only want me to go to her. She became very, very dependent and therefore was quite hard to let go.... she didn't want to let go because I was someone that she could trust and someone that is constant, exactly what we were trying to work to build. We built that and almost it's a bit unfair really you build up this, you build a good relationship with someone and then only to say actually that's enough now. – Participant 9

The example above describes the relationship between this female offender and YOT worker using parent-child language, as a trusted secure base. This use of language such as 'cuddle' begins to blur the personal/professional boundary and highlights the emotional labour within the role.

## Managing endings and minimising harm

In order to manage endings and create as few feelings of rejection as possible, practitioners discussed three different techniques which they employed in their practice; 1) being clear about the finite nature of the relationship with the young person and beginning exit planning early 2) completing joint work with other professionals involved in the young person's care team and 3) encouraging and supporting young people to engage with community based services.

Firstly, practitioners' accounts discussed including exit planning early in the professional relationship and, like the importance of being honest in maintaining the relationship, ensuring that the young person is aware that the relationship will end was considered paramount. Exit planning was also constructed as a professional skill that practitioners could improve on:

Probably be an area of my work I need to develop on in general to be honest, but I think a lot of the time, it is about the finite nature of your relationship...I think with girls kind of starting to end your relationship, I mean with all young people but, starting to end your relationship kind of quite early, not end it but make young people aware, and I think yourself, that your relationship is going to ultimately be finite is one way that I try and counter that. - Participant 19

This suggests that it is good practice to remind both the young person - and themselves - that the relationship has an end and prepare for the ending.

Secondly, joint work with other professionals working with the young person was a tool used by some YOT practitioners to manage this stage. This was achieved by having appointments alongside services such as social care, who at that stage would be in that child's life longer than the criminal justice system. This was constructed by some practitioners as supporting the young person to avoid building an exclusive attachment to the YOT worker and in doing so avoid potential feelings of rejection when their order was complete:

I was really a little bit worried about attachment issues actually, because I was going to be in her life for such a short period of time. And I noticed after

a couple of weeks she was calling me a lot, she was coming into see me even when we didn't have appointments, so I was quite worried about that, just because I wasn't going to be somebody who was going to be stable in her life, like her foster carer and her social worker. So, I started doing a lot of joint work with them, so it wasn't about me kind of in isolation. So, most of the time she saw me she either saw me with her social worker or her foster carer and we kind of did, right at the beginning we started doing exit planning work because yeah, after I kind of saw after 2 weeks erm I didn't want her to get too attached and then feel abandoned when I was like you know, your order is done, you don't need to come back. – Participant 13

The concern about attachment and dependence led some workers to choose to distance themselves and even become less helpful in order to encourage the young person to seek support from the other professionals who were in their lives for longer periods. This is illustrated below:

It was a real encouragement to get her to work with her new worker so I had a joint meeting with her new worker and it was, during the end it was almost literally like, this is her job... it was literally a push onto someone else. I never said to her, never managed to say to her don't phone me. I just stopped being as helpful...I'd just tell her to go and tell someone else. – Participant 9

This approach of discouraging closeness to persuade the young woman to move on seemed to contradict the more honest and transparent relationship building that was described earlier. In addition, many female offenders from care were reported as experiencing frequent changes in their social workers, in care homes and care home staff and therefore pushing them to rely on those workers may actually be counterproductive. Therefore, how joint work is managed in these situations remains unclear.

Finally, some practitioners reported concern about youth offending not being the most appropriate service longer term for the young woman. These practitioners discussed the importance of exit planning to involve supporting young women to

work with groups within the community and divert them away from the criminal justice system:

...it is actually maybe about moving young people on to say other services that are better suited to them rather than the criminal justice system. -

Participant 19

It would be probably be a better idea to engage them with a community like as a part of an exit plan, for them to engage with somebody in the community. The YOS is not always the best place for them and post their order you kind of want to reintegrate them back into the community so that if, you know, you ended up moving tomorrow they still have got somebody who is going to be positive and kind of you know, support them on in their life. They can always pop in and say hello and etcetera and that does happen, but I think the most effective exit strategies would be to find somebody else who can fill that role for them. – Participant 13

### Keeping the door open: YOS as a secure base

Some workers discussed how if the youth offending service keeps the door open it can become a secure base for the young person beyond their court order. Accounts relayed instances of young offenders dropping into the YOS or calling their ex-worker post their order when they needed support voluntarily. This is an interesting role for a youth offending team to play in a young person's life and further highlights the flexibility for some practitioners to go above and beyond the boundaries of their role. It also highlights the longer-term needs of young people and the requirement of ongoing support from trusted adults in their lives:

Quite a few of them we're sort of still keeping, not keep-, they touch base with us every now and again or you know it's good to hear them getting on; this has happened; that's happened and you know I'm going to college; I'm doing this... and I think they like to hear that actually we're pleased for them as well, you know, because when you see someone day in day out for months and months and months it's quite difficult for them not to, you know you're still interested in them obviously you're not working with them

but you still got an interest in someone...part of what the job is I suppose. –

Participant 1

The practitioner in the quotation above constructs offering ongoing support to young offenders and the worker genuinely caring for the young person beyond their order as ‘a part of the job’, which again illuminates a blurring of the personal and professional boundary and indicates an investment on behalf of the practitioner. However, other practitioners’ accounts refer to extra support as being the result of the type of worker they are:

It depends on what type of worker you are. Sometimes they call me and just say guess what I’ve got a job and I’m like yeah that’s brilliant. Or sometimes they phone me up and say I’m struggling can I come and see you, and I always try and leave the door open even if I can’t, there is nothing I can do, but I can sign post them. So, like I say you know what you can do is you can phone these people or I’ll make you a referral for these people. It is about always keeping the door open on people. – Participant 5

With my young people they know that if they really need something, they can always come back to me. – Participant 10

Hence, in some cases showing an interest and concern beyond the mandate of the court is considered the role of the YOS, whereas other practitioners consider providing this support as being down to the individual worker. Practitioners also discuss how young people seeking ongoing support post their order is illustrative of the strength and quality of the relationships they individually and/or the youth offending service build with young people. This is often discussed with professional pride:

We transferred her to our local probation service, which erm, even though since that time I’ve remained in contact with her sort of sporadically, like she’ll ring me or she’ll turn up at the office, so we still have contact at the YOT which is actually a bit of a testament to the relationship that we managed to build with her, while she was with us. – Participant 2

I had a girl come back not too long ago that I hadn't worked with for a couple of years and she came back because she got her cheek pierced and it had got infected and I just thought, you know like, I hadn't had contact with her but I thought that says a lot that like this service is the one place that she could think of to get help. – Participant 8

However, despite being proud of being able to provide this level of support to young people, practitioners struggled with this being provided by a criminal justice service. This tension reflects dilemmas discussed earlier in engaging and maintaining relationships. However, although criminal justice practitioners may not seem the most appropriate service for these young women from care, they may be the best or only option available:

They just want to know that they can call you if they are having a bad day or just come in and see you once. They might want help with an application for things or just to see you really because sometimes we are more consistent than the care staff because sometimes they have quite a high turnover of staff, especially if they are out of county. They might not even know their social workers because they keep changing the allocations. So sometimes, as sad as it sounds, we can be the most consistent thing for the young person.

– Participant 6

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored what youth offending team practitioners consider key to relationship based practice when working with female offenders from care. It has highlighted what is involved in 1) engaging 2) maintaining and 3) ending these relationships and how each stage must take into consideration the impact of previous and ongoing experiences of loss and rejection. Furthermore, this chapter has explored the professional skills practitioners described as essential for working effectively with female offenders from care at each stage of the relationship.

YOT practitioners in this research have proposed that the relationships they build with female offenders in care can become a gateway to being able to complete 'work' required by the court. That is, it is only through having these relationships



that the young person learns to trust the youth offending worker and in turn can complete the learning designed to 'rehabilitate'. Practitioners advised that having this relationship is important when working with all young offenders, but they stress it is vital when working with female offenders in care. Therefore, building, maintaining and ending relationships is a gendered process, linked to care histories and considered an essential part of the job.

However, accounts also suggest that, although relationships are deemed a legitimate part of the work itself how they are managed at each stage can be informed by professional and personal values. For example, how practitioners justify breaching orders was based on how they individually weighed up welfare and risk alongside their own professional anxiety. Additionally, there was evidence of some practitioners offering support above and beyond their professional responsibility. Because they build strong, effective relationships the YOS can become such a stable, reliable and consistent support for some that young women continue to 'touch base' with their workers when their orders are complete. This is an unrecorded, voluntary role that the YOT practitioner may provide. This is constructed by some practitioners as 'a part of the job' and by others as the individual worker's personal choice. What comes through in all these accounts is that practitioners have an emotional investment in these relationships and certain situations can elicit a range of feelings of frustration, anxiety and pride.

Therefore, this raises the question; can and should the YOS offer a secure base (Schofield, et al. 2014) to female offenders from care? Is the criminal justice service the correct service to be providing this type of support, given that they are restricted by aims and timeframes directly related to a young person's offending behaviour? Typically, meeting welfare needs are the remit of social services and youth offending services prioritise desistance from offending. However, the practitioners in this research suggest that some young people are unable to build effective relationships with their LAC social worker. Therefore, the youth offending workers can become the stable, supportive, welfare focused professional in the young person's life. This is evident in the accounts discussed in this chapter.

The following chapter will further examine the risks and needs that female offenders from care bring to youth offending practice, arguing that this is what makes work with this particular group of young offenders distinctive. It will also explore how practitioners construct their roles as youth offending officers in addressing the complex welfare needs of female offenders from care. Finally, it will explore how practitioners manage their own emotions around completing this work.

# Chapter Six: Doing Youth Offending Work

## Introduction

In this study, practitioners suggested that youth offending work with female offenders in the care system involves specific tasks, in particular negotiating meeting welfare needs and vulnerability while managing the risk of further offending. Although it could be argued that combining these areas of practice is common when working with all young offenders, practitioners reported that they experienced the welfare and vulnerability elements as being magnified when working with female offenders from care. Girls in the care system were described by practitioners as extremely vulnerable and therefore more at risk of both being harmed and of engaging in criminal behaviours that are linked to their vulnerability. This view is supported within the literature (Sharpe, 2012; Bachelor, 2005; Schofield et al. 2014). Due to the common experience of working with high levels of perceived vulnerability, practitioners reported that emotional wellbeing, including mental health and anger management, and concerns around risk of sexual exploitation, dominate the work they complete with this group. It is this particular focus that makes youth offending practice with female offenders from care distinct from work with male offenders from care.

Practitioners viewed welfare, vulnerability and offending as being closely intertwined. Conceptualising them as isolated elements of practice was difficult for youth offending officers to reflect on when discussing their work with female offenders from care. This suggests that ideas around welfare, vulnerability and risk exist in close conjunction with this particular group of young offenders.

Furthermore, 'welfare' and 'risk' were discussed by practitioners using multiple meanings. For example, when discussing risk, risk was conceptualised as both risk of offending but also risk to self. Similarly, 'welfare' was discussed as both needs such as housing and educational needs, but also emotional needs including mental

health and the impact of trauma, which was described as particularly significant for girls in care.

For example, the following quotation highlights how some practitioners use the term 'welfare' to describe needs which the state as the corporate parent are responsible for meeting, such as the quality of placement for looked after children:

We find her needs were welfare but if her placement was better suited to her, then she wouldn't be doing all of this. – Participant 9

These practitioners also suggested that when welfare needs were not addressed appropriately by the state this had a direct impact on the criminalisation of looked after children. That is, if the state provided more adequate care then these young people would not be in the criminal justice system. This created feelings of frustration for youth offending officers. Rather than the criminal behaviour of the young person being the primary reason they have entered the criminal justice system, it is seen as the state's inability to meet their needs that have led them there. This can then have an impact on how practitioners experience their role, how they make sense of the appropriateness of the youth offending service and how they approach this work.

Other practitioners discussed 'welfare needs' in relation to individual psychological needs. This construction of welfare is highlighted in the following excerpt:

I mean in terms of criminogenic needs there were virtually none. It was all emotional, well, yeah, almost entirely emotional. – Participant 7

How a practitioner constructs the YOS role in providing emotional support will influence how they experience their practice. For example, if there are perceived to be minimal 'criminogenic needs' then this raises the question on what the role of the youth offending service is for the young person. The answer to this will depend on how the practitioners considered working with welfare needs in relation to offending behaviours.

Some practitioners' accounts proposed that how they considered the role of addressing welfare needs and vulnerability within their practice was individual to

them and dependent on their original training. The following example discusses how personal values and a background in social work training influenced how this practitioner considered meeting welfare needs within a criminal justice paradigm:

Probably because it is my social work background I probably tread on the welfare side more. And that is probably a lot to do with my own personal values about how offending comes about and you know, what causes offending behaviour in young people... but yeah, I would say that my, I think in my professional practice the approach is similar, but I guess maybe, girls demonstrate, maybe girls bring more welfare related issues to the table or are more open about that side of things. – Participant 19

This perspective suggests that the weight of focus on welfare and vulnerability will be different for each practitioner and dependent on their personal values and professional training backgrounds, thus potentially providing varying experiences for girls from care in contact with the YOS.

On the other hand, other accounts discussed meeting welfare needs and managing vulnerability as a core principle of youth offending practice. However, this was discussed as being specific to individual teams and not necessarily across the YOS as a whole:

I think doing the welfare stuff was important and we do try and do that actually in our office. I think we are very good at concentrating on what the needs of the young person are. – Participant 4

How 'welfare' is made sense of and what is considered as the role of addressing welfare needs in youth justice practice is not an agreed position by all YOS practitioners and this chapter will examine this in greater detail. This uncertainty is also consistent with previous research (Schwalbe and Maschi, 2009; Marshall, 2013).

The chapter is broken down into four sections. The first section explores how practitioners experience addressing the welfare needs of female offenders in care. The following two sections explore the two areas that practitioners describe as

dominating their work with female offenders from care. These two areas of practice are emotional wellbeing and mental health and child sexual exploitation. The final section considers how practitioners manage their own anxiety around finding a balance between welfare, vulnerability and risk within a criminal justice framework.

## I. Addressing welfare needs in youth offending practice

All practitioners interviewed in this research believed that the welfare needs and the vulnerability of female offenders in care had a direct impact on their offending. This is consistent with previous research (see Sharpe, 2009; Urwin, 2018; Corrado, et al. 2010; Smith and McAra, 2004; Batchelor, 2005; Sharpe, 2012; Arnull and Eagle, 2009; Kolvin et al. 1988; Cockbain and Brayley; 2012, Pearce, 2016). Accounts also often described a link between trauma and offending. This link was something that was suggested as being overrepresented in work with female offenders in care and is established in the literature (Smith and McAra, 2004; Batchelor, 2005; Sharpe, 2012; Arnull and Eagle, 2009):

Generally, the girls that come to our attention are offending because it's an indicator of welfare needs or some other trauma, some other exploitation that is going on in their life... kind of the ones that get to us are, it's more serious by that stage anyway... where on the surface of things there doesn't really seem to be, you know... It can be a bit more hidden the needs... I guess the main thing is there does seem to be a higher like degree of correspondence between the level of trauma and them coming to YOT. –

Participant 8

However, it is important to note that the research participants found it difficult to recall working with many female offenders who were not known to social care or had not had a history of being involved with social care, so their experience of working with female offenders overwhelmingly included working alongside social care. Additionally, practitioners also discussed how the few female offenders that they had worked with who were not currently involved with social care had also experienced some level of trauma. These girls were considered as being let down

by the state by not being taken into care, or not being taken in care at an earlier age, which suggests they consider being taken into care as being protective. This adds to feelings of frustration towards the state for not protecting children adequately and the youth offending team is considered as at times becoming the safety net for these children:

I think the girls that I have worked with that haven't been in care, I think that they've all been open to social care, although not in a care placement. So, I think they are just at different stages of their process through the care system. So, some of the experiences that I have had are of frustration that these young people are still at home with inadequate parenting. Or they are being removed very late, whereas it is quite a, it's difficult to make changes to those things that are really embedded in them by the time they are 14... I think that is what I have tended to see in girls that aren't in the care system. They still are not receiving the sort of structures and emotional warmth and boundaries that they should be, that they are entitled to be. –

Participant 10

This hyperawareness of complex trauma histories and welfare needs requires youth offending officers to adjust their practice when working with female offenders from care. Welfare needs, including psychological and emotional needs, vulnerability and experiences of trauma were said to be directly related to offending behaviours. This connection was less often described as the focus in youth offending practice with male offenders in care, for whom, interventions such as 'actions and consequences' which focused specifically on the offence rather than previous or ongoing trauma was more applicable. However, with female offenders in care, regardless of whether the offending was considered an indicator of an underlying trauma history or was considered a result of unaddressed welfare needs due to the failure of the state, the correlation between high welfare needs and offending behaviours was described as significant in all accounts of practice with female offenders from care.

Hence, all practitioners' in this research agreed that offending behaviour work could not be completed until welfare needs are addressed. Therefore, if welfare needs were not being met by other services then the YOT practitioner would need

to take on this responsibility. In these cases, being able to complete offending behaviour work was described as being influenced by 'the right time' and included crisis management.

Timing was discussed as having a significant impact on work with female offenders from care. Because of the high welfare needs and vulnerability taking priority, working on offending behaviours was constructed as being subject to the 'right time'. This suggests that in order to complete direct offending behaviour work, female offenders with high unmet welfare needs must be in a space where they feel 'contained' and safe to do so:

Given the circumstances she was in whilst in the community it was more focused on welfare based work and kind of that containment. Because any offending based work wasn't, it wasn't really the right time if that makes sense. And it was more about the welfare and safeguarding and...the wellbeing aspects and vulnerabilities, how they link to her offending. Which is where, rather than focusing on why did you commit this theft, we kind of took it right back. – Participant 14

Although resources may be scarce, working on 'taking it right back' and focussing on keeping the young person 'safe' is identified as a priority. This further illustrates the level of autonomy practitioners have within their roles. Whereas the court may specify what 'work' is expected in order to successfully complete a criminal order, what this work looks like in practice appears to be down to the youth offending officer's judgement.

Further compounding the influence of 'the right time' practitioners reported that practice often involves crisis management when working specifically with female offenders from care. And as a result, offending behaviour work often takes a back seat:

You kind of you know what you want to do with them when they come in, when they have a session with you, you know what you want to do, got to do this stuff on their offending behaviour and you got to talk about this and talk about that, but then a lot of the girls as well they've come in with an



issues or a problem or something's happened, so whether that's they are homeless or they've had an argument... something has always happened and you need to get through that before you actually get to doing anything.

– Participant 3

Practitioners reported that the young women from care they worked with often led chaotic lives and therefore tended to present in crisis. Their practice was then required to deescalate and manage this. A 'crisis' was constructed as resulting from unmet welfare needs, such as homelessness as indicated above, or more interpersonal needs, such as falling out with peers:

A lot of our interventions with her was crisis management. It was, there was always something. She used to come here screaming all the time. There was always something. Normally something ridiculous. Quite hard to pull back down again but never impossible. So, a lot of the stuff, like you'd plan to do a session and she'd come in with a crisis. I actually do remember really clearly my boss at the time sort of laughing about it, when are we ever going to be able to, when am I ever going to be able to do this piece of work with her, because it was always something different. And I don't think it was deliberate avoidance, it's just that's how her life is. Her life is one crisis after another. – Participant 9

Using terms such as 'ridiculous' highlights how youth offending practitioners understand that small things can trigger these crises, but they are still required to manage them before the actual 'work' can begin. Dealing with this type of barrier to progress was associated with youth offending practice with female offenders from care and therefore may offer some further insight into why female offenders are considered more challenging to work with (see Kersten, 1990; Baines and Alder, 1996; Alder, 1996; Bond-Maupin, Maupin and Leisenring, 2002).

However, when evaluating the impact of their interventions, practitioners took into consideration the high level of vulnerability, unmet welfare needs and the chaotic lifestyles of the girls in care. That is, although a young person may have reoffended or engaged in anti-social behaviour, practitioners were able to sympathetically

conceptualise this within the context of the young person's life overall, as evidenced below:

I mean in terms of reoffending, I mean as far as I know she hasn't reoffended since she has gone over to probation, or when I say she hasn't reoffended she hasn't been convicted of any new offences. Although she has kind of said to me that she has still been involved in altercations with people. So, in terms of changing her behaviour, you know that's probably not been as successful as we would have liked. But then I think you look at that within the context of her upbringing, her family situation, her current circumstances. Last time I spoke to her she was homeless, she'd recently had a termination and was having problems in her relationship with her partner. So, she's just used to living in total chaos and whether or not she will ever be able to kind of go on and sort of live a settled life, I'm not sure. – Participant 2

Similarly, practitioners also identified that in some cases when welfare needs are not met, reoffending continued despite a young person engaging with offending behaviour work. As identified in the practitioners account below, getting to the 'bottom' of the welfare concerns was required to be the focus as otherwise the offending based work becomes 'meaningless':

We have obviously completed some consequences of offending work with her, victim work with her, but the behaviour keeps happening so more and more incidents have occurred of violence within the home. And it's been difficult to work with her because there is underlying mental health issues, self-harming, possible trauma and it is difficult to do the offending based work because we haven't kind of got to the bottom of why she sort of wants the attention and what the underlying sort of mental health issues are. So, it has been very difficult to do without sort of finding that out and resolving those issues. The offending based work is a bit kind of meaningless at the moment. – Participant 17

As youth offending officers reported that offending behaviour could not be addressed until welfare needs are met, they did not wait for social services to address these needs but were completing the welfare work themselves, regardless of whether they felt it was within their role. One practitioner described the 'good balance' she tried to achieve:

There is no point in hammering you know, the offending behaviour if they haven't got somewhere to live or erm you know, things are breaking down at home. You know, it is classic Maslow's hierarchy of needs you know, that actually you can't focus on other stuff if the world around you is collapsing. But I think we also achieve a good balance so even when we are doing the welfare stuff we will you know, give them things to think about in terms of the way they still respond to people. So, although we won't necessarily really be saying 'Ok let's look at your offence', it will be a kind of drip feed response I suppose. – Participant 4

The idea that offending behaviour work is completed in a 'drip feed' manner further highlights how practice is adjusted when working with female offenders in care. The work is less 'direct' and the approach to addressing offending behaviour may be more subtle and something that happens in the background. Often what is going on in the young person's life can be chaotic and so, addressing 'offending behaviour' in isolation from other needs can be unhelpful. Nevertheless, helping young women to 'respond to people' more appropriately addresses both welfare needs and offending behaviour.

Despite all interviewees agreeing that meeting welfare needs was foundational for completing offending behaviour work, practitioners were inconsistent in how they considered the role of addressing welfare needs within youth offending practice. Some practitioners considered meeting welfare needs and managing vulnerabilities as a direct part of offending behaviour work. For these practitioners completing welfare focused work was then constructed as appropriate youth offending practice, or direct youth offending 'work'. However, other practitioners conceptualised meeting welfare needs as being separate to youth offending 'work'. Although these practitioners agreed that welfare needs and levels of vulnerability

directly influenced offending behaviours, they did not believe that the YOS were the most appropriate service to be addressing welfare needs. Rather they constructed their role as being primarily focused on offending behaviours and criminogenic risks. The following two subsections examine the nuances in these different constructions of the YOS role.

### **Welfare, vulnerability and offending risks: one and the same**

Consistent with previous research (see Haqrnee et al. 2014; Umamaheswar, 2012; Maschi and Schwalbe, 2012) some practitioners interviewed in this research discussed meeting welfare needs, managing vulnerability and reducing the risk of offending as being 'one and the same' and suggested that being primarily welfare focused mitigated risk of further offending:

I think they are one and the same really. Because I think with the girls, you know when they are feeling ok and they are safe then they are less likely to offend. – Participant 6

Having welfare needs met was often discussed as being specific to girls and their offending behaviour and that 'feeling safe' was a contributing factor to desistance. This also suggests that the girls are being constructed as vulnerable and potential victims and that any offending behaviours will come from a place of fear and self-protection. Youth offending practice that concentrates on consequences of behaviour would not necessarily be appropriate when addressing offending behaviours which are considered the result of fear and self-protection. This offers some insight into how practitioners may feel they need to adjust their practice when working with female offenders from care and, as the resources available to them may not be suitable, 'bespoke' solutions may be needed:

I think certainly a lot of the resources that are commonly used at the YOT are not female specific, so they are more geared towards boys, so generally services around offending are geared towards boys. So I think they tend to need a very kind of bespoke approach which needs quite a lot of imagination and creativity. There is less kinds of established services for them, most places that you would normally encourage a young person to go

to are male dominated and I think for girls, especially girls who are in the care system, probably more vulnerable, you wouldn't want to put them in a male dominated environment. So I think you end up doing quite a lot of bespoke work with them. – Participant 13

Similarly, practitioners who discussed welfare and offending focused work as being 'one and the same' framed the interventions stipulated on the court orders as addressing wider welfare needs.

With referral orders you've got your contract that you have to complete, so you're always aware that there is a certain amount of work that needs to be changed in order for the contract to be signed off and that... so there would be the desistance factors really, the emotional management and anger management and those sorts of things and managing conflict better and having better relationships with people. So, I think they probably cross over in terms of the things that were making her less likely to offend were also making her more likely to feel good about herself, her place in life, so I don't know that they were separate from each other. – Participant 10

Hence, completing work which focuses on building self-esteem and 'feeling good' about oneself is considered direct youth offending 'work' as practitioners identified links between female offending, feelings of self-worth and desistance. These links are also established within the literature (Sharpe, 2012; Taylor, 2006; Arnull and Eagle, 2009).

Additionally, those practitioners who felt it was indeed within their role to address welfare needs described doing this as being 'easier'. Addressing welfare needs and managing vulnerability resulted in mitigating offending and therefore rather than compartmentalising each 'need', these practitioners were able to 'work around everything in one go':

Sometimes they were sort of intermingled as well I would say. Especially because of her behaviour in relation to sort of the drinking and the drug use and then how that led onto offending. So it kind of had an element of

everything in it, which made it easier to work around everything in one go. –

Participant 2

Constructing welfare needs, vulnerability and offending behaviours as interrelated or ‘one and the same’ allowed practitioners to address welfare needs without feeling like they were not doing their ‘job’ as youth offending officers. This also suggests that practitioners held a lot of autonomy within their role and that practice was individually tailored to meet the needs of each young offender. Practitioners also made the point that the ‘work’ of meeting welfare needs, managing vulnerability and mitigating offending risks with a young offender is not static, but rather the focus can change depending on circumstances:

At the beginning it was quite balanced and then I think her welfare took over, if that makes sense. So, because we were very concerned about her risk, where she was when she was with gangs, you know, her offending escalated as well but the welfare became the main focus. – Participant 11

This also highlights how the use of the term ‘risk’ can both refer to risk of offending and also risk to self. Both these risks become a focus within practice but the risk to self (vulnerability) frequently takes priority. Hence, these practitioners described a welfare focused youth offending service where the boundaries of the role are broad and go beyond traditional offending behaviour work that primarily focuses on actions and consequences.

The YOS role is to focus on offending behaviours, not welfare needs. Other practitioners felt that although unmet welfare needs and high levels of vulnerability influenced offending behaviours, the youth offending service was not the most appropriate service to be addressing these needs. This finding is consistent with Pearce’s (2016) research. These practitioners tried to make a much clearer distinction between what are ‘welfare’ needs and what are ‘offending’ needs.

However, practitioners agreed that female offenders from care in particular presented with much higher welfare needs compared to their offending needs. Given that meeting welfare needs for these practitioners was not considered their

primary role, this may provide further insight into the narrative that ‘girls are harder to work with’.

A lot of the stuff that we had to manage with her, that we had to deal with her, was around her welfare. And I find that really typical of girls, their welfare needs quite often outweigh their offending needs. – Participant 9

Those practitioners who constructed welfare needs and vulnerability as separate to offending behaviour needs were then required to decide how they manage working with young people whose ‘welfare needs outweigh their offending needs’. In these cases, multiagency working was considered key to achieving a balance between meeting welfare needs, managing vulnerability and mitigating risk of offending:

Vulnerability tends to be a bigger issue than risk, which a lot of the time working from the youth offending team we are working more with risk, and less around vulnerability. But with girls in the care system at the YOS, vulnerability tends to be a bigger issue which tends to also mean that the YOS is not the best service for dealing with that. So, you have to work really close with children’s services, because they tend to be the better lead agency in that sense. – Participant 13

As illustrated here, some practitioners felt that the youth offending service was not the most appropriate service to meet welfare needs and did not construct meeting welfare needs and offending behaviour work as ‘one and the same’. Because of this differentiation, practitioners highlighted the importance of having a ‘strong professional network’.

However, this can become complicated as practitioners reported that working closely with other agencies can present difficulties and, as explored in the previous chapter, the young person may not have a trusting relationship with their social worker. Therefore, being able to purely focus on offending behaviour needs or ‘direct work’ was described as rare for practitioners who work with female offenders from care:

I think with her because there is quite a strong professional network around her, our work has been focused on desistance... It's been a kind of luxury to focus on that direct work instead of trying to put that kind of support package and that kind of scaffolding around her. – Participant 8

This offers further insight into how practitioners who do not consider meeting welfare needs as the primary role of youth offending practice may find it challenging to work with a client group who are considered high needs. The use of the term 'luxury' when describing being able to complete 'direct work', meaning in this case offending behaviour work, suggests that this is a rare, yet preferred method of practice. This also assumes that focusing on offending behaviour work can be less complicated and much more straight forward, which is similar to practice with male offenders.

Because of this distinction between welfare and offending work, these practitioners' accounts often questioned if the youth offending service is the most appropriate service for young people who have significant welfare needs. Given that higher welfare needs are linked to female offenders, especially from care, this consideration of the appropriateness of the youth offending service was gendered:

To be honest I am not sure if the youth offending service was the correct service for her. Obviously, it needed to be as other services were already involved but I think her risks and vulnerabilities were more mental health based and kind of welfare based in terms of social services work. So, I don't think that we were the best service to address all of her needs, although we did have to address obviously the offence. But I don't yeah, I didn't think that she was an entrenched offender really. – Participant 13

This account suggests that this practitioner constructed her role with this young woman as addressing the offence and raises concerns about being expected to have to address her other needs. As the young offender being discussed is a female offender in care, the YOT worker was not the only professional in this young person's life. However, it is important to note that despite not being the primary focus for practitioners, accounts suggests that if social services are unable to do



‘welfare work’ then, even for these practitioners, it becomes a YOS responsibility. This gives further evidence of the expected flexibility of youth offending practice and the unclear boundary between the role of the youth offending service and the role of social care:

There was a lot of welfare work [laughs]. I think also because she didn’t have that relationship with her social worker or felt that she could go to her for welfare related issues, we kind of, I didn’t want to be the one to say sorry I can’t help you with that, you need to go to social care. If she brought a welfare issues then yeah we would talk about that. – Participant 12

Doing the ‘welfare work’ and not feeling that the YOT are the most appropriate service to do this may also create feelings of frustration with social care and may influence the professional relationships:

If her welfare was taken care of better then she wouldn’t be in our service at all. If she was looked after better. – Participant 9

This frustration is directed at the system around the young offender and holds the care system accountable for the vulnerability, or indeed the criminalisation of the young person. This is then compounded by the belief that addressing welfare needs is the foundational work that needs to be in place *before* working on offending behaviour with girls in the care system. However, it seems that the role the YOS plays in addressing welfare needs is not agreed upon by professionals in the service.

This section has suggested that the relationship between meeting welfare needs, managing vulnerability and mitigating risk of offending is complex. Youth offending practitioners are required to manage these interrelated issues in their practice and this is magnified when working with girls in the care system. Similarly, practitioners suggest that female offenders from care often present in crisis and that this can take over the focus of the sessions with them. This is also influenced by how the youth offending officers make sense of their role and the role of meeting welfare needs within youth offending practice. It is also important to note that there is a lack of training in addressing welfare needs and doing trauma informed work (See Wilson and Hinks, 2011; Talbot, 2010; Pearce, 2016). The following two sections will

examine the areas that practitioners report as dominating work with female offenders from care and illustrates the complex interaction between welfare, vulnerability and risk. These areas of practice are emotional wellbeing and mental health and child sexual exploitation. Practitioners' accounts also suggest that having a strong focus on both these areas in youth offending practice is what makes work with female offenders from care different and distinct.

## II. Emotional wellbeing and mental health

Given their likely histories of trauma and adversity, risks to emotional well-being and mental health are common for the majority of girls in care, but for those caught up in the criminal justice system these risks are particularly challenging. Emotional wellbeing work was often constructed as working with girls concerning their self-esteem and desire to be liked. Practitioners suggested that having poor self-esteem and feelings of low self-worth encouraged these young women to seek validation from those around them, which left them vulnerable to exploitation and engaging in offending behaviours. Managing mental health and the impact of previous trauma was also reported as an area of significance when working with female offenders in care. Practitioners were often required to 'hold' many of the girls who were not ready to engage with mental health services. This work required both a knowledge base of mental health and level of sensitivity. Finally, emotional wellbeing was considered when completing victim empathy work with girls from care, who practitioners often assessed as not being emotionally stable enough to complete:

I think because you've got the more emotional aspect with girls and sometimes when they come into appointments they, you know something could have gone wrong and they, they can be much more emotionally driven than what boys can... Which I suppose then you've kind of got to contain them. - Participant 14

It is important to note that although being aware of the emotional wellbeing and mental health of all young offenders was considered effective youth offending

practice, this work was perceived as being magnified when working with female offenders from care and often dominated a great deal of the work. To examine this in closer detail this section is broken down into three subsections. The first subsection considers the impact of the perceived low self-esteem of female offenders in care. The second subsection examines the experiences of practitioners in managing the mental health of female offenders in care and the final subsection explore the link between emotional wellbeing and victim empathy work.

### **Self-esteem and wanting to be liked**

Lacking confidence and self-esteem was constructed by practitioners as being a gendered element to youth offending work, as this was reported to be much more common with female offenders from care and was required to be addressed in practice.

She had horrendously low self-esteem and low self-worth...So, it was really about managing her emotions and feeling better about herself. – Participant 10

This is also consistent with the literature (see Arnall and Eagle, 2009; Smith and McAra, 2004; Hammersley et al. 2003; Sharpe, 2012). Girls' lack of confidence was also often linked to how they fitted in with their peers and how their appearance conformed to the cultural norm. This draws on cultural ideas around confidence in the performance of femininity and was accepted as a normative experience for young women.

I'd say it would be confidence, a lot of girls' lack confidence, don't they? They lack confidence in lots of areas in terms of even about how they look, how they fit in, what they are wearing all these little things with the girls. – Participant 14

Due to their low self-esteem and lack of confidence, practitioners reported that female offenders from care have a desire to be liked and accepted by others. This often presented itself in behaviours described as 'needy'.

She found it quite difficult to, acknowledge that she was worth much. She was quite needy in that she wanted to please you all the time and she

wanted to be praised but...she found that very difficult to accept. So that was quite a struggle. – Participant 10

Seeking validation and wanting to be liked also applied in the professional relationship. This then required practitioners to consider these dynamics when working with female offenders from care, something they may not have had to do in the same way when working with male offenders.

This desire to be liked was also reported as evident in peer relationships.

The sad thing about her was that, even though she saw the peers as friends... relationships would quickly break down with males or females... I remember staff saying to me, like she might just meet someone and then she will be like spending 40 pounds out of her allowance or something to buy them a gift. It is kind of like 'like me' you know, I want you to like me. – Participant 18

These relationships however were unstable, and their inevitable breakdown affected the complex nature of work with female offenders from care as this added to their feelings of low self-worth and self-esteem and often created crises. The complexities of these peer and family relationships, as indicated in the following quotation, may provide additional insight into why practitioners often report that this work is 'harder' when compared to work with male offenders.

I do think, if I've got to be perfectly blunt, I do think girls are harder. There is a lot more to unpick. And they have some very, very complex relationships and friendship groups. You know you'll do a genogram with a girl and on my genogram, I don't just do family I do significant friends because often they'll say their best friend is their sister... and then the following week I'll be like oh yeah, how is you and Cath? I hate that bitch. You're like but she's your best mate! No, she ain't, I hate her! And you're like oh ok. Whereas boys don't tend to have these peaks and troughs. - Participant 5

Lack of self-esteem and low confidence can also influence girl's engagement with protective factors against offending, such as going to college. In these cases,

supporting a young person in building her confidence can be constructed as direct youth offending practice.

A lot of them aren't in work or college they are just kind of out hanging about, drifting about, doing things with other people and then getting involved with things they shouldn't be doing. So, it's trying to find them something that they are interested in but then that comes as well with confidence. A lot of them haven't got any confidence, and they might be bolshie and shouty and shout at you, but actually they've not got a lot of confidence and they've got a lot of quite low self-esteem. There's also then trying to build that up as well, to support them with that too, really. And *then* trying to encourage them to go somewhere new, like go to a college. –

Participant 3

In addition to this, the desire to be liked by peers can become a risk of engaging in offending behaviours. For example, practitioners' accounts suggested that girls tend to also 'play the protector' to their peers. This behaviour was constructed as a way to get peers to like/respect them but was also a tool used for self-protection. Playing this role, however, put them not only at risk of being hurt but also at risk of facing potential assault charges. Furthermore, engaging in crimes such as theft to impress peers was also identified as a risk factor:

Around her peers she wanted to be sort of really popular and liked. I think she was quite naïve to erm the situation that behaviors like that could lead you into. Shop lifting with her peers, I don't think she would be the person who said no I am not shop lifting because I don't want to get arrested or anything. I think she would do a lot of things to get in with her peers. –

Participant 9

Practitioners also suggested that the desire to be liked put female offenders at risk of being exploited by people who would groom them into committing further offences:

I think the difficulty is that often when young people are vulnerable, people seek them out. So, it isn't just based on the decisions she was making, it was

likely you know, they had noticed her and had probably thought they could exploit her to committing offences and that kind of thing. So, befriended her and groomed her in the way that we know people do the grooming process.

– Participant 4

Given these risks, working on emotional wellbeing and self-esteem can be constructed as work that is directly related to reducing offending for girls from care.

### **Juggling mental health and not getting to the root of the problem**

Practitioners reported that it was common for the young women they were working with to be struggling with poor mental health. This is also evident in the literature on young women offenders from care (Arnull and Eagle, 2009; Hawton et al. 2000; Smith and McAra, 2004; Sharpe, 2012). Mental health concerns were discussed as both emotional wellbeing and behaviours such as self-harm and suicidal ideation. However, formal mental health diagnoses were rarely discussed. This was often due to the young women they were working with either waiting for assessments or not yet being ready to engage with mental health services.

We offered her support from the sort of CAMHS, local CAMHS team. And she met with the lady once and she just wasn't ready to really explore where that was coming from. And again, I think that links into possibly some undisclosed stuff from her childhood. And that she's not ready to kind of talk about or, you know, remember. – Participant 2

Practitioners had a sense that some of the female offenders from care they were working with had undisclosed trauma and this therefore made it difficult to work through. Practitioners also reported that given the high number of professionals girls from care might have had in their lives, retelling their disclosed trauma may be difficult for them.

I felt like she would really benefit from some therapeutic sort of work and actual counselling about her life history. I was quite frustrated that she's never done any life story work with her social worker and never really got things in order about what had happened to her and what her experiences had been of life. And because of that she had taken a lot of things on board that weren't her

responsibility and it was frustrating that she didn't feel like she could do that. But I absolutely understood that she had so many professionals in her life that she really didn't want to tell her story again, to somebody else and have nothing come of it. – Participant 10

The quotation above also speaks to the frustration that the YOT worker felt in terms of the welfare work, in this case life story work, not being completed for the young person. This frustration with other services not meeting the young offender's welfare needs will be discussed in the following chapter on interagency working.

Practitioners discussed how the young women they worked with were also concerned about stigma and being labelled as “mentally unwell”, which became a barrier to their engagement with mental health services

She did not want to be assessed by the CAMHS worker saying that she, she was frightened that they would say she was mentally unwell or they were going to try and do something. I am not sure what that was that she thought they were going to do with her but I think she was just worried about being labelled, so she didn't want to do that. And obviously it is a voluntary service, you can't force young people to do it. It would have no, no positive impact on her. – Participant 1

Because of this barrier, practitioners described trying to challenge the stigma of mental illness within their work. However, this was not necessarily successful in encouraging female offenders from care to engage with mental health services.

I think as soon as you mention mental health, or even I don't know how many times I've tried to think of a different word to explain, like talk about emotional health and how they are feeling and they are like oh yeah, yeah well, I'd like to talk about that or do something. But then as soon as you mention like the service, like where it will come from, like if it was counselling or something they just don't want to know because it's either that stigma or they just don't, they just think they don't need that. But then they would agree with me five minutes before that they would like to talk about it. – Participant 19

As alluded to above, this apprehension about engaging with mental health services may be the result of not wanting to retell a story to another professional. As the excerpt suggests, this young person has said she would like to talk about what is going on for her but pulls back when there is suggestion of a referral. As discussed later in this section, this often results in youth offending practitioners providing initial surface level mental health support or ‘holding’ female offenders from care until they are ready to engage with specialized services.

Practitioners also reported that the young women who were at a point in their life where they felt ready to engage with mental health services were then faced with going on a waiting list, which could further impact on their engagement.

I think there was difficulties because it was quite a long waiting list and I think that it kind of loses impetus, doesn't it, if there is, if you've got a young person who historically has been quite reluctant to engage with those sorts of services but then comes to a point where you think actually yeah, I need to do this. And then there is a waiting list. You know, that kind of impacts on that. – Participant

14

Additionally, the continual moving to different care homes further influenced female offender's ability to engage with mental health services. That is, by the time the young women got to the top of the waiting list they had moved location, as indicated in the quotation below.

By this time, she had started self-harming and a CAMHS referral had been made for her in the previous care home. She wasn't at that care home long enough for the actual appointment to be seen. So, the referral got made and then she got shipped out from care home to care home and the appointments never quite caught up with her, if that makes any sense. Sometimes you can make a CAMHS referral, and it can take 3 months to be seen. In that time, she's moved.

– Participant 5

Practitioners also highlighted the need to feel stable in order for young people to begin working within a therapeutic capacity. For example, the following account suggests that being in a settled placement and feeling contained can allow female



offenders from care to feel ready to engage in therapy, in this case, cognitive analytical therapy (CAT). Again, this account draws a link between the young person's experience of trauma and their offending behaviour.

She has been the most settled that she's ever been... I've referred her for some CAT therapy which she is going to be doing to help her with her emotional regulation and to deal with her experiences of abuse and neglect, because I think that is basically key to her offending behaviour, because it's when she feels insecure or worried or fears abandonment, that sort of thing...I think the reason that she hasn't offended over the last 6 months since she initially offended and got this referral order is because she's felt contained, if that makes sense. – Participant 6

However, stability and containment were not a common experience with the majority of female offenders in care reported on in the study and, additionally, experiences of trauma were often ongoing. For example, young women from care involved with the youth offending service may simultaneously be experiencing an exploitative or violent relationship. Experiencing ongoing trauma affected the depth of the interventions the mental health services were able to provide to these young women. As a result, the service provided was focused on monitoring or holding rather than completing any effective trauma processing therapeutic work.

That she still kind of experiences a lot of trauma, that was problematic for her. They felt like they were more monitoring, rather than really intervening, that she kind of wasn't at the stage to really engage with the therapy work. But because of her vulnerability and history of self-harm and history of being sectioned etcetera they were working with her on a weekly basis. But they really felt that they were just monitoring rather than doing any real effective intervention. – Participant 13

Similarly, for the female offenders not engaged with any mental health service, it was the youth offending practitioners who were required to 'hold' and monitor these young women. This was seen as surface level work and not getting to the

'root' of the problem and therefore involved a focus on safeguarding in terms of physical safety, rather than addressing emotional need.

We always addressed the symptoms of what was going on, we never got down to... underneath to say this young girl... she has lost her mother, no one talks about the women, no one had asked her, you know, how she feels about it. She had a lot of anger and so she ran off and so instead of addressing what is at the root of this we are going... the immediate need is her physical safety. And so, I think that was what we were all doing, just juggling. You know, how can we keep her safe? How can we keep someone from raping her and killing her and having her being found on the street? Instead of looking at why is she running to the streets, what is she running from. – Participant 15

In addition, practitioners identified that concerns around emotional wellbeing did not necessarily meet the criteria for receiving support from mental health services.

I think that that is a very difficult one because they don't always meet the criteria for being referred to a mental health team, because they are not mentally unwell they are just struggling with managing their emotions. So, I think there is a kind of gap in the service provision where it's not a mental health issue, it's more of an emotional wellbeing issue and they don't always meet the criteria. – Participant 5

This suggests there is a gap in mental health support, which is filled by the YOS. However, practitioners' accounts suggest that this role can be difficult for youth offending workers, as this is not an area that they are necessarily trained in and feel that there are limits to the support that they can offer young people:

That's hard for us because I'm not a mental health professional. So, then I try and use our mental health worker who is more of a, like I don't know a consultant really. I'd have a consultation with them about what's going on and try and get something from them so then I can then do it with them. But then if it's something more serious, when they do need a mental health assessment or they do need that support, obviously I can't do that. – Participant 5

Unfortunately, youth offending services were reported to be losing funding for these specialised roles, such as mental health workers, so having access to this specialised practitioner in youth offending teams was not a consistent experience across local authorities.

Finally, accounts suggested that working through previous trauma with female offenders from care was often linked to the relationship the young person had with her birth parents, often her mother. This was also an area that is established in the literature (Sharpe, 2012) and is evidenced in the following account:

A lot of the stuff that had gone on in her past, the fact that her mum hadn't believed her was a big issue for her as well and she kind of struggled to engage with that work with other people when the issues was about the real person that she wanted to open up to and talk about it with and hear an 'I'm sorry' from was her mum. So, it kind of didn't matter so much that professionals believed her when her mum didn't. – Participant 13

It was rare for the youth offending workers interviewed in this project to have completed direct work with birth parents of female offenders who were in care. However, as highlighted here, the relationship the young person had with her birth mother needed to be considered in practice. For example, this often complicated victim empathy work when the 'victim' was the young person's mother.

### **Emotional wellbeing and victim empathy**

According to practitioners' accounts, victim empathy work was complex when the crimes committed were against family or friends. In these circumstances there was a pre-existing emotional connection between both parties. Because of this history, often who the 'victim' was and who the 'perpetrator' was became difficult to distinguish. This is supported in the literature and is highlighted as something that is common when working with female offenders (Larsson, 2014). Therefore, victim empathy work in these cases was not straightforward and was often complicated by the emotional connection between the parties. This was most notable in practitioners' accounts when the 'victim' was the young offender's birth mother.

Her [young person] general ability to empathise was very good. In regards to her own behaviour she kind of flicked between feeling so let down that she felt like her mum deserved it anyway to feeling overwhelmed with remorse that she has caused harm to her mum and upset her. So, it was really tricky actually, the victim work, because it made her quite emotional. She would either be really angry that she had been let down by a poor parent, two poor parents in fact, and then also feeling terrible that she has hurt the one person that she loves more than anything in the world. So, it was quite tricky to do victim empathy work. – Participant 10

The ‘trickiness’ of completing victim empathy work when there is a pre-existing relationship with the ‘victim’ was also extended to care home staff. As with victim empathy towards a young offender’s birth mother, victim empathy towards care home staff was compounded by feelings around being in care and being a ‘victim’ of her current situation. The feeling of being victimised by the situation of being in residential care also resulted in young offenders harbouring negative attitudes towards care home staff. As evidenced in the following example, practitioners reported that this also made it difficult to complete victim empathy work when the victim was the care home worker.

She was very much of the view that that’s what they are paid to do. And if the care home worker hadn’t of pissed her off so much she wouldn’t have smacked her around the head with a saucepan. And that was her view for a long, long, long, long time. And there was no shifting that...So yeah, she struggled with victim empathy. I think if she could, if she’d attacked somebody on the street and her aggression... which she had done, she had made threats against people in the street, she could understand that and she would say they didn’t deserve it. But anybody within a care home setting she was pretty much of the opinion that’s what happens if you work there. – Participant 5

Many of these accounts discuss a resentment toward care home staff often in relation to boundaries and that the care home staff are ‘paid’ to look after them. This will be discussed in detail in the following section, but it is important to

highlight that it is the complex nature of this relationship that makes victim empathy work towards care home staff complicated.

Additionally, when there was no pre-existing relationship with the victim, the emotional 'stability' and wellbeing of the young person often informed if victim empathy work was an option due to concerns for their capacity to sustain the intervention. In the following example, a face-to-face restorative justice conference was deemed inappropriate based on the young person's 'frame of mind'.

. I have a feeling we didn't do the face-to-face stuff in this instance because she was quite up and down. And when I say up and down, I don't mean in her attitude towards the gentleman, I just mean in terms of emotionally up and down. What we felt is that, you know, it's going to be potentially a very emotive situation for both of them, including the gentleman to have to meet the person who had taken money from him, and what we were concerned about is whether actually she would be in the right frame of mind to be able to go through with it...because she was emotionally up and down, there were concerns about her vulnerability and exploitation and that kind of stuff. It just didn't, it didn't feel a right. – Participant 4

As indicated in the example above face-to-face restorative justice conferences also need to consider the impact on the victim. Yet, it is the perceived emotional stability of the young person that informed this decision.

The emotional wellbeing of the young person can have a direct impact on interventions such as restorative justice conferences and can complicate victim empathy work. Additionally, youth offending officers are also often required to 'hold' female offenders from care who are not engaged in mental health services. This support is surface level and involves juggling risks. Low feelings of self-worth and self-esteem are both areas which practitioners are hyper-aware of, as this vulnerability is considered to put female offenders from care at risk of being harmed or engaging in further offending behaviours.

### III. Child sexual exploitation: agency and risk

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is also an area of practice that youth offending workers report as dominating practice with female offenders from care. Cockbain and Brayley (2012) have also identify a link between CSE and offending. This was also an area where welfare needs, vulnerability and risk of offending overlapped and often existed within the context of a lack of resources from other agencies. When doing this work practitioners also experienced a conflict in practice, where the agency of female offenders in care was often overshadowed by potential risk. This therefore makes this area of work tricky to navigate.

To examine this at a greater depth, this section is broken down into four subsections. The first subsection considers how this work is often complicated by female offenders from care not considering their relationships to be risky or exploitative. The second subsection explores who constructs 'risk'. The third subsection examines how risk is managed when it is not agreed between the girl and the practitioner. The final subsection considers how practitioners conceptualise the vulnerability.

#### Young women unable to identify risk

Practitioners described how female offenders from care considered at risk of CSE often did not necessarily consider themselves as being at risk.

Because she didn't see the risks, she didn't think there was anything she needed to do to manage herself...She was never very open to doing work about being exploited because she didn't think she was exploitable. –

Participant 10

This meant that these young women did not see a need to manage or mitigate the risk of exploitation. Similarly, as the account above suggests, this female offender from care did not consider herself as 'exploitable'. This could be a reflection of her low self-esteem and lack of feeling of being of any worth or that she identified as tough and 'streetwise' enough to not be taken advantage of.

She didn't think she was at risk because she considered herself quite tough and quite streetwise and sort of knowledgeable of what went on, but I do think she had an inflated sense of that, I don't think she was what she thought she was... So, I don't think she thought she was going to be exploited, no. I don't think she thought she was going to be harmed. – Participant 11

Similarly, some practitioners' accounts suggested that female offenders from care were unable to consider themselves at risk as they had a false sense of agency. That is, as indicated in the following extract, some girls felt responsible for their exploitation and therefore struggled with identifying as a victim.

I think that quite typically they don't understand what the fuss is about and they play everything down so nobody panics... I think there is quite a lot of responsibility they take for things, even when they have been involved in situations where they are raped or they are put in situations that they don't like, they tend to take responsibility for things that they never should. – Participant 9

However, similarly to constructing narratives of being streetwise, considering themselves as having made these decisions may be how these girls are currently dealing with the trauma of being exploited. By 'taking responsibility', these girls have also constructed narratives that allow them to have a sense of control, regardless of if this narrative is inaccurate. They may not be in a place where they can accept that they have been a victim and process this trauma. Therefore, creating a narrative where they have 'choice' may in fact be about their survival.

Further evidencing this, practitioners' accounts also noted that female offenders from care were able to identify the risk of sexual exploitation more generally but were often unable or unwilling to apply this to their own situation.

She did have a good idea of what was kind of risky and what wasn't, when we talked about it generically. She had a good idea, but she wouldn't, she didn't talk about it in terms of her own behaviours. - Participant 12

This theme of being able to identify CSE risk but not apply it to their own situation further supports the hypothesis that some of girls may not be emotionally ready to identify as a victim of exploitation. Rather, in order to survive they construct narratives of choice and a sense of being streetwise and tough. As discussed in the previous section on mental health and emotional wellbeing, processing trauma requires stability. Therefore, if the young person in question has unstable living conditions or is enduring a chaotic lifestyle and negotiating their own survival, then identifying as a victim of CSE may not be an option for them.

Practitioners were also aware that being a victim of CSE could lead to offending risks, where young women were considered at risk of grooming other young women.

Some of the young women that she was associating with, the police were saying they were highly involved with CSE and said that my young person was kind of a leader. Like she, one of the placements the foster placement eventually she got moved out of, she left but we also moved her, she didn't want to go back, so social services moved her, but there was a very vulnerable young woman there and she would take her out at night and you know, we didn't know where they were and stuff. And she was associated with quite a lot of vulnerable young women and a lot of phone contacts were linked to her phone. So, there was concern that she could have been perpetrating, grooming young women but at the same time, my concern was if she is doing that she is also at risk because that is putting herself at risk. But there was no solid evidence that she was at risk of CSE directly, but somewhere along the line something must have happened. – Participant 11

This illustrates how often young women can be simultaneously victim and offender and therefore how the criminal justice system responds to this is important.

However, as illustrated in the above quotation, practitioners often refer to assumptions made about sexual exploitation rather than evidence of sexual exploitation. As female offenders from care may also not recognise the risks they face or indeed they may not identify as being at risk, how this is managed in



practice becomes complicated. 'Risk' is therefore a conclusion drawn by the professionals around the girls and not necessarily consistent with how the girl herself constructs the situation. This difference in perspectives raises questions regarding how practitioners consider the agency of the young person and how they balance this with perceived risk.

### Who constructs risk?

As illustrated in the following excerpt, practitioners' accounts often reflected a difference in how sexual relationships and risks of exploitation were constructed by the young person and the professional:

There were still some concerns around her choices in relationships. As much as the amount of work was completed with her in regards to concerns around exploitation, she never saw herself as being exploited. She was very promiscuous, in terms of she would very quickly and easily sleep with boyfriends and there were a number of pregnancy scares and she... for her it didn't really matter too much to her whether she slept with somebody on the first date or you know, whatever. Having said that though, I do think that the older that she got I think she started to associate with much older boys and those who had cars. She went to college in London and so I think all the classic hallmarks were there of potentially being exploited. She was given lots of gifts you know, there were older boyfriends, they were giving her a phone that she could use, all of that kind of stuff. So, there were a lot of concerns but she viewed it as, when I say sexual promiscuous, she viewed it as well I'm making the choice to sleep with people quite early on. That's my decision. As opposed to what we would see is the likelihood of her being exploited and men taking advantage of her and using her vulnerability. – Participant 4

This account highlights a stark difference between how this young person and the professional construct the young woman's sexual interactions. The language used by the professional in this sample also draws on gendered sexual behavior and the associated 'morality'. The use of language such as 'promiscuity' is value laden, as is the discussion around sleeping with a boy on the first date. As discussed in the literature review, morality and girls' sexual behaviour have been policed via the

criminal justice system throughout history (see Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008; Cox, 2003; Sharpe, 2012; Worrall, 1999, 2000, 2008). Hence, this offers insight into the continued embeddedness of these socially constructed gendered ideas about behaviour which remain an implicit bias and continue to unconsciously inform frontline practice.

Other accounts suggested that some girls have learnt to use their sexuality as a tool for survival. This may give further insight into why these young women do not construct themselves as being at risk as their sexuality may be one of the few means they have to get their needs met.

She didn't see anything wrong with it because she was used to, like in order to get cigarettes from men, she would show them her breasts and they would give her the cigarette and so she was, that was kind of what she had learned on how to get her needs met, was to turn it sexual. – Participant 15

Complicating this further, as illustrated in the extract below, despite this being a 'choice' that the girls may have made, the choice has been made from limited and often highly risky decisional pathways.

She reported that she was having sex with several, she wanted to be in a gang and she said that she had sex with them. She said that she didn't mind, no one was forcing me, you know and things. But some of the boys when they came into the office they made comments about her they called her a slut and things and I asked, I said did you know him? And she told me a little bit about it, so how they would be nice to her to either get her to steal something for them or for sex. – Participant 15

Hence, although female offenders from care at risk of exploitation may not consider themselves at risk for a variety of reasons, this does not eliminate a risk being present. And therefore, this is something that youth offending practitioners will be required to manage in their work.

On the other hand, some practitioners questioned if practice around CSE was too risk focused and eliminated consideration of the girls' agency and their decision-making.

I don't think she did identify as being at risk of CSE, and I guess I think that often of late young women tend to get that kind of label, potentially unnecessarily, just because they are kind of chaotic and not doing what we would like them to do...From my experience, as a wider social care system, we seem to always regard or predominantly regard women, young women who exhibit any kind of sexual behavior as maybe likely to be victims or likely to be exploited, and that seems to differ from the reaction to boys. – Participant 19

As suggested in this example, the higher the perceived risk the more control the agencies take over the young person. Safeguarding measures such as moving residential homes or being placed in a secure unit can reduce the perceived risk that the professional team have constructed yet at the same time limit the liberties of the young person and disregard their agency. Hence, the contrast between how the practitioner constructs the situation and how the young person constructs the situation creates a significant power imbalance that can have a direct impact on practice.

#### **How girls and professionals manage 'risk'**

Practitioners' accounts suggest that girls manage their agency or perspective not being taken into consideration by not disclosing sexual relationships to their workers. This raises questions around autonomy and where the boundaries lie for a youth offending practitioner and the young offender's right to privacy.

She would argue that she knew what she was doing. So, to some degree, she is bright, so I think she kind of knew what she was doing, but I don't think she can necessarily control it. So, most of the partners that we knew about, actually weren't too much of a problem. They weren't exploiting her, they were quite often as vulnerable as her. So, once we knew about them, it wasn't too bad. It was the ones we didn't really know about that were the problem. And that is the trouble, you don't know if she is being exploited if

you don't know who they are or where they are. So, it's very, very difficult to ever pin that down. - Participant 7

This quote above also alludes to the myth that those who are vulnerable cannot also be perpetrators of sexual exploitation or violence. This further highlights how underlying views on gender and who is/can be a victim or offender can directly influence frontline practice.

Because girls often did not identify their relationships as being exploitative, some practitioners would manage this by completing CSE work with them which 'depersonalised' the content.

Rather than making it about her I would, we would watch this and she would really watch it you know, she was really clearly interested and then afterwards by making it not about her but by about you know the if you had a friend what do you think she might be feeling or how do you think she might, or what could she do about that and then you'd get the answer, she'd answer. But if you said to her, what you know did this happen to you then she would just shut down. – Participant 18

However, concerns were raised around certain types of this depersonalized CSE practice re-traumatising young women who were not willing or yet able to accept or disclose that they were or had been a victim of sexual exploitation:

It was difficult for her because that obviously brought up stuff for her. So, I don't know if, if she had been through something when she was meeting these men, I don't know if she had had that experience, but she wouldn't discuss it. She found some of the resources we had, but I did check it with the social worker first, were quite kind of... explicit and hard hitting. So, I'd shown some of these resources with social worker and the social worker said she felt she needed to do these pieces of work. And she just struggled with it really. I don't know if... it was quite difficult. It was a DVD around a girl that wasn't having a very good time at work and an older male had come in and approached her and basically, he ended up kidnapping her and it was quite obvious that she was being shared around lots of different men. And she found that quite difficult to

watch and talk about and she was quite angry that we had shown it to her. But I had discussed it with the social worker first and her key worker in the care home. And they felt because of some of the issues she was placing herself at, it was really important that she did that work. So I suspect although she wouldn't talk about it, I suspect the reason she found it difficult was because of some experiences she had had. – Participant 12

The use of these DVDs and the potential of them re-traumatising victims of CSE has been raised as a problematic area of practice and as a result of the #nomoreCSEfilms campaign these DVDs are no longer considered ethical (see Eaton, 2018).

Other practitioners recognised the boundaries of what they could achieve within their sessions by taking into consideration the young person's history and where they were currently at in life. These practitioners constructed the work they were doing around CSE vulnerability as 'planting seeds' and hoped that in the future this work will have a positive impact:

I had to see my work as kind of like planting seeds because I thought ok, if she had come from you know a supportive background and had adequate resources and secure attachments, then I wouldn't have been worried about her. But because I knew of the other issues that was going on for her, that she would gravitate towards or be drawn towards if someone told her that they loved her and she looks nice then she, you know, it didn't matter what else they were doing, as long as they loved her and told her how beautiful she was. – Participant 15

However, this was difficult for some practitioners as it was felt that progress was slow and at times regressive, with the young person continuing to make risky choices. Practitioners reported finding this frustrating to manage:

I think the other thing as well is, what was hard for us I suppose is to be doing a lot of work with her around concerns around exploitation and getting her to understand you know, how things were being perceived by other people etcetera and how things were being perceived by us and the

concerns we had. We would think we were getting somewhere and then suddenly she would have another boyfriend who was 7 years older and buying her phones and you know and that was something that we had to, you know we would air our frustrations with each other as opposed to the young person because we'd kind of be like you know we'd talked about this and we'd thought we'd got somewhere and then all of a sudden you know it would all seem to come around full circle again so that was quite difficult. – Participant 4

Despite understanding the limits to their support, some practitioners also reported not 'shying away' from this work. These practitioners discussed the importance of creating relationships with female offenders from care where they would feel safe enough to make any disclosures.

I am not scared for a young person to almost open up a can of worms to me and I am not going to try and make them put a lid back on it. I am going to try and help them and you know, I can't help them with a lot, but you know I can hand hold them into different services...for me it is just about managing what I can at the time, because a lot of time I don't always know what to do. I don't pretend to be a miracle worker. – Participant 9

As highlighted in the above quotation, accounts reported an understanding that they were not able to 'fix' everything for the young person, but that they were able to make supported referrals to services that could meet what the practitioner has perceived as their needs. The bigger question surrounding this then is around how youth offending practitioners balance how they perceive vulnerability with how they consider the agency of the young person and how this informs the ethics of practice.

### **Making sense of girls' vulnerability**

Practitioners suggested that low self-esteem and feelings of low self-worth, which meant they wanted to please and be liked, put female offenders from care at risk of CSE as they were 'looking for love'.

She is desperate for attention from anybody. So, there was concerns that she would get that attention anyway she chooses. She admitted to me that she was, she had been sexually active, with a peer age male in the past and that that was something she had chosen to do but actually she was gay. So, that was the first we have heard of it. But she was quite, it is a horrible way of describing it but she was desperate, she was desperate for somebody to have a relationship with and because of that she would have been with anybody really. And I think the older the person then the more that they could potentially offer her, the more attractive they would have been to her. So she was definitely at risk of issues of absconding, of using drugs and then also desperate for closeness and to be wanted. – Participant 10

This 'desperation' for closeness and willingness to do anything to be loved can be linked back to experiences of rejection. Hence, practitioners' accounts suggested that being in care and the associated experiences of rejection outlined in the previous chapter can increase vulnerability for CSE.

The difficulty is that you know, with a lot of young people who are in care, obviously you know come with it a lot of need to be loved and all of that kind of stuff, so naturally you know they are going to want to be showered with gifts and presents and things. – Participant 4

Additionally, practitioners discussed how this need to be close and feel loved is not likely to be met in residential care units.

You know and obviously, these young people in the care system, although the care homes are geared up to be like a family home as much as possible in real life terms they are not, are they? You know they've still got offices where doors are locked and it is not a real home so, you know, some of these young girls are going out to try and find people who care and love them and you know they don't see the other side of it in terms of the, that they are giving them something in return. So, that is frequently with the young girls that we get CSE referrals for. – Participant 12

The difference between care homes and family homes being a risk for vulnerability and offending will be discussed in the following chapter, but it is important to note that practitioners consider that this lack of a 'secure base' for female offenders in care increases their vulnerability and risk of CSE.

Working with female offenders in care at risk of exploitation is fraught with complexities and challenges. Youth offending practitioners' accounts suggested that this work involves managing ongoing trauma, which can mean that girls are unable or unwilling to identify with being a victim. This can raise professional dilemmas around considering the agency of the young person in interventions. It also raises concerns about interventions creating harm by re-traumatising victims who are not ready to process what has happened or is indeed continuing to happen to them. .

#### IV. Professional Anxiety

Practitioners discussed having at times to manage a high level of professional anxiety around risk and vulnerability associated with youth offending work with female offenders from care. McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden (2016) argue that this anxiety is how practitioners experience vicarious trauma. This professional anxiety can be the result of concern about the perceived risk that the young person is exposed to, but may also be connected to other factors, such as the worker's lack of experience of working with girls.

I think if I am completely honest, I always feel a little bit more anxious about working with girls than I do with boys. And I think that that is probably just because I have had loads of experience of working with males and less so with female. But I do think they do bring their own, although I said earlier there is not much difference between boys and girls really, truly I think girls do bring their own sort of societal pressures and ways they should be and self-esteem issues that you don't see with the boys and I know that I feel more anxious generally when I am allocated a girl of how it is going to be. Whereas I feel very confident working with boys. - Participant 10



A number of practitioners reported having to manage increased levels of anxiety when working with female offenders. As Lanctot and colleagues (2012) report, this anxiety is often around lack of experience of working with girls and concerns about the impact of low self-esteem and perceived vulnerability. This is also compounded by the lack of training provided to practitioners in working with female offenders (see Arnall and Eagle, 2009; Sharpe, 2012; Matthews and Hubbard, 2008).

As the above excerpt illustrates, this anxiety is compounded by their awareness of 'societal pressures and the way they should be', 'they' referring to girls and the expectation to conform to ideals around how they perform their gender, and the higher risks facing girls. This anxiety may be another factor in why practitioners find working with female offenders more challenging

She is not being safe within the community... I think it is the first time where I had ever really, really had significant worries about whether she is going to make it through the weekend. And I know that sounds quite dramatic, but her safeguarding and safety and wellbeing was really high. It got to a point where mum was also... on one occasion the young person alleged that mum had injected her with amphetamine. So obviously we reported that to the police but then the young person withdrew the statement and said no I made it up and it was that kind of, yeah, I know she has done this, but she is my mum. – Participant 14

Practitioners reported having to manage their individual anxiety related to the perceived risk and vulnerability of these young people. In other accounts, this anxiety was described as being felt as a team.

I know that when we hear about someone being stabbed or someone has been hurt and they will say the location automatically everyone's phone will start ringing even in the evening hours. 'Oh my God! Is that one of ours?' You know, who's hurt. We've had workers where you run up visits in the hospital, when you have had a young person who is injured and just my stress and worry when my girl disappeared for 3 weeks... So yeah, it can be

very emotionally charged. They kind of become your kids, I guess. –

Participant 15

Practitioners also often described this experience of anxiety using language such as ‘your kids’ that placed them close to the role of a parent. This highlights the emotional investment that the youth offending workers had in the young people they worked with and the intensity of the emotional labour that goes into this professional relationship. To examine the nuances in practitioners experiences this section is broken down into three subsections. The first subsection explores practitioners experiences in feeling maternal, the second subsection explores practitioners experiences in feeling protective and the final subsection considers the impact of the emotional labour in this work.

### Feeling maternal

The association with feeling like a parent was also highlighted when practitioners considered how their gender influenced the working relationship. As only one of the practitioners interviewed for this study was male, overwhelmingly the responses were from female practitioners.

I think often you’ll get young girls that will either have a good relationship with you because you’re female and there’s almost that maternal, they see it as a maternal thing. – Participant 5

As reported feeling ‘maternal’ in turn increased the amount of emotional labour they were managing and influenced direct practice. The ‘maternal’ nature of the work described by practitioners was reported as being important to the female offenders and something that distinguished this practice from practice with male offenders.

I don’t know if it’s my own perception of things or how I feel, but I think sometimes girls maybe still need a little bit of parenting... and I don’t know if that’s because I’m a girl and just how I feel because of them. Because you know, they could be my sister, they could be whoever you know? I don’t know if that’s my own perception but I think they do need a lot more maybe

mothering than boys do... but then I don't know if that's just my own perception. – Participant 3

As suggested above having the same gender allowed practitioners to feel as though they could identify with the girls they were working with. This is consistent with previous research (see Lanctot et al. 2012). This therefore alludes to ideas around gender stereotypes held by practitioners and illustrates how this can influence direct practice.

I think because I remember when I was a teenager and my experiences as a female. Now I know there is a generation gap, a huge generation gap and things, but some of the issues are the same. And how would I approach, what information did I need when I was that age that I wished I would have had and how would I, how would I have been more receptive to receiving it... I try to stay in touch with the young woman... to kind of help with my approach with the girls now. – Participant 15

This suggests that there is a common hegemonic experience of being an adolescent girl which female practitioners are able to draw on to help inform their practice. However, in doing this it minimises experiences of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and trauma and ignores how the “intersectional experience is greater than the sum” (Crenshaw 1989:140) of individual positions.

When the young women noted shared identities, this was described as assisting in relationship building in specific ways:

The case that I was telling you about before in the care home where the family had been split up and she was on a full care order and hated her social workers, erm we were similar complexion and erm she did work quite well with me, she always used to say I bet people think you are my sister etcetera and you know we would go and do shopping and we got our nails done together a couple of times and I think things like that were helpful for bonding exercises and for relationship building. – Participant 13

There were a couple of practitioners interviewed for this research who challenged the idea of a hegemonic experience of gender and applied a more intersectional lens to their approach. These accounts also recognised that stereotypes exist within criminal justice and inform practice, often at an unconscious level:

I tend to find that the youth offending service I work in is very gender biased... in practice with boys and girls is kind of, I just think sometimes we propound stereotypes about men and women that perhaps we shouldn't use in our work with young people. So, you know like you need to be the man of the family kind of thing. And I think that does translate into practice at a kind of service wide or team wide level. I think specific practitioners might try not to practice like that, but I think it sometimes feels a bit inevitable. I don't think there is much discussion about things like gender and the way that impacts the practitioner or the young person in terms of a service. I don't think there is a lot of discussion about that kind of service wide level...so actually in approaching a young person themselves and working with them one on one, I would make reasonable effort to not really change too much the way I practice with girls to boys. Particularly because I don't know, you know, having on a piece of paper where it says boy doesn't necessarily mean that that young person identifies with that gender. –

Participant 19

The practitioner in the above account proposes that practice can include many unconscious assumptions around gender and the performance of gender. They also note that gender is fluid and therefore how a young person is identified on paper may not reflect how they self-identify. This supports providing a youth offending service that is individualised and bespoke to each client. However, this insight was only held by a minority in this research.

What did appear to be important was being a 'secure base' for these young women, as this was often discussed as being absent in their lives.

I think unfortunately when you've got young people like Katie who have been in care home after care home, you know, I was a horrible teenager to

my mother, but I knew she was never going to get rid of me, do you know what I mean? There was that underlying consistency, no matter how I acted I knew I was in a safe place and nothing awful was going to happen and I think for me, some girls not only do they move their care homes, but when they move care homes they start new schools, they have new friendship groups, and they struggle to re-establish themselves at every opportunity. And I think that's also a really hard one. And I think some girls have a tendency to be more emotional than boys, having to start that whole new peer group, new school thing, new staff, new care home. It's overwhelming.

– Participant 5

### Feeling protective

Because of the low numbers of female offenders in the criminal justice system, practitioners reported a desire to want to protect them not only from the system as a whole but also from the male offenders within the system.

I'm naturally protective of them, from the system generally. Like I don't like, the low-level girls I work with, I don't want them to come to our building... If they do, I am completely aware of the time so I can be downstairs and meeting them in reception, so they are not waiting in reception full of boys. And I make sure that similarly I walk them out to the door, so they don't have to do that walk of, not walk of shame, but you know what I mean, like walk through a room full of young men. – Participant 5

The quote above suggest that practitioners constructed an inherent vulnerability in 'low level' female offenders. They do not want to expose them to 'risks', such as engaging with entrenched male offenders. There is also a sense that simply being female means that these young offenders are more vulnerable, and this creates a desire within the practitioners to be more protective

For me you look at respect, you look at self-image, you look at how to look after yourself, you look at how not to be assaulted as a woman yourself, and sometimes I think you want to protect young women. – Participant 11

Again, sharing a gender allowed practitioners to identify with these young women. As is suggested being 'a woman yourself' included a construction of a shared experience of vulnerability, a shared risk 'of being assaulted' and a need to manage that. This finding is also consistent with Lanctot et al. (2012) who found that practitioners reported 'affinities' to clients of the same gender. Therefore, this identification of vulnerability created a feeling of wanting to protect girls and teach them how to protect themselves. However, fixed ideas of female vulnerability may not recognise individual differences, including strengths and resilience.

### **Emotional labour**

Not surprisingly, as practitioners identified feeling maternal and protective of female offenders from care, practitioners also reported that this work could include significant emotional labour:

There are numerous times when I go home with a case still troubling me. I'll be lying if I said I hadn't cried on occasion. – Participant 13

Practitioners also describe the emotional element of youth offending practice as labour and 'draining', especially when working with young people who are not ready to engage with safeguarding measures.

You are dealing with young people who, sometimes have come from quite traumatic situations and circumstances and sometimes trying to, you know, to work with young people when they are not in that stage of kind of wanting to be terribly receptive can be quite draining. – Participant 14

This can then lead practitioners to feeling 'helpless'.

That was the most helpless I have ever felt. And I kept thinking, I've had all this training and all this education and I can't help this girl. And so that was, that was when I felt that we didn't have adequate resources and hers was the saddest, because she was just getting it either way. On social media, on the neighbourhoods, they moved her out of area and she wasn't safe there and it was like this poor kid. It's like she had like a magnet because she was so vulnerable. It was like people could just sniff out the vulnerabilities and just, oh here is someone let's go do this to her. -Participant 15

As the practitioner above suggests, there is a sense that academic training and education for practitioners around understanding what is going on for young women is not going to protect staff from the emotional labour and sadness in the work. In addition, the feeling of helplessness is compounded by the lack of resources and the limits of what the service can offer.

Some practitioners constructed having to manage this emotional labour as being a part of the job.

It is very emotional, and then like me personally having all the emotion that goes on with a child being abused, raped this that the other, it all comes up. And these are all things that other people in society crumble under. Some people find it quite horrific, but we have to kind of like hold it, manage it. – Participant 16

This emotional labour is constructed as being something that needs to be managed in youth offending practice, with the suggestion that people not working in this field would ‘crumble under’ this pressure. The idea is that YOT work requires almost an unspoken sense of emotional resilience and strength, which for some practitioners was a source of professional pride as well as anxiety; they can ‘hold it, manage it’.

However, this emotional labour and the required resilience and strength to manage it is not an area of practice that has been traditionally recognised in criminal justice.

I think there certainly is an element of it kind of being unprofessional to care too much about a case or for it to affect you or there’ll be an element of weakness if you are upset, which I don’t know if that is a bit of a British thing as well. But I think we are probably in youth offending across the board starting to understand a bit more maybe about vicarious trauma and the impact it can have. It is probably changing, in the process of changing. – Participant 13

This suggestion that criminal justice practice is traditionally a rational thinking/emotion free space. Additionally, this practitioner also suggested that the British cultural code of having a stiff upper lip may compound a lack of

acknowledgement of the emotional labour of practice. However, as this quotation also suggests, there appears to be an increased understanding of the impact of vicarious trauma within the youth offending service and this could indicate a change for the future.

Practitioners also reported that maintaining hope for the future of their female clients from care allowed them to manage the emotional labour with a positive outlook. This was defined as a 'choice' as indicated below.

My hope is that something will click and she'll, that she will take on board or she'll get interested enough in her life and the possibilities that she has, that she can have, and she'd go for it. But if things remain the same then I would suspect that she would probably have maybe a couple of kids, maybe a few abortions along the way and quite possibly with very little qualifications or education. Yeah, I can choose to believe, I am choosing to believe and to hope, just trying to keep hope that someone, that wherever she wound up that there was someone who could connect with her and maybe mentor her, support her. – Participant 15

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined how youth offending workers made sense of meeting welfare needs, managing vulnerability and mitigating risk of offending in their practice with female offenders from care- and maintained a feeling of hope. It has examined how practitioners considered meeting welfare needs as either being one and the same as offender behaviour work, or as being separate and better undertaken by other agencies but still the foundation for offending behaviour work. It has also explored how achieving this balance of welfare, vulnerability and risk is considered by practitioners when providing support on emotional wellbeing and mental health and when mitigating risk of child sexual exploitation. Both these areas were commonly experienced as dominating youth offending practice with girls from care. Practitioners described complexities in working with disclosed and undisclosed trauma, balancing vulnerability born out of feelings of low self-worth and a desire to be loved and dealing with professional dilemmas around agency and



risk taking. Finally, the chapter has explored professionals' experience of anxiety and the emotional labour that is invested in this work and how unconscious ideas of gender can influence this.

The following chapter will explore how youth offending practitioners experience multiagency work with female offenders from care. It will explore how practitioners construct their role as the youth offending service in relation to wider social care and criminal justice organisations. In addition, it will examine how corporate parental responsibilities for female offenders in care are considered, who becomes responsible for what and the importance of communication.

# Chapter Seven: Multi-Agency Working: Roles, Relationships and Perceptions

## Introduction

Despite being managed by the Youth Justice Board (YJB), where the Youth Offending Service (YOS) sits in local government is inconsistent across England. Some local authorities place the YOS under children's services whereas in other local authorities the YOS stands alone. Similarly, some youth offending teams are co-located with children's services, whereas others are not. This adds to the uncertainty about the priorities of the YOS, whether the work they do should focus on welfare or justice or both and their place in the multi-agency network

When working with female offenders in care, youth offending officers will be required to work alongside children's services. This will include the children's services social worker and either foster carers or residential care staff. However, the cases practitioners discussed in this study were overwhelmingly of girls who were in residential care. In addition to this, depending on the needs of the young women and if they are willing to engage with other services, the YOT worker may be required to work alongside child and adolescent mental health services, substance misuse services, health services, education and employment services and possibly, if the offending continues, the wider criminal justice system such as police, courts and probation services. For female offenders in care this range of agencies often includes working with safeguarding services regarding risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), such as the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). The MASH aims to improve safeguarding outcomes for children and vulnerable adults and consists of a team made up professionals from local authority services, such as children's services, the police, health services and probation services (Home Office, 2014). The importance of effective multiagency practice when working with complex needs is established in the literature (see Umamaheswar, 2012; Marshall,

2013; Pearce, 2016; Haqrnee et.al. 2015; Frost et.al., 2005; Frost and Robinson, 2012).

Practitioners in this research reported that their experience of positive 'joined up' working with other organisations was often dependent on having good communication, effective information sharing and having clarity about the role of each service involved and their professional responsibilities. Building these partnerships allowed the youth offending officer to complete their work with greater ease. Having strong communication and access to information also assisted in building relationships with young women. As discussed in the first findings chapter, these relationships with female offenders in care are considered essential to impactful youth offending practice. Hence, although having positive partnerships with other services is considered beneficial to work with all young offenders in care, it is crucial to work with female offenders in care. Furthermore, practitioners also described that when organisations were 'on the same page' this provided a secure base for these young women.

This chapter is divided into four sections and will examine the experiences of interagency working from youth offending practitioners' perspectives. The first section explores the role of communication and information sharing. It outlines the difficulties practitioners experience in achieving effective communication and highlights practical elements in overcoming these difficulties. The second section examines how practitioners experience different professional approaches in managing and responding to challenging behaviours within the multi-agency network and considers the impact on joined up working. It also explores the inconsistencies of the expectation of different agencies in the professional network.

The third section considers how the youth offending practitioners position their role within the multi-agency network as advocates in reducing the criminalisation of girls in residential care, and as mediators in assisting young women build relationships with children services professionals. The final section highlights practitioners experiences of effective multi-agency work and elements of successful working and considers how this can benefit female offenders in care and themselves as professionals.

## **I. Communication and information sharing**

Practitioners reported that communication and information sharing with children's services was essential for positive practice and female offenders in care were considered to require more intensive multi-agency work than their male counterparts. This was linked to the girls being perceived by professionals as vulnerable and at higher risk of harm. For example, practitioners in this research reported that the vast majority of female offenders in care were considered at risk of CSE, and therefore this particular group of young offenders would be more likely to be case managed by a wider multi-agency care team, such as the MASH.

Therefore, effective communication with other agencies was significant to work with female offenders in care. Furthermore, the needs of female offenders in care can change rapidly and therefore so should the roles of the network of professionals around them. As a result, practitioners reported that communication becomes extremely important to ensure the support being provided is appropriate and relevant for their particular young person and their individual needs at any given time. However, Walsh and Jagers (2017) argue that due to the seemingly distinct priorities of children's services and youth offending service, effective communication can be tricky to navigate.

This section is broken down into two subsections. The first subsection will outline in greater detail why practitioners consider communication essential to their individual work and for joined up working. This will highlight the role effective communication plays in case preparation, worker safety and engagement and continuity of care. The following subsection will explore experiences of positive communication and discuss the strategies youth offending practitioners employ to achieve this. This will highlight the role of co-location, shared database and continuity of staff.

### **Why communication is considered important**

**Communication between professionals is important for case preparation**  
Practitioners in this research reported that clear and detailed communication was important for their work regarding case preparation. Having an understanding of

their care history prior to meeting the girls was considered good practice, however being able to access this was dependent on information sharing and effective communication. As discussed in the earlier chapter on relationship building, this information was important to youth offending workers for their individual practice, particularly in the early stages. Having this information meant that the girls did not have to retell their history. When cases are within their local area youth offending officers are able to access social care data bases to gather this information. But for cases that are originally from a different local authority the youth offending worker is solely dependent on having direct communication with the children's social worker.

If it's [home area] we can see the social care systems, computerised system, so then we can read and see the gist of what's going on. But if it were out of area you are so reliant on that social worker to call you and speak to you and to kind of get that information, that background. – Participant 3

Being reliant on direct communication with the children's social worker when communication is difficult can be experienced as frustrating for the youth offending officer. This may create feelings of frustration when working with the case overall and may also lead to a split in the professional network. It can also be argued that the girls that are being placed out of their local area are more likely to be considered significantly vulnerable. The practice of moving girls to residential care homes out of area is often considered a safeguarding measure, particularly for girls considered at risk of CSE. Therefore, effective communication becomes even more crucial.

#### **Communication is important for worker safety and engagement**

Information sharing was also highlighted as being important to the safety of the YOT worker themselves. Furthermore, poor communication, particularly in relation to information sharing, can have a direct impact on the young person's engagement with the YOT and the work they do within the sessions. For example, practitioners reported that when a young person is in residential care it is helpful for the residential care staff to inform the youth offending worker prior to their session if there have been any recent incidences which may impact on their engagement.

Certainly some of the preparation work and the risk management to begin with I think, you know, this is a girl that is using violence to show people that they couldn't get in or she wasn't going to work with them, so talking to staff at the residential home, finding out what had worked with her and what was likely to be a trigger was really important in setting up that first visit. – Participant 8

As discussed in the previous findings chapter on relationship building, youth offending workers were aware of not wanting to trigger or further distress the young women they were working with. In order to do this, they require knowledge of not only the young women's history but also any recent incidences, such as recent contact with their birth family, which may have been particularly difficult. At the early stages of the professional relationship it is essential that the practitioner navigate these interactions as this is when the young women are assessing if they can trust their YOT worker and work with them.

#### **Communication is important for continuity of care**

From a wider perspective, practitioners also believed that it was important for the children's social worker to know what they are focusing on in their sessions with the girls and vice versa. This enabled them to provide continuity of care to these girls. However, not being in communication with children's social workers made this very difficult.

I've worked with a girl recently that I, until the day that I closed her the social worker still didn't get back to me, and that was for a good few months. So she'd probably never know what we actually did with that girl unless she asked her. – Participant 3

The subtext in the example above suggests that having this information was not considered as important to the children's social worker and therefore furthers the practitioner's perception that youth offending work is not considered important to social care. Whereas youth offending practitioners felt having an understanding of the work the children's social worker was doing was central to their work and reflective of good practice.

For example, youth offending workers noted that it was important to know if there was ongoing work being done with the birth family and what the future plans were, such as plans for reunification:

It can be quite challenging to actually make contact with social worker and actually sort of find out the work that they are doing with young people and you know, it sometimes seems that they kind of see our young person but I don't actually know what they do with them, and like with the family as well, you know? They sort of... the plan is for a lot of young people to be, you know, returned home who have been in care but actually the families need a lot of work done before that happens which I don't think is done. But yeah, it's very different, I mean, obviously in this area resources are limited and you know social workers caseloads are huge and it sometimes is difficult to be able to have that sort of regular communication... But it is often instigated by us, I feel. – Participant 17

The account above recognises the pressure that children's social workers are under with high case loads and limited resources, however they also question the ethics of the care being provided. Open communication was also described by many practitioners in this project as being prompted by the youth offending service and therefore prioritised primarily in their practice only.

Not having knowledge of the work the children's social workers are doing with girls from care, or indeed feeling that they are not being provided adequate care, may provide insight into why practitioners do the 'welfare work' even if they don't believe the YOS are the most appropriate service to address this, as outlined in the previous chapter.

## How good communication is achieved

### Co-location of services

One of the main structural issues practitioners identified as making a difference to communication was the co-location of children's services and the youth offending service. This meant having access to other professionals who shared the same

building. In the following excerpt the practitioner was able to compare the experience of working with the same services prior to and post sharing a building with children's services.

I have noticed a difference in that we are based in the same building and I think that has real positives to it. We are a lot more accessible to one another rather than relying on email and voicemails. - Participant 14

When services did not share the same building attending regular meetings became all the more important for youth offending practitioners. These meetings created a shared space where concerns could be raised, questions could be asked and all professionals could be 'on the same page'. By not having these professional meetings, youth offending workers felt this could risk support becoming compartmentalised, conflicting or repetitive. Having this shared space also allowed for limited resources to be used more effectively, support provided to be more holistic and the response by multiple agencies to be better coordinated.

We do have strong communication with the changing network. We have certainly been invited to LAC reviews and professionals meetings, so it's good to have that space to share our thoughts and make sure we are not all working in a vacuum and trying to do the same or completely conflicting things with her. – Participant 8

In contrast to face-to-face contact, practitioners reported that the delays in contact via phone or email often made providing holistic support more difficult.

### Shared database

Not only did co-locating allow for professionals to be more accessible to one another but using the same database and co-locating 'online' also provided access to information required for effective youth offending practice.

If we could have the same IT, the same data base and include education in there that would be really good because we spend half of our life trying to chase around for different bits of information. – Participant 8



This barrier to effective communication specifically impacts work with girls who are placed in the area from a different local authority.

Kids in care in particular tend to be from other areas and we have got no access to their data base system which makes things very difficult. I have a phone call about a transfer in case for a kid that is in another borough and I have left 4 messages for the social worker to try and find out where this kid is, where they are going, what services are involved, but again there has been no response to that. – Participant 4

As discussed, this is more likely to impact female offenders in care due to them being perceived as highly vulnerable and at often at risk of CSE. Hence, because the data bases used are not nationally regulated nor accessible, practitioners working with these girls are solely dependent on telephone or email communication with professionals that they do not have an established relationship with.

#### **Having continuity of staff**

Practitioners reported that having a high turnover of staff can impact on the effectiveness of communication with the multi-agency team. As discussed in the previous chapter, it can be difficult for female offenders in care to build relationships with their social worker if they have changed multiple times. Similarly, it can be difficult for youth offending workers to build professional partnerships with social workers who are changed multiple times.

I've worked with some placements where I've never spoken to the same person twice...We let the young person know about their appointments but we also send a letter to let the staff know at placement, but they might not have reminded them, but they need to be reminded, you know and we keep saying that. – Participant 3

By the staff member in the excerpt above not reminding this young woman of her appointment with the YOS, the subtext is that residential care either do not consider this appointment important or they do not consider reminding the girl of their appointment as their responsibility. However, it is clear that this practitioner does consider it the responsibility of residential care to remind this girl of her YOS

appointment, which highlights a difference in how this practitioner feels this girl should be cared for and what the responsibility is of social care and how the residential care staff are thought to perceive this.

## **II. Mismatched expectations: differences in managing female offenders in care**

Compounding the importance of communication and information sharing, practitioners in this research experienced a difference in how they felt the YOS and social care approached challenging behaviour displayed by female offenders in care. Although the youth offending services were considered the expert regarding offending behaviour, practitioners perceived social care - in particular residential care - as expecting the YOS role to be much more punitive in practice and not to concern itself with the welfare needs of the young women they were working with. On the other hand, practitioners in this project often expressed concern that social care – again, residential care in particular - were being too punitive and that their boundaries were too inflexible. This clash in how challenging behaviour is managed, how welfare and offending needs were understood as interacting and the expectation that each service had of one another had a direct influence on the professional partnership.

This section explores in greater detail how these different expectations impact on experiences of joined up working. This section is broken down into five subsections which explore the lack of understanding of the YOS role, how practitioners manage this lack of understanding, the impact of mismatched expectations, the role of court and the YOS expectation of the corporate parent role.

### **Lack of understanding of the YOS role**

Practitioners reported that working within a multi-agency setting was often complicated by what they believed as social care not having a complete understanding of the youth offending role. This complication around different roles in multiagency setting is consistent with findings from Frost et.al. (2005). There was an assumption that children's social workers and residential care workers presumed the role of the YOS was strictly related to offending behaviours and the criminal

justice process. However, as discussed in earlier chapters, youth offending practitioners often consider their role as being much more affiliated with welfare work. Hence, when practitioners discussed their experience of social care not understanding the depth of their role this expectation was often referred to:

It's hard because I think social workers don't necessarily, social care don't necessarily know what YOT do. They know we are there; they know that we get involved when the kids are kind of like taken to court or whatever, but I don't think they really know what we do... I wouldn't say it's always really hard, but it sometimes is hard, it is difficult. I think it's because they don't know what we do. – Participant 3

Without the understanding of the welfare element of youth offending practice, practitioners felt they could be left out of meetings related to welfare needs and communication with them around these areas was not considered a priority. As discussed in the previous two chapters, the practitioners in this research felt that they were doing *significant* welfare work, so to be excluded from meetings related to the welfare needs of the girls they were working with risked the support being provided becoming disjointed.

Additionally, with a lack of clarification of role, which service is responsible for what regarding the corporate parenting role can also become unclear:

I think it would be of benefit if it was joint social care and youth offending teams' kind of find out what each other do. And actually, know what happens and whose responsibility it is to do what. I've had social workers who have said oh well if they are in court with you I haven't got to turn up, have I? Well actually yeah, because you need to be an appropriate adult, but they are like, well no aren't you that? And so they don't understand that if they are there for breach we can't be that appropriate adult because we are there breaching them, we are not there being their appropriate adult. And they might think, oh well they are in court their YOT worker will take them, but no it's not our responsibility. It's still social care's responsibility to support them to go to court, any court. – Participant 3

Who is responsible for what regarding the corporate parenting role is also linked to ideas around professional identity. For example, drawing from a heteronormative traditional lens, practitioners' accounts suggest that social care ascribe the YOS the paternalistic, disciplinary parenting role, whereas a maternal, nurturing role remains within the remit of social care. However, as these chapters have pointed out, this is in contrast with how youth offending practitioners construct their professional identity and undertake their role, particularly with girls in care.

Similarly, the YOS practitioners also consider their professional role as advocates for girls when they are not receiving the level of support from the state that the practitioner believes they are entitled to. This will be discussed in greater length in a later section.

### **Educating social services**

In order to manage this perceived lack of understanding of the welfare element of the youth offending role, practitioners accounts suggest that they have learnt to be proactive in organising meetings early on with the girl's case worker, ensuring that they introduce themselves and inform the worker of their role, the expectation of the service and remind the residential care home staff to include them within the weekly updates.

If I as a YOT worker contact the unit, let the unit know, tell the unit what the expectations are and even invite the unit into our planning meeting so I make sure the key worker brings that young person, then I find that after that I find that the liaison between us is really good. The communication is there, they are part of it from the beginning, what we are doing is on their plan for the week and what they're doing is on our plan and vice versa. –

Participant 16

Working in partnership is experienced as being a priority for youth offending practitioners but they have concerns that it is not necessarily a priority of residential care staff. In these cases, the practitioner is required to encourage - in this example residential care - to involve the YOS in planning meetings etc. Again, this was often reported as being the result of other services not having a clear

understanding of extent of what the YOS do, particularly in relation to welfare. Although the subsequent outcome of being proactive is often positive, pushing for this professional education does create extra work for the practitioner:

What I would generally do at the beginning of working with a young person in a residential placement would be I would ask that they copy me into any kind of weekly report to the social worker, but I don't know if they just view us differently or they just don't think that it's maybe as important but I do, I don't really think we get told a lot of information unless we directly ask for it. And that kind of goes across all, most of the care homes really, that I've worked with. – Participant 2

The idea of being 'viewed differently' plays into practitioners concerns that social care consider the YOS role as only being related to offending behaviours and simply supervising the criminal order and that they are not 'as important' as the other services involved. However, this is in direct contrast to how the practitioners in this research view their role. Practitioners often positioned themselves as the professional who has the most significant contact with female offenders in care, and therefore arguably one of the most important professionals in the young person's life. Hence, feeling that one has the most significant contact with the young person, yet treated as the most insignificant professional can cause frustration and create splits with the professional network.

When social care are perceived as understanding the role of the YOS, services are reported to work really well together and this was discussed in accounts as a strength within the professional partnerships. However, this was not something that was consistent across local authorities but rather usually due to individual social workers having more exposure to the YOS thorough case managing young people involved with youth offending team for some time.

I think the ones who you work with and who understand the role of the YOS, and the benefits of working in partnership with us is great. And those ones are usually ones whose young people have been in the criminal justice

system for a long time. Otherwise, I mean they actually ignore us a lot of the time. – Participant 16

Without having clear role clarification and an understanding of how the YOS link addressing welfare needs and offending work, other services may have expectations of how they believe the youth offending team should be working with female offenders in care. This can lead to clashes within the professional team, particularly in relation to the balance between ideas such as teaching consequences of behaviours and taking into account circumstances.

### **Mismatched expectations**

Practitioners reported that they felt that social care and residential care often had an expectation that the youth offending team would be strict and inflexible with young people when it came to the conditions of their order. However, as discussed in the previous two chapters, in practice youth offending workers are much more flexible and able to respond to the young women and their welfare needs and make allowances for these.

I don't think she [the young person] really saw the importance of her referral order and compliance really, but because of her difficulties I suppose we made allowances for that really. But that caused some problems because, things like, she refused to do the reparation as a part of her referral order so after a lot of discussions with my manager it was thought that that would make, it would perhaps make things too difficult for her. So, the decision was she didn't have to do her reparation, but the care staff that were at the home felt that we were just letting her get away with things. So that caused some difficulties I guess between the working relationships. They felt that she wasn't learning, but we felt that we were kind of making the whole... it was more traumatic really, for her by trying to force her to do something that she really didn't want to... but then some of the care staff the key workers said that then she wasn't learning the importance of consequences. – Participant 12

The expectation of the YOS being involved to teach female offenders the consequences of their behaviour further suggest that their role is constructed by residential care as disciplinary. When youth offending workers respond to poor behaviour in a more understanding manner, this can be interpreted by residential care staff as allowing young people to 'get away with things' and doing the young person a disservice.

Compounding this the practitioners often defined the YOS as more understanding and more empathetic in their approach. Whereas, in some cases they positioned residential care as the service who are much more punitive and 'unfair':

I had a situation at the beginning of this year with a care home and their ways of handling stuff was very, very punitive and it got quite messy in the end. From what the young lady was telling me... The care home were accusing her of having her phone, they had a no phone policy in their house so therefore until she admitted she had the phone she was not allowed to watch TV with them, she was not allowed to join in with take away food on Saturday night, she was not allowed to go out to the gym, she was not allowed to go out to any clubs. It was just really over the top. The young person was saying 'I don't have a phone so I am unable to give it back' and the care home were going to carry it on until she provided the phone. So, you have a bit of a stalemate situation... there was no time limit on this and so it was a case of it would be forever until you hand the phone in. I just thought that was just quite wrong and then the care staff accused myself and the other social worker of colluding with the young person and it just became quite messy... at the moments she's having to make herself something in the kitchen while everyone else is sitting having pizza and to me that is just cruel. – Participant 4

The account above provides an example of professionals in the network being split due to different professional approaches towards the management of poor behaviour. In this case, the residential care home staff accused the youth offending worker and the children's social worker as colluding with the young person. Whereas the youth offending working described the management of this female

offender as 'cruel'. This split in the professional body can make joined up working tricky to achieve and understanding welfare and offending behaviours as two separate issues can also create a different response to the young offender:

they [residential care] kind of felt like well this isn't welfare, this is her, she is difficult this is like an offending need and I can't really see the two in isolation. – Participant 9

Practitioners' accounts suggest that they see their practice as considerate and empathetic in their understanding of the interaction of welfare and offending. As a result, they professionally align themselves more closely to the female offender in care. That is, they become the professional who 'understands' the young person, rather than 'blaming' them. Positioning themselves in this dynamic can also confirm the relationship that they have built with them. This also suggests that the behaviour of the young women is being constructed differently between the YOS and children's services. This difference informs interventions and therefore will impact on multiagency practice (McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016).

Practitioners also held expectations around the kind of support they felt the girls they were working with were entitled to. For example, many accounts suggested that working with girls who were traumatised required professional training and at minimum an understanding of this impact of this trauma. Practitioners in this research often identified themselves as having this understanding and the residential care home staff as lacking it, as evidenced in the following example:

I haven't met one that I would say that I would want my child to go into. Again it is not that they are intentionally being unhelpful, but I don't know what qualifications you necessarily need to work in a residential home, but if it is the, you know if you are just pulling people off the street because you need a babysitter to watch with the girls... I think that the key workers that are in there that make up the staff they need training and they need to learn about you know, this is what trauma looks like, this is what post-traumatic stress looks like, this is how, you know, what do you know about the autism spectrum, what do you know about how to interact because as soon as, you



know how do you deescalate a situation, do you stand... I've witnessed folks standing up arguing with the kids and it's like well, that is not really helpful and as soon as the guy snaps you want to call the police on them. And so, I would say that training, skills upskilling, because the key workers I believe are the ones that have the main, the majority or they are supposed to have the majority of contact with the young people but they seem to be the ones with the least training. – Participant 15

Using language such as 'babysitting' also suggests that youth offending workers construct residential care staff in a supervisory role, without any deeper understanding of how to manage and work with children with complex needs. This also highlights the value that this practitioner places on the impact of trauma but also separates her from the residential staff. She is the one who she considered to have this understanding and the residential care home staff do not. Hence, this creates an interesting paradox as the traditional roles of each service are perceived to be flipped. In this case it is the YOS who are constructed as the welfare focused service and residential care are constructed as the service that is more akin to traditional criminal justice with its supervisory focus.

### The role of the court

Responding to female offenders in care with a welfare or punitive response is further complicated by the court system which practitioners report often draws on gender stereotypes when sentencing. Similar to Heidensohn (1985) double deviance theory practitioners in this research felt that the court's perceived expectation of gendered behaviour, practitioners suggested that female offenders received sentences which were either much harsher or more lenient when compared to their male counterparts:

My long-term experience in the whole criminal justice system has been that they [the courts] either feel really sorry for them and don't give them anywhere near the level of intervention they need, or they really over egg it because they are girls that are doing something bad. I do think there is a difference in the [adult] courts and I think that on the whole men are bad, if a woman does that same thing she is even worse because she should be

nurturing and loving and I do think that filters through to young girls. I think courts are quite shocked if a female behaves the same way as a young male often behaves. If they read that a girl has you know used really foul language or specifically assaulted another person, I think they find that difficult. More difficult than they do with boys. – Participant 10

In addition to this, practitioners felt that female offenders also tend to receive longer sentences ostensibly for their protection due to their perceived vulnerability. This is also consistent with Phoenix (2018) theory of oppressive welfarism and was not something that was experienced when working with male offenders (also see Gelsthorpe and Worrall, 2009; Harrison and Sanders, 2006; Dobson, 2011; Phoenix, 2012; Brown, 2014).

There was this young lady in court not too long ago who was heavily pregnant and the solicitor harped on about her pregnancy so much so that the judge gave her the full whack. Now, had he just shut up and just let her go like he would have a guy, she would have likely got a lesser, lesser thing. It sounds really crazy, doesn't it...because he kept using her pregnancy and all of that as justification so the judge said 'ok, well she has got all that drama going on maybe she needs a longer sentence, more time for the YOT to take care of her', stamp, stamp... she ended up getting a longer sentence for her welfare. – Participant 16

Giving female offenders longer sentences as a result of their perceived vulnerability suggests that the court conceptualise the YOS as being a protective, welfare focused service for girls who offend. As discussed above, this is different to how practitioners experience the expectations of their practice by social care and residential care. That is, practitioners feel that social care and residential care see them as an arm of the law who are there to enforce the conditions of the order and teach young women consequences of behaviour.

#### YOS expectation of the corporate parent

Practitioners in this research often refer to their own expectation of the type of care that they believed female offenders in care were entitled to and suggest that

residential care homes should replicate a family home. When practitioners described care homes they felt achieved this they describe them using language such as 'genuine', 'warm', 'nurturing' and 'caring'.

The care home that this young person is in now is absolutely brilliant. I can't sing their praises enough. I mean you go in and it feels like a home. Whereas some units you can go into and it doesn't, bearing in mind these are these young people's homes, it doesn't feel like a home. The staff in there are just really good. They challenge appropriately and they seem to really care. There is a genuine vibe about it, whereas I am not sure I have experienced that consistently across all residential units...some it can appear, you know it's my job, whereas this one that I am talking about is a real nurturing, warm environment. – Participant 14

The critique of some care home staff who give the impression that this is just a 'job' for them suggests that what practitioners feel can make a difference is how invested residential staff are in the young people. Unfortunately, the majority of practitioners reported that they felt most of the care homes did not replicate a family home and described these homes as being clinical, with a clear distinction between staff and young people, without an emotional investment.

From my experiences anyway of going into supported accommodation and children's homes or whatever you know, it doesn't often replicate a home... I've seen young people who have been in a care home and they've had to knock at the office door, the office door is always shut. So they've got to knock and wait for a staff member to come out so they can talk to them, and you know. I just kind of, I struggle sometimes because I think actually, you know ultimately we are supposed to be offering these children, you know this is their home, this is where they should feel that actually people are available all the time and you know, I get that there needs to be places where confidential information is held that the children can't readily go and use, but for all the staff to be stuck in an office and for the door to be shut, that to me doesn't suggest that there is an open policy where children can,

you know, come and approach an adult as and when they need to. –

Participant 4

The account above refers not only to the physical space of the home but also to how the practitioner interprets the attitudes of the residential care staff and if they consider them as approachable for the young people. That is, as described above and in the earlier excerpt, practitioners considered it problematic for residential care staff to present as ‘just doing a job’ without displaying any personal investment in the young person. However, in the following example the practitioner discusses the complexities for care staff in managing this professional/personal binary.

I think they quite like the girl and I think they have a good relationship with her and think they are quite happy for her to be there... I don't think they are actively discouraging her from making those moves to go home but I don't know if they are supporting as they should be, because it, she is a nice young person to have in that environment, they have done a lot of work with her. And sometimes you see people being sort of more motherly than perhaps they should and I think that is really a hard line to draw, isn't it? When you are going to have a relationship with somebody because you are seeing such a lot of them for such a long period of time I think it is important to make that distinction between parent and professional. And not try and replace the parent. – Participant 10

This account suggest that these residential staff have become overly attached to the young woman and were not maintaining boundaries between their personal (parent) and professional role. Interestingly, however as discussed in the previous chapter, practitioners describe feeling maternal in accounts of their own practice and that they consider the girls in need of maternal care. This critique also contrasts the expectations that practitioners have of the care home being like a family home and the staff being able to provide care like a parent would.

I feel like that quite often they are neglectful. I find myself being frustrated all the time because I think if you are in care you should be cared for like your parents would care for you. –Participant 9

What is often not acknowledged is the difference between the services provided. For example, residential care staff are responsible for multiple children who all come from troubled backgrounds and are most likely to have complex needs.

Although not many practitioners had experienced working with female offenders in foster care, those who did were able to provide a comparison to residential care. These accounts spoke positively about foster care and described the foster families as providing appropriate boundaries and being invested in the young person, giving them time and genuinely wanting them ‘to have a good life and do well’.

Adele is in a foster placement and they are an outstanding foster placement. And Adele knows that and she is quite grateful that they have taken her back and that they are working with her despite some of her behaviour, but they have got a real, real good relationship. They are just particularly good with teenage girls I think. They have got boundaries which she needs more than anything, and they have expectations of her and I think they have quite clear outcomes for her positive behaviours but also they are, they are emotionally involved with her and she doesn't like disappointing them knowing they have got her back so much. So I think they have got that edge that if she does behave in a way that she is expected not to, that leads to disappointment and she doesn't want them to be disappointed. So, I suppose that is more of a parent relationship... They think a lot of her and that goes a long way with her. They genuinely want her to have a positive life and do well. – Participant 10

Given that practitioners in this research place a lot of emphasis on the importance of relationships when working with female offenders from care, having staff or foster carers who are also invested in the young person may be constructed as more likely to have a positive outcome for the young women themselves. How this differs to the previous account which was critical of residential care staff for being

too maternal appears to be what the practitioners consider as the intentions behind the relationship. In the previous example, having a maternal relationship with the girl in residential care was framed as benefiting the care home by 'holding onto her' and not considering or working towards reunification with her birth family. Contrasting this, in the above example, this practitioner repeatedly discuss how the foster carers wanted what was best for Adele. Adele is described as invested in the relationship and is reported as 'not wanting to disappoint' her foster family, which adds further credence to practitioners' suggestion in this research that positive relationships are essential to effective work with female offenders in care.

However, practitioners report that if female offenders in foster care does not feel that they are being treated as an equal member of the family this can damage the relationship and trigger experiences of rejection:

The girls I work with especially can get quite upset about the way they perceive foster carer treat them differently to other young people, say other foster children or their own children in the home. – Participant 8

Although foster carers may be able to offer a family home and a more parent-like relationship, they are not void of issues with the personal/professional binary. That is, foster carers can face difficulties due to the imposition on their private life, which is not something that residential care homes need to consider:

The ones that have been problematic is like we will maybe share some cursory information at meetings but it can be difficult to get hold of them otherwise. Or they seem to be a bit perturbed about if we want to get an update because I guess that's where it gets a bit clunky, they might have social workers who want an update and then something happened and everyone wants to talk to them, and I think it probably feels like a bit more of an imposition into their personal life, you know, if a young person is going missing from home and the police are knocking on their door every single night. – Participant 8

As discussed in the earlier chapter on building relationships, youth offending practice with female offenders in care involves finding the balance between professional and personal. As this section has highlighted, youth offending workers consider this balance as also impacting on care provided by residential care and foster care.

### III. How YOS make sense of their own role in a multi-agency setting

This section will examine how practitioners themselves consider the YOS role within the multi-agency network when working with female offenders in care. It is broken down into two subsections which include the YOS and an advocate and the YOS as a mediator.

#### YOS as an advocate: reducing the criminalisation of young people in care homes

Concerns about the criminalisation of young women in care for offences that would not be considered an offence in the family home influenced how practitioners made sense of their role within the professional network. This concern is supported in the literature (see Darker, et al. 2008; O'Neill, 2001; Shaw, 2015; Taylor, 2003; Staines, 2017; Ryan et al. 2010; Goodkind et al. 2012; Malvaso and Delfabbro, 2015).

As opposed to the focus of the intervention being on the individual girl and reducing her offending behaviours, these practitioners took a more systemic approach and explored mediation and conflict resolution with care home staff. Because the criminalisation of female offenders in care was conceptualised as unnecessary, practitioners also described feeling frustrated. This suggested a further split between the professionals network as the criminalisation of girls in care homes was often described as unjust:

It can be frustrating in terms of care home offending, as well I think. There's sort of one particular place where a lot of the young people who live there have come through in relation to fairly minor or petty offences which, had

they have been committed in a family home probably they would have been dealt with differently. And for me I find it quite frustrating that young people can be criminalised because of that. And particularly in relation to their sort of care circumstances, and why they are there in the first place. That being said, I'm not saying that care workers should expect to be assaulted or anything like that but I just wonder whether things could be handled differently. I know that our restorative justice team have offered to go into a care home locally and deliver sort of restorative justice training to them, to help kind of improve, you know, conflict resolution, and that kind of thing. Some places have taken that up, other places haven't and that can be quite difficult. – Participant 2

The frustration practitioners report appears to be related to how the care home manages the behaviour of these young women and what they consider as a lack of empathy, or consideration for their experiences. The example below also suggests that the police and the wider criminal justice system are being used as tools by residential care staff to manage poor behaviour. As the youth offending service are considered part of the wider criminal justice system, this may offer insight into why residential care staff may expect the YOS to act in a disciplinary role, and how this may cause conflict when the YOS response is more welfare focused:

I don't think it is ok for kids to offend in the home, even if that is a care home I don't think that is ok, but we do quite often see placements using the police as sort of behaviour management tools as opposed to managing behaviours and then young people getting criminalised for behaviours in the home that they may not have done if they were in their own home or if they were being managed more appropriately. It is quite frustrating for us to have kids repeatedly arrested for criminal damage, when they are having a tantrum in their home and something gets broken. That is quite frustrating because that could be worked with outside of that criminal justice system, and should be I think. – Participant 10

Practitioners also offered critical commentary on the care homes' response to poor behaviour by moving young women to different areas. Despite noting that the girls



in these situations were not easy cases to work with, YOS practitioners still described moving female offenders because of their poor behaviour as counterproductive to reducing offending in care homes.

It was exactly the same with her, frustrated smashing up her care home, moved. Repeat cycle, ended up with I think 8 convictions in 6 months, all within the care home. And it just, well actually this is not ok, leave it another 6 or 8 months and what is going, we are going to have a child in care coming out with 20 convictions! That is absolutely horrendous. But I think, from my experience of social care is that, that I think they try, then it fails and then they move and there is like almost like they think a miracle is going to happen at some point. – Participant 9

However, although from a youth offending perspective moving young people for poor behaviour in a care home appears problematic, it is important to recognise that the residential care home is responsible not only for this particular young person but also for the safety of the other young people within the home and their staff. Practitioners do recognise this, sympathise with residential staff members and do not condone violence. However they also advocate for a more understanding, trauma focused approach to working with young offenders in care.

I think there needs to be a real look at how many of these young people need to be criminalised for their behaviours really in the first place. I think there is a lot of young people in care who come to the court, you know, as a result of emotional trauma that they have responded in that way in the first place and so actually it's not right to start criminalising them for that. I kind of think there needs to be more in the way of significant therapeutic support that can be offered to them, you know, whether that be for 6 months or whatever but a decent piece of time that gives them the opportunity to build up a relationship with somebody who is separate from the care home and family who can actually from a psychotherapy type point of view work through some of the trauma based issues with those young people...a lot of children in care haven't had... haven't had that consistency and opportunity to build attachments which is naturally going to affect how

they respond to situations in the future. I think that if we can really get that right I think we will see a significant reduction in young people who end up being convicted of offending and who end up coming to court.

– Participant 4

The above example may also be reflective of the importance youth offending workers place on building relationships with female offenders in care, assisting them in developing healthy attachments, but also getting therapeutic help. It also again highlights the tension in criminal justice between welfare and justice.

#### **YOS as a mediator: Helping build relationships between young person and social care**

As discussed in an earlier chapter, practitioners in this research prioritise building relationships with female offenders in care. However, achieving this was thought to be much more difficult for the children's social worker due to the high caseloads and frequent staff turnover:

Due to the work load for social workers, it can feel a bit time limited, they are less able to build that relationship, which isn't true of every social worker, but a lot of the time we end up being a bit like good cop bad cop in a way. Because we are the ones that have the time to spend with young people and to take them to various appointment and to do that following up things whereas social workers are almost more like care coordinators nowadays. They are kind of looking for the placements, they are making sure the assessments are done on time. But in my experience, especially recently it has turned into a bit more of a factory line than a relationship-based service. – Participant 8

The use of the phrase 'good cop/bad cop' when referring to the YOS and social care is a further example of traditional roles being flipped, which is consistent with Shaw's (2012) research. The youth offending workers perceive their role as being the nurturing, understanding and empathetic 'good cop' whereas the social worker is conceptualised as lacking a relationship with the young person, being absent, distant and the less involved 'bad cop'. The above account also suggests that

children's social workers are unable to prioritise relationships and that the service is much more comparable to 'care coordinators'. Because of this distinction practitioners also conceptualise their role in some cases as assisting in improving the relationship between the female offender and their social worker.

The following extract picks up on this and suggest the YOS role includes supporting the girls in accessing their social worker and building a relationship with them:

I think sometimes kids in care need more, they need you more as an advocate. I'm trying to think, I've worked with quite a few kids, lots of young girls in care who have felt because their social workers are so far away they don't answer the phone. I think, it's kind of like, well you are safe you're out, you know you are out of London, or up in the sticks, nothing is going to happen, and so you are no longer a priority. And I think they are acutely aware of that. And if they try and call their social worker they don't answer or they don't get back to them. You know, I don't think it's anything deliberate on the social workers, obviously they have to prioritise those in terms of risk and case load and everything else, but obviously to a kid who is stuck up here that is no consolation. So yeah, often I will find I have to make a lot of calls to get them to then interact with the young people that they are case managing. – Participant 6

Similarly, the youth offending workers also spoke about how they were able to use the positive relationships that they had built to assist in encouraging the female offender to engage with their social worker. The practitioner in the account below describes this as 'mediating' the young person's relationship with their social worker, even if this is just in relation to complying with their order.

She doesn't have a very good relationship with social care, she never really has done. And sometimes, you know, her own behaviour hasn't really helped her in that respect. But the YOT's kind of acted as a bit of a mediator I suppose, if that's the right word, between her and social care. And we try to book appointments where her social worker could come in on the back of

those and just to kind of encourage that compliance with them that, you know, for her. – Participant 2

The following section will examine the experiences of practitioners of when joined up working works well and will consider what this looks like in frontline practice.

#### IV. When it works well: Being on the same page

Despite having different approaches to working with female offenders from care, practitioners reported that when services were able to put their individual agendas aside and work from ‘the same page’ this was experienced as positive for both the young person and the care team.

I think, I mean communication was really good between everyone, the sharing of information was good between everyone. And I think ultimately, you know without sounding gooey, everyone had the young person’s best interest and I think that really, that really shined through actually. Yeah, because you know sometimes, in previous jobs that I have done in multi-agency arena, agencies can come at it from different agendas, whereas actually this, we, as I say, we were all on the same page. – Participant 14

This practitioner placed an importance on everyone having the young person’s best interest as a priority and that this required putting agendas aside. This appears to offer a solution to the difficulties discussed previously when there was a mismatch of ideas around how to best manage poor behaviour.

Being ‘on the same page’ was also understood as being positive for the young person herself, as it provided her with a feeling of being cared for.

I think that she had a, she could see that people did care for her but I think one of the things that really came out was the agency, the interagency working and the planning. Yeah I think that everyone, the way that the professionals come together and everyone was able to put aside their own agendas to get to the heart, you know, to try to... ok, I need to, my agenda is for you to not reoffend, this agenda over here is to you know, have to keep

finding you a placement blah blah blah blah. And so I think everyone just kind of put aside the titles and roles and just focused on this young girl's safety. – Participant 15

Being on the 'same side' as opposed to the 'good cop/ bad cop' analogy that was drawn on earlier, was also raised as being positive for professional partnerships, in this case linked to systemic practice.

Generally speaking I would say social workers in our borough are definitely becoming easier to talk to...I think we have embedded systemic practice across our council, our working together is improved so much. So we have regular meetings, we are regularly in contact we are very clear about each service's agenda, our tasks, our actions and how we are going to get there. We have definitely come a long way. And I think that even, we used to be a service that sat out on its own, so there is definitely a better sense that we are on the same side. – Participant 9

Although agendas might be different, when the understanding is the same and the professional partnership all want the same outcome, then this can be experienced as positive for all involved.

I think it really, for us it is a must. It is something that is a part of the work that we have to do because trying to work with young people you can't work in isolation. They obviously, we have different agendas in terms of different, what I mean is...in terms of that the structure might be different but the work is, you know we are all aiming to do the same, the same outcome basically to keep young people safe and keep them well and keep them out of offending and keep them healthy in placement or healthy relationships really. – Participant 11

## Conclusion

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the lack of clarity that YOS practitioners felt in their roles from a personal level also comes up as problematic at a systemic level within multi-agency working.

Practitioners in this research often felt that children's services did not have an accurate understanding of the role of the YOS and often held expectations that they should be punitive and inflexible. Given that previous chapters suggest that practitioners experienced their role with female offenders from care as being much more focused on addressing welfare needs, this mismatch of expectations can have a negative impact on joined up working.

Practitioners also found that having access to information and effective communication had an impact on joined up working. If, as discussed above, other professionals do not consider YOS as a welfare-based service, then this may explain why they do not consider it a priority to pass on certain information to the YOS. However, by not having this information it can be unclear to the YOS worker what welfare needs are being addressed. This can therefore lead to the practitioner feeling that they are responsible in addressing them, as the welfare work is foundational to offending behaviour work.

This lack of role clarity also leads to YOT practitioners feeling that the traditional roles are flipped when working with female offenders in care. That is, practitioners place themselves as the primary worker addressing the welfare needs of the young women. They are also the one who they consider having the strongest professional relationship with. On the other hand, social care is constructed more in a supervisory, case management role – linked more closely to the criminal justice system. In terms of multi-agency work practitioners align themselves with the girls they are working with and describe their role as being an advocate and a mediator.

When multi-agency practice is described as working well it is when all roles are put aside, and all professionals become welfare focused. Hence, this eliminates the lack of clarity of the YOS role.

However, this tension that exists within their role is something that practitioners are unable to untangle themselves fully from. For example, accounts critique the court for sentencing girls to longer sentence due to their vulnerability and welfare needs, suggesting the court perceives the YOS as welfare service. This appears to

mirror how practitioners themselves perceive their role, however this is critiqued from a systemic level.

On the one hand practitioners describe practice with female offenders from care as being dominated by building relationships, addressing welfare needs and offending behaviours are considered symptomatic of those unaddressed needs. On the other hand, the criminal justice system includes elements of punishment for offending behaviours and 'rehabilitation' of young offenders, and so they cannot divorce this element from their role. This contradiction becomes evident in practitioners accounts of individual practice and complicates multi-agency practice.

# Chapter Eight: Discussion and implications for policy and practice

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the literature and the findings of this thesis, generate a theoretical framework that addresses the research questions and make recommendations for youth offending policy and practice. There will also be recommendations for future research.

The aims of this research were to develop a deeper understanding of how youth offending practitioners in England experience work with female offenders in care and how they construct their professional role in addressing complex welfare needs. This research question was born out of a recognition of a gap in current literature and a consideration of the ambiguous role of the youth offending service regarding the care and control dichotomy.

The review of the literature first provided a history of the youth offending system within England and Wales and highlighted how ideas around care and control are set up as binaries which policy and practice have consistently swung between. The literature demonstrated that there has been a lack of clarity around the priorities of the youth offending service which has raised questions regarding whether the service is primarily a welfare focused service which prioritises addressing needs of young offenders or primarily a justice focused service, prioritising punishment and rehabilitation from offending. Given that the priorities of the youth offending service are unclear, it appears to be to some degree down to the individual practitioner to make sense of their role and what they prioritise in their individual practice. It also argues that this has had specific impacts on girls who offend.

The changed position of the service within government contributes to some uncertainty about the role of welfare. As of 2010 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) was appointed as solely accountable for the Youth Justice Service (YOS) (Grimwood and Strickland, 2013). Prior to this, accountability had been shared between the MoJ and the Department for Education (DfE), which is more reflective of the dual



aspects of care and control. Yet Charlie Taylor's 2016 *Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales* recommended that the English YOS embraced the Welsh, 'Children First, Offenders Second' model and move from "justice with some welfare, to a welfare system with justice" (2016:49). From an organisational perspective this may seem to be in conflict with its structural position within the MoJ. Rather the recommendations in the Taylor Review are more aligned with the 1965 White Paper *The Child, the Family and the Young Offender* (Home Office, 1965) which proposed young offenders should be treated as children in need rather than offenders and supported by social services rather than the criminal justice system.

The literature review then went on to examine the knowledge base on the welfare needs and offending risks of girls who offend and of children in care who offend. Although there is only limited research examining the welfare needs and offending risks of girls in care, when reviewing these two bodies of literature overlapping themes emerged. These themes which include poor mental health and low self-esteem, substance misuse, insecure attachment styles and relationship difficulties, vulnerabilities to negative peer groups and experiences of neglect and trauma, suggest that girls in care who offend are likely to have significant, interacting welfare needs.

The literature review also examined what is known about how youth offending practitioners conceptualise and experience practice with female offenders and with children in care. This particular chapter drew on qualitative research that examined the experiences of practitioners. Themes from the literature highlighted a long-standing discourse amongst professionals that 'girls are harder to work with' (Baines and Alder, 1996; Sharpe, 2009, 2012). When taking a systemic view of this discourse and considering the literature illuminating the lack of clarity around the priorities of the youth offending service and the complex welfare needs of girls in care - the ambiguities around role coupled with barriers within the system may amplify this discourse in relation to female offenders in care. That is, rather than the girls themselves, it may be the lack of clarity around the priorities of the youth offending service and its role in working with complex welfare needs that can lead

to practitioners potentially finding this work 'difficult'. Furthermore, how this tension is managed within offending practice with girls who are also in care is not clear. Although girls in care have been included in studies of young offenders in care (Schofield et al. 2014; Taylor, 2006), the impact of gender on this area of youth offending practice has not been fully explored.

In order to address this gap in the literature and explore in greater detail how youth offending practitioners currently manage their role, this research asked the following questions;

1. What do youth offending practitioners consider to be the welfare and offending needs that female offenders in care present?
2. What challenges do youth offending practitioners face when working with female offenders in care?
3. What do youth offending practitioners consider as effective practice when working with female offenders in care?
4. What are the implications for the future of frontline youth offending practice?

To explore these questions semi-structured interviews were conducted with youth offending practitioners and the findings resulting from the analysis of this data are presented under three main themes. These themes explore 1) the central role of the professional relationship 2) the foundational aspect of addressing welfare needs, including the impact of abuse and trauma and 3) the complexities of multi-agency practice. These three themes will underpin this discussion, which argues that - although practitioners may not explicitly state that the work they are doing with female offenders in care relates to trauma - how practitioners describe their work and what they focus on in practice illustrates that at the heart of their professional decisions is a consideration of the impact of trauma.

## **Reframing youth offending practice with girls in care to be trauma informed**

The concept of trauma refers to experiences of harm and loss that are unresolved and continue to impact on thinking, feeling and behaviour (Mendes, et al. 2014;

YJB, 2017). A key component to being trauma informed is being able to provide an environment that is predictable, safe and consistent (Briere, 1992). This is reflected in the first major theme drawn from the in-depth accounts of youth offending workers which suggests that building a secure relationship is the basis of effective practice. This relationship was described as providing a secure base to girls in care (Bowlby, 1988; Schofield and Beek, 2014). The availability and sensitivity to the girls' needs provided by this relationship were considered as reducing anxiety and enabling the girls to build trust, which is consistent with feeling safe and secure. It was also seen as important to be honest with the girls and not make promises that cannot be kept. Honest communication and consistently being available created predictability and security. These elements - predictability, security and safety - are key to providing a trauma informed approach (Briere, 1992).

Furthermore, research suggest that feelings of abandonment may be a trigger for children who have experienced trauma (YJB, 2017; Sharpe, 2012; Taylor, 2006). Practitioners in this research recognised the importance of careful management of ending the relationships with girls in care and considered this effective practice.

Prioritising the impact of trauma in youth offending practice changes the question from "what did you do and how can we prevent you from doing it again" to "what happened to you and how can we address it". This is not suggesting that offending behaviour is excused, but rather it suggests that a trauma informed approach reframes how offending behaviour is understood (Briggs, 2013; Dunkel, 2014; McGee and Waterhouse, 2007). Taking this approach is consistent with the second major theme born out of this research which illustrates that effective youth offending 'work' with female offenders in care is viewed as necessarily welfare focused, flexible and informed by an understanding of their experiences of trauma, as opposed to prescriptive practice narrowly focused on the offence itself.

For example, what is known about the histories of girls who offend and children in care who offend suggest that the attachment style of girls in care who offend is likely to be insecure and may be disorganised or disoriented (Main and Solomon 1990). This means that female offenders in care are likely to test out the availability of the professionals around them. Traditional youth offending practice may

construct this as young women not being committed to changing their offending behaviour. However, practitioners in this research illustrate an understanding of the impact of insecure attachment and their accounts construct challenging behaviour as being reflective of previous experiences of trauma, insecure attachments and unaddressed welfare needs.

However, despite recent recommendations (YJB, 2017; Home Office, 2018), embracing a trauma informed approach from an organisational perspective is still in its infancy. As a result of this, practitioners in this research reported complications when they prioritised the impact of trauma in their interventions. For example, practitioners in this research had not been offered training on trauma and in some cases did not use the language of 'trauma' when describing their approach and seemed unsure about this aspect of their role. Hence, the ambiguities around the role of the YOS remain. This is linked to the final theme in this research which illustrates the difficulties that youth offending practitioners found in navigating multi-agency work. The ambiguity of the YOS role within multi-agency networks - combined with a lack of effective communication between the professionals and different approaches to managing offending – was said to lead to splitting within the professionals around the child, which acted as a barrier to joined up systemic support. This could also leave youth offending practitioners feeling isolated in their work and therefore exacerbated feelings that they are the 'catch all' service and, by default, the primary support in addressing complex welfare needs. Poor communication and a general lack of resources in all services could sometimes lead to practitioners feeling judged by but also becoming judgmental about other services available to these girls, for whom there was a shared concern but not always a shared approach in understanding and managing of offending behaviours.

Therefore, drawing from the literature and the findings from this research this thesis argues that effective youth offending practice with girls who are in care prioritises the impact of trauma. However, it is essential that this prioritisation is made explicit so that practitioners can access appropriate support, training and resources. It is also crucial that taking this approach (and understanding how it links

to offending) is shared by the multi-agency network around the child for joined up work to be most effective.

## **A trauma informed approach and the position of the youth offending practitioner - navigating care and control**

In contrast to much of the policy and literature, this thesis proposes that a trauma informed approach to youth offending practice with girls in care creates a framework which rejects the construction of care and control as binary positions. Rather, this approach recognises the importance of integrating care and control and understands the role of youth offending practitioners as being most effective when they are able to move flexibly between these two complementary positions. That is, a trauma informed framework enables practitioners to navigate the tension between care and control more consistently.

The following section will outline what this framework and the integrated positioning of care and control looks like in practice with girls in care and will highlight how practitioners can become resilient in this space by reframing their approach to practice accordingly.

### **Building trust within relationships that are mandated**

Although mandatory engagement in youth offending does remove the individual's liberties regarding their personal choice and is linked to their punishment, this thesis illustrates that when prioritising the impact of trauma this mandated space can be productive and containing. For example, as the literature review established, girls who offend and children in care who offend in England and Wales are likely to have experienced unstable home lives (Sharpe, 2012), have insecure attachments (Schofield et al. 2014; Taylor, 2006) and when in care can have had multiple placement moves (Schofield et al. 2014). Therefore, the mandated nature of YOT appointments can provide consistency and predictability in a life that may very well be chaotic. Predictability, consistency and containment are important for children who have experienced trauma (Briere, 1992).

However, taking a trauma informed approach to these mandated spaces meant that it was important that the session content was led by the girls themselves.

Hence, if a girl was reluctant to communicate in their mandated sessions then practitioners understood this as them lacking in trust. Rather than being constructed as 'not engaging', which places a responsibility on the girl herself and disregards her history of trauma, the behaviour was understood as reflecting her trauma history and how this may impact on her trust in adults (Sharpe, 2012). Therefore, through its mandated and predictable nature the space itself becomes containing, but the session content is in the control of the young women themselves, creating safety. By applying a trauma framework, practitioners can reframe the 'control' aspect of mandated attendance to be one of providing 'containment' to traumatised young women.

#### **Having clear boundaries that are also flexible**

Similarly, clear and transparent boundaries are also essential in a trauma informed approach as they provide predictability. As previously stated, predictability for children who have experienced trauma is foundational to creating security. For example, if a young woman re-offends, she should understand that she will be brought back to court and her current order will be in breach.

Furthermore, as the established literature suggests, girls who offend and girls in care who offend can feel that they are not genuinely cared for by the professionals in their lives and this matters to them (Sharpe, 2012; Taylor 2006). Practitioners in this research felt that clear and transparent boundaries illustrated to the girls they were working with that they were cared for. For example, if a young woman reoffended and the youth offending officer was required to breach her order it was thought to be imperative that the same youth offending officer continued working with her. This consistency illustrated to the young person that even if they make a mistake they won't be rejected and the trust they have built in the relationship will be sustained. Hence, the process of breaching the criminal order was less likely to damage the relationship. Therefore, rather than this process being dominated by the young women's 'punishment', it can be reframed as illustrating to the young woman that the YOT worker was true to their word and could be trusted and that someone cared about what they did and had to set a reasonable limit.

However, practitioners also stressed the importance of considering the setting of boundaries alongside the girls' history. That is, many of the young women in care came from homes that were neglectful and hence they may not have experienced clear boundaries before. Therefore, practitioners' accounts suggested that the girl's history needed to be taken into context when establishing appropriate boundaries to ensure they were not being set up to fail and criminalised. For example, if a young woman in care who has experienced trauma is triggered, often by an incident in relationships with staff or peers, and she reacts to this by breaking some kitchenware in a residential home, charging her with criminal damage does not take into consideration the impact of trauma on her capacity to manage feelings in relationships.

Furthermore, when considering the profile of girls in care and the impact of trauma, many of the traditional youth offending practices may not be appropriate. For example, practitioners in this project found that victim empathy was not an issue with most of the young women they discussed. Rather, practitioners felt the girls in care often felt immense guilt for their offending behaviours, which led practitioners to feel that victim empathy work was inappropriate due to concern for the girls' emotional wellbeing. When this is considered alongside the established literature which suggests that girls who commit crimes against a person tend to have complex relationships with the victim (Larsson, 2014), traditional victim empathy work does not seem suitable. Rather than lacking empathy for their victims, offending behaviours of girls in care may be linked to irrational responses due to their unaddressed trauma being triggered. For example, a girl may be emotionally invested in a relationship with a peer which takes a negative turn. This may cause feelings of rejection to be triggered which they may respond to with violence. Hence, their offending behaviour will not be addressed by building on their ability to empathise with the victim – it is likely that they already have this ability. More appropriate work would focus on addressing unprocessed trauma and recognising triggers.

This is not to suggest that these young women should face no consequences for violence, but rather indicates that victim empathy work is not necessarily the most

effective approach. Equally, having an established relationship with the victim and having a history of trauma can impact the restorative justice process. This aligns with Larsson's (2014) research which argues that having a relationship with the 'victim' can complicate the restorative justice process for girls, as the boundaries between victim and perpetrator become blurred.

Therefore, by applying a trauma informed framework, practitioners can reframe the 'control' aspect of boundaries (which are appropriate) to be providing predictability and evidencing that they care. However, the positioning of practitioners as setting boundaries that are flexible also presents ethical challenges regarding the process of breaching young women for concerns of her safety. This will be further explored in the following section.

### **Recognising the agency of girls from care alongside their vulnerability**

According to the literature and as is supported by this research, girls who have experienced trauma often identify as agents within their own lives (Larsson, 2019; Henricksen and Miller, 2012). From a trauma informed perspective this may be a way in which the girls protect themselves both emotionally and physically. In this research the vulnerable/agent binary became particularly significant to practice when practitioners in this study discussed working with girls who were in sexual exploitative relationships or considered at risk of exploitation. However, many of these young women were reported as not necessarily ready to recognise the abusive nature of these relationship.

Hence the individual agency these girls identify in themselves needs to be considered alongside the social and systemic vulnerability they face due to their gender, race, class, ability, sexuality and experiences of trauma. That is, it is society around them and predatory individuals that make them vulnerable. Therefore, disempowering young women by removing their agent identity because their position in society places them as vulnerable can be considered counterproductive. Rather, they are agents who are also vulnerable. This is an example of taking an intersectional lens to a trauma informed approach. Taking this approach is common in work in sexual assault services where the client group are often referred to as victim/survivor (See Jordan, 2013; Bluett-Boyd and Fileborn, 2014; Alexenko,



Satinsky and Simmons, 2015). This term recognises the simultaneous position an individual can take in being victim of a crime whilst also acknowledging their strength and not disempowering them.

This work then positions practitioners as being required to mitigate risk but also recognise the girls' identity as agents, which was experienced as difficult and created feelings of anxiety in the interview sample. A further consideration when recognising the agent identity girls ascribe to is how this can feed into victim blaming discourse. That is, although identifying as an agent may be protective for these young women, if they are sexually assaulted their identification as agents and rejection of the victim position may encourage them to feel that they were in some way responsible for their assault. As Western society at large encourages victim blaming in cases of sexual assault, these damaging discourses can further compound those feelings (See Curchin, 2019). Practitioners' accounts in this research also found that in some cases, how the risk of CSE was dealt with could reinforce victim blaming narratives. For example, protecting a girl who identifies as an agent in this situation – such as putting her into secure accommodation to mitigate CSE risk - can be experienced as punishment which further embeds the victim blaming discourse.

According to practitioners in this study the most protective care that can be provided to girls at risk of CSE lies in having a strong, reliable relationship which enables them to feel comfortable to open up. The power of this type of relationship has been found in other studies working with girls and women and risk (Dodsworth, 2014). However, if a practitioner insists that the young woman is in an abusive relationship, yet they are not ready to recognise this, then it is likely that she will shut down communication around this topic. Furthermore, some practitioners discussed the service requiring girls to engage with prescriptive CSE work that involved watching educational videos which were likely to be retraumatising. However, during the writing of this thesis campaigners have successfully ended the use of these CSE videos based on concerns regarding their ethical implications (See Eaton, 2018).

Many practitioners in this research felt that the girls were vulnerable to being exploited because of their trauma histories and experiences of abandonment and rejection. Hence, providing a space where these girls felt secure and cared was considered paramount to begin to build their resilience to this risk. The work done by practitioners in this space can be considered as consciousness raising. Consciousness raising relies heavily on having an established reliable, trusting relationship where the girls feel respected and heard. Within this space practitioners can support girls to build their self-esteem, encourage them to identify and be critical of wider and internalised victim blaming narratives, explore dynamics of healthy relationships and also develop safety plans. Consciousness raising also aligns with taking an intersectional lens to understanding the impact of trauma.

Hence, being vulnerable but also having agency are not mutually exclusive categories – girls can be strong, but it is often the world around them that makes them vulnerable. They can be making decisions but from a limited decisional pathway. A trauma informed framework, which takes an intersectional lens, will allow practitioners to incorporate recognising agency alongside vulnerability and assist them in navigating the space between care and control and how they respond to working with girls in care.

## **Implications for policy and practice**

This thesis argues that taking a trauma informed approach to youth offending policy and practice with girls in care can assist practitioners in navigating the tension between the care and control binary inherent in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, providing an intersectional lens to this approach moves the focus beyond the individual and considers how the system around the young women they are working with is classed, able bodied, gendered, raced etc. and how this may impact on their experience.

However, taking this approach within the current structure of the youth offending service raises some concerning ethical issues. For example, it is established in the literature that becoming involved with the criminal justice system is the single,

highest predictor for further involvement (Bateman, 2014; Goldson 2013; McAra and McVie, 2007). This suggests then that although— as this thesis has thus far argued – the youth offending practitioner can become a protective secure base for girls who are in care, the very fact of court ordered involvement with the youth offending service is putting them at risk of further engagement with the criminal justice system. Therefore, diversion from the criminal justice system must remain a priority of the YOS.

Nevertheless, within the YOS the needs of young women for positive relationships is undeniable and for a trauma informed approach to be successful, all the services around the YOS will also need to consider how they understand offending behaviours by girls in care. That is, the YOS cannot act as a silo in prioritising this approach to practice as this may have negative outcomes in the long term for girls in care and will cause splitting between professionals. It is imperative that all agencies - police, education, care systems, courts, as well as the YOS – are trauma informed and for this approach to be employed when working with female offenders in care at all levels. The recent national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers (Home Office, 2018) argues for just that.

Therefore, embracing a trauma informed approach which takes an intersectional lens needs to be made explicit from the Youth Justice Board and the MoJ. This reframing needs to come from the top and be implemented nationally. The priority in practice needs to be made explicit and clear, as does the reframing of the care and control binary. If this does not come from the top and is not made explicit, then practitioners will remain individually trying to balance the tensions within the care and control binary and will work with their own interpretation of this alongside other services who will have their own individual interpretations which may not match up.

## Recommendations

From this study has emerged a range of recommendations for integrating an intersectional trauma informed approach into policy and practice in relation to female offenders in care.

### 1. Reduce the number of girls in care being criminalised by using trauma informed therapeutic placements

Practitioners in this study discussed what they considered to be the unnecessary and damaging criminalisation of girls in care, especially residential care. These girls are likely to have been taken into care due to experiences of abuse, neglect, and trauma which can impact their behaviour (see Briere, 1992). And once placed in care the state takes over parental responsibility. Therefore, the state has a duty to understand the impact of abuse, neglect and trauma on behaviour and adjust the support being provided accordingly.

However, as this project and other research (Sharpe, 2012, Staines 2016;2017) is suggesting this is not the case as girls are being unnecessarily criminalised in this process of being placed in care - particularly residential care. This is a significant systemic failing which requires addressing urgently. These girls are already vulnerable and removing them from their family home may be protective, but the separation can itself be experienced as an additional trauma which must also be considered if the state is to truly respond protectively and minimize harm while the child is in their care.

Accounts in this research suggested outcomes could be improved significantly if girls' welfare needs were addressed more sensitively and effectively in residential care and if the residential care staff prioritised the impact of trauma in their approach. This was commonly discussed as the importance of providing therapeutic placement options for girls in care. It was also suggested that a trauma informed therapeutic placement should be embedded in the girl's local communities and where appropriate work in partnership with their families' established support networks and be able to offer support for the long term. Trauma informed therapeutic placements should also work "in collaboration with a full spectrum of

community based formal and informal helping resources” (Whittaker, Del Valle and Holmes, 2014: 24).

As highlighted in the literature review and earlier in this chapter, trauma informed therapeutic placements need to offer predictability, stability and a secure base to aid recovery, build resilience – and also reduce the risk of offending behaviour and criminalisation (Briere, 1992; Schofield et al. 2014; Taylor, 2006). Taking a trauma informed approach to residential care is also recommended in the recent national protocol (Home Office, 2018), but needs to be implemented across this largely privatized sector.

## **2. More research, training and resources put into effective criminal justice practice with girls in care**

In order to improve outcomes for female offenders in care practitioners require access to specific resources and training around addressing welfare needs, being trauma informed and understanding the role of intersectionality – especially how gender intersects with ethnicity, care and offending. This learning would need to include knowledge on how gender is constructed and how girls who offend are still judged by respectability politics, as this thesis has highlighted. It would also need to include understandings of how constructions of race, sexuality, class and disability – and their intersections- impact on a criminal justice response. Developing a critical understanding of these constructions and the power dynamics that are inherent in them, is essential knowledge for practitioners carrying out this work.

Practitioners would also require training around understanding the impact of trauma and how this links to behaviour and be provided with the resources required to provide a trauma informed response. Additionally, practitioners recommended that they would benefit from training around mental health, as access to mental health services is becoming more difficult. It is also important that practitioners have access to effective and regular supervision that mitigates the impact of vicarious trauma, reduces anxiety and provides practitioners with a secure base (Biggart et al. 2017).

### 3. The role of support beyond the order

Ending the professional relationship needs to be considered alongside the wider context of the girls' life. For example, ending the YOT relationships at the same time as a young woman begins the leaving care process may compound feelings of rejection. However, as it currently stands YOS sessions are bound by court orders, which does not necessarily take into consideration the impact of ending a significant relationship. In attempts to address this some practitioners were able to offer voluntary support post the ending of the court order, but a trauma informed approach would more consistently provide the option of a continuing to offer of support and voluntary engagement by young women post the criminal order – possibly through engaging volunteers from the community to provide a mentoring service to girls in care once they had completed their order.

### 4. Less prescriptive practice – more worker flexibility

As accounts in this study suggest, a trauma informed approach to practice with girls in care needs to be flexible, individually tailored to each girl and be led by the young women themselves. This approach is also recommended by the YJB (2017). Hence, the priority is that the young women feel secure and contained and are able to build trust in the professional relationship.

### 5. Re-evaluate what is measured as 'successful intervention'

In contrast to the prescriptive, risk focused youth offending practice (Urwin, 2018) rather than measuring success as achieving key performance indicators which focus on reoffending rates and completion of criminal orders, when working with girls in care it is helpful to consider the micro interventions. For example, many of the 'soft outcomes' that are currently invisible in the evaluation of work done by the YOS, such as building trust in a relationship or feeling ready to engage in therapy, are the interventions that practitioners in this study suggest have the biggest impact for girls in care. This needs to be recognised so that it can be caught within the evaluation of the work the YOS do.

## 6. Trauma informed public health approach to girls in care who offend.

As is also suggested in the recent national protocol (Home Office, 2018), a trauma informed approach is going to be much more effective if the approach is taken by all the systems around the young person. This was also a finding in this research and therefore, this thesis recommends a public health response to work with female offenders in care. This way the services provided to young women and girls in care will not be contradictory or overlapping. It also means that the service sector as a whole becomes a secure base (Schofield et al. 2014) for the young women and that the sharing of resources within the services assist in providing consistent and predicable support that the young women can then rely on. These are all essential for trauma recovery. As these girls are also children in care whom the state have parental responsibility for, their recovery should be the primary priority.

To achieve public health response, services may need to come together for shared training on trauma and the links to offending and wider problems in education and mental health, including its link to CSE. Crucially, however, it is also recommended that the services around the young person understand each other's role. For example, the role of the YOS in addressing welfare needs has been ambiguous which has created difficulties for multiagency practice. Therefore, it is important to have clarity regarding the value of a trauma informed approach to youth offending practice and communicating this to the wider network in order to improve relationships. Given the challenging nature of the work, professionals within teams and across agencies could also benefit from the 'team as a secure base' model which is based on mutual support, promoting emotional resilience and avoiding burnout (Biggart et al. 2017)

It is also important that this approach to addressing trauma applies an intersectional lens and that this is made explicit and included in the training. Without this, a trauma informed approach risks minimising the impact of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability etc. and the interaction with trauma.

Taking this approach to working with girls in care who offend does not only have benefits for the girls themselves, but it will also provide benefits to the professionals. Working with trauma will also require professionals to be aware of the impact of vicarious trauma and having an established care team who are all on the same page to lean on who can provide this kind of support. In this situation the multiagency team will become the safety net for both the professionals and the young women they are all working with. As this work may be highly emotive and complex the professional can feel that they are not carrying this load on their own and the young person can also feel that there is a team of professionals around them who care, are reliable and can offer them effective support.

## 7. Creating a bridge between Youth Offending and Probation

This research suggests that girls in care who offend are being provided with a youth offending service which is welfare led and allows for secure relationships to be built within the YOT, and that this can work well. Yet it is unlikely that these girls will have the same experience with the adult criminal justice service, and this was supported by the small number of accounts in this research where girls had been transferred to probation. Additionally, previous research which explored how probation practitioners work with care leavers (see Fitzpatrick and Williams, 2017) suggested that practitioners feel inadequately resourced in addressing the complex welfare needs of care leavers and because of this perceive care leavers to be a 'risky' group and therefore do not include exploring welfare needs in their practice.

Hence, this thesis recommends a more fluid, relationship focused bridging between the youth offending service and probation services and suggests that probation services are included in the proposed public health approach to youth – and young adult - crime.

This final point regarding the experience of young women in care who have been transferred from the youth criminal justice system to the adult criminal justice system highlights a gap in current knowledge. Therefore, this thesis also suggest that this is an important area for future research.



## Limitations and areas for future research

A limitation of this study is that it does not include the voices of female offenders in care, so we hear about their lives and experiences of the youth justice system through the voices of YOT practitioners. Since the project focused on how youth offending practitioners experience their practice with young women in care and their negotiation of the care and control binary, outcomes for the young women, including their experience of the service, were not part of the study. However, the case for a trauma informed, relationship-based approach would be more persuasive if the perspectives of girls in care themselves were available. This limitation presents an area for further research which examines how girls in care experience the criminal justice system and could include how ethnicity intersects with this.

A further limitation is that data on the ethnic identity of the practitioners in the study was not collected. Had this information been collected, it could have provided the research with a deeper analysis of what contributes to how girls in care are constructed. For example, one practitioner in this project disclosed that she identified as a lesbian and therefore felt that she had a more critical understanding of how constructions of gender influence practice. This may also apply to experiences of race – particularly in the criminal justice system which is built on systemic racism (see Lammy, 2018). This suggests an area for further research on ethnicity but also on intersectionality more generally between gender, offending, care and ethnicity as it affects both workers and young people.

Another limitation of this research is the sample size. Only 20 youth offending practitioners were interviewed and for such a small sample size, even if from three rather different local authorities, these findings may not be confidently ascribed to a wider demographic.

A final limitation of this study is related to whether these findings are only relevant to girls in care or can be applied to young men and non-binary individuals who have experienced trauma and have been in care. However, the numbers of children and young people who identify as non-binary, transgender and gender fluid is increasing and “more fluid conceptualizations of gender are also evident in mainstream awareness” (Diamond, 2020:111). This creates space for these findings to be

applicable to all genders and non-binary individuals, though also suggests an area for further research. A trauma informed approach may have benefits in practice with all young offenders and this has been recommended in the literature (YJB, 2017). Therefore, although this thesis focuses specifically on girls in care it can nevertheless contribute to this wider discussion, through demonstrating the flexible roles and relationships that YOT practitioners found to be possible within court mandated work.

### **Conclusion: The current context for implementing change**

Prior to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 the youth offending service was a part of social services and practitioners were predominantly social work trained (Urwin, 2018). However, New Labour's restructuring of the youth offending service saw a shift to focusing on 'results', prescriptive practice and achieving key performance indicators which has pushed prioritisation towards a more criminal justice, risk focused service. Hence, despite youth justice being rooted in social work values and practice, the contemporary organisational structure focuses on crime reductions which "creates questions around what youth justice work should do, and what the best way of reducing crime is" (Urwin, 2018:135).

Further to this, the YOS have successfully reduced the number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time. However, this has meant that youth offending officers are more likely to be working with more 'entrenched' young offenders who present with complex welfare needs. Compounding this, the impact of austerity measures in Britain has seen wide cuts on the welfare state, and this has led to a crisis in health and social services, including mental health and the wider criminal justice service. Practitioners in these services are in high demand yet are armed with limited resources. This is far from an ideal system and the impacts are felt hardest by the most vulnerable members of our society, including girls who offend and are also in care.

Hence, it can be argued that the work youth offending practitioners are doing needs to be reconsidered and adjusted to address the changing demographics of the youth justice population, while also being aware of the wider societal pressures

on young people and the often harsh funding climate for children's services and the youth justice service

In recent years the consideration of the impact of trauma on offending has begun to come into focus (see YJB, 2017; Mendes et al. 2014; Home Office, 2018). In England and Wales this has been considered as particularly significant to work with children in care who offend. The 2018 National Protocol on Reducing Unnecessary Criminalisation of Looked-After Children and Care Leavers (Home Office) recommend that "all professionals working with looked-after children and care leavers should understand the impact of trauma and abuse on development, particularly their effect on emotional and behavioural development and self-regulation" (Home Office, 2018:9).

However, although welcome, both the YJB report (2017) and the national protocol (Home Office, 2018) do not consider the impact of gender and gender fluidity when it comes to understanding trauma and how to work with traumatised young people.. Hence, as it stands society at large remains far from being gender neutral, nor is the criminal justice system. For example, what is clear from the literature review and what was reflected in this thesis, is that because girls make up a small number within the youth offending population the approach to youth offending practice is often based on male offending patterns. Hence, girls who offend have to negotiate these intersections within the system and therefore - in order to understand their behaviour and how best to respond to them - practitioners in this research highlight the importance of recognising the gendered systemic barriers they face.

Implementing a trauma informed approach which does not consider intersectionality risks ignoring the impact of gender and will "inevitably prioritise the male majority" (Fitzpatrick, 2017:143). Hence, an effective approach considers the impact of trauma beyond the individual and recognises how managing this can be impacted by wider social structures.

Therefore, despite the YJB report (2017) and national protocol (2018) the nuances around prioritising the impact of trauma in criminal justice practice is not clearly

addressed, which once again creates ambiguity around the youth offending practitioner role. As found by researchers Branson et al. (2017) in their examination of recommendations of a trauma informed juvenile justice system in America, if these nuances are not addressed the role of youth offending will remain ambiguous.

Hence, the contribution to knowledge this thesis makes is the unpicking of some of these nuances in the youth offending service. In particular, it illustrates that the application of a trauma informed framework to youth offending practice means that the care and control binary does not have to be considered as dichotomous, but rather these binary positions can complement each other and be integrated to provide effective support. The criminal justice sector will always have elements of control. However how this is conceptualised by youth offending practitioners and how this is considered in practice means that when directed to prioritise the impact of trauma, control does not have to be punitive but can be beneficial. And practice can be reframed as providing safety, predictability and containment rather than punishment.

The second contribution to knowledge this thesis makes is the demonstration of the need for a trauma informed approach to youth offending practice to embody an intersectional lens. As discussed, taking an intersectional lens was evident in some of the practitioners' accounts and became significant in work around CSE. However, race was not addressed as much as I anticipated in this study. I am not sure if this was because practitioners focused on the gender and care status of the cases they brought to the interview, but I think this is important to flag as it reinstates why taking an intersectional lens is essential. There is a long history of systemic racism inherent in the criminal justice system, and the youth offending service is no exception. David Lammy stated in his report on the treatment of and outcomes for BAME people in the CJS that his "biggest concern is with the youth justice system" (2017:4).

Although there are ongoing attempts to address this, it remains an issue which I have no doubt affects girls in care who offend and are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. A trauma informed approach that does not take an

intersectional lens risks minimising these structural barriers that contribute to experiences of trauma. And as Lammy (2017:3) reports “some of the most marginalized BAME communities have much in common with the White working-class. A justice system that works better for those who are BAME and poor will work better for those who are White British and poor too”. Therefore, taking an intersectional trauma informed approach to criminal justice practice will have wide reaching benefits.

As a final thought, Urwin (2018) describes the current youth justice system as a culture of speed, certainty and prescriptive practice. However, these three elements contrast with the trauma informed approach practitioners in this study argue as being effective when working with girls in care. Rather this thesis advocates for a trauma informed framework that applies an intersectional lens. In doing so it reconstructs girls in care who offend as ‘traumatised’ rather than ‘troublesome’. And making this distinction is key to developing an effective and ethical systemic approach to youth justice practice.

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# Appendix A.

A systematic literature search was completed in May 2019. This search was completed on the UEA library catalogue and the Social Care Online database.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF GIRLS WHO OFFEND

Searches were conducted using the following terms;

**Youth Justice OR Youth Offending OR Juvenile Justice OR Juvenile Delinquents**

**AND Girls OR Women Or Females OR Young Women Or woman**

**AND Britain or British or "United Kingdom" or UK or England or "Great Britain" or Scotland or Wales or Ireland**

Refined results between date range of 2008 – 2019

Using the UEA library catalogue search returned 220 titles. All abstracts were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria

Using the Social Care Online data base search returned 96 titles. All abstracts were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria

| Inclusion Criteria  | Exclusion Criteria  |
|---|---|
| Studies that discuss demographics of girls who offend                       | Historical accounts of systemic response to girls who offend  |
| Studies that measure demographics of girls under 18 years of age who offend | Studies that measure demographics of adult women who offend   |
| Abstracts in English  | Papers not published in English                               |
| Peer reviewed journals/ completed PhD thesis                                | Unpublished studies/abstracts only                            |
| Studies that focus on female offenders or split genders in analysis         | Studies that focus on male offenders or do not split genders. |

23 papers met this criteria. Further papers were identified from reference list searches of studies closest to the research question.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF LAC WHO OFFEND

Searches were conducted using the following terms;

**Looked After Children OR Lac OR Foster Care OR Children In Care OR Cic OR Out Of Home Care or Care System or Residential Care**

**AND Youth Justice OR Youth Offending OR Juvenile Justice OR Juvenile Delinquents or Offending or Criminalised or Crime**

**AND Great Britain OR United Kingdom OR England OR UK OR Britain OR Wales OR Scotland OR Ireland**

Refined results to Great Britain only between date range 2008 – 2019

Using the UEA library catalogue Search returned 461 titles. All abstracts were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria

Using the Social Care Online data base search returned 659 titles. All abstracts were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

| Inclusion Criteria                                     | Exclusion Criteria                  |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Studies that discuss risk/resilience to LAC who offend | Studies that focus on LAC generally |
| Studies based on UK LAC                                | Studies based outside UK            |
| Abstracts in English                                   | Papers not published in English     |
| Peer reviewed journals/ completed PhD thesis           | Unpublished studies/abstracts only  |

25 papers met this criteria. Further papers were identified from reference list searches of studies closest to the research question.

#### DEMOGRAPHICS OF LOOKED AFTER GILS WHO OFFEND

Searches were conducted using the following terms;

**Looked After Children OR Lac OR Foster Care OR Children In Care OR Cic OR Out Of Home Care or Care System or Residential Care**

**AND Youth Justice OR Youth Offending OR Juvenile Justice OR Juvenile Delinquents or Offending or Criminalised or Crime**

**AND Girls OR Women OR Females**

Refined results between date range 2008 – 2019. Due to limited research in this areas search was opened up internationally.

Using the UEA library catalogue search returned 1244 titles. All abstracts were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria

Using the Social Care Online data base search returned 53 titles. All abstracts were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria

| Inclusion Criteria   | Exclusion Criteria   |
|--|--|
| Studies that discuss risk/resilience to LAC girls who offend | Studies that focus on practice outcomes  |
| Abstracts in English   | Papers not published in English  |
| Peer reviewed journals/ completed PhD thesis                 | Unpublished studies/abstracts only   |
| Studies that separate gender                                 | Gender blind studies   |
| Studies that focus on risk for LAC girls in present time     | Studies that look at risk for women who were as children in care and offenders |

16 papers met this criteria. Further papers identified from reference list searches of studies closest to the research question.



Three areas which focused the search included;

- Offending pathways, offending patterns of girls who offend in the UK
- Welfare needs and welfare histories of girls who offend in the UK
- Offending pathways, offending patterns of LAC who offend in the UK
- Care and welfare histories and welfare needs of LAC who offend in the UK (including placement moves)
- Offending pathways, offending patterns of LAG who offend in the UK
- Care and welfare histories and welfare needs of LAG who offend in the UK (including placement moves)

# Appendix B.

A systematic literature search was completed on the 30<sup>th</sup> October - 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2018. This search was completed on the UEA library catalogue and three electronic databases: Social Care Online, Scopus and Cochrane Library.

Searches were conducted using the following terms;

**Youth Justice OR Youth Offending OR Juvenile Justice OR Juvenile Delinquents**

**AND Professionals OR Staff Or Workers Or Officers**

**AND (perspective or perception or opinion or experience or attitude) or views**

| Inclusion Criteria   | Exclusion Criteria  |
|--|---|
| Studies that directly measure youth offending workers (or international equivalent) perspectives | Studies that do not include voice of youth offending officer  |
| Studies that measure perspectives of working with young offenders                                | Studies that measure perspectives of working with adult offenders   |
| Abstracts in English   | Papers not published in English   |
| Peer reviewed journals/ completed PhD thesis   | Unpublished studies/abstracts only  |
| General youth offending practice examining practice and needs of youth offending population      | Perceptions on specific youth offending intervention i.e. restorative justice, specific evaluation tools, or localised programs |
| Practice with all genders.   | Focus on perspectives of only working with male offenders   |
| Data driven studies  | Theoretical papers  |

Search returned 3,140 titles which were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. 16 met this criteria and a further two papers were identified from reference list searches of studies closest to the research question.

Three areas which focused the search included;

- Youth Offending Practitioners perspectives of general youth offending practice (taking a particular focus on trauma and gender)
- Youth Offending Practitioners perspective of youth offending practice with girls
- Youth Offending Practitioners perspective of youth offending practice with children in care

Chapter Plan:

1. Youth Offending Practitioners perspectives of general youth offending practice

How practitioner conceptualise the role of the young offending service – balance of care and control

What practitioners consider effective practice and what is considered challenges to practice

How practitioners conceptualise needs of young offenders and how risk and need is balanced

What is known about how practitioner conceptualise working with trauma

How practitioners conceptualise working with other services

How practitioners consider race, gender, class impacts practice

2. Youth Offending Practitioners perspective of youth offending practice with girls

How practitioners describe working with girls (does this include race/class)

What practitioners consider needs of girls in youth offending

What practitioners consider effective practice when working with girls

What practitioners consider challenges to practice when working with girls

3. Youth Offending Practitioners perspective of youth offending practice with children in care

What practitioner conceptualise as the needs of young offenders in care

What practitioners consider effective youth offending practice and what is considered challenges to youth offending practice when working with children in care

How practitioners consider the role of interagency working with young offenders in care

How practitioners consider race, gender, class impacts practice with young offenders who are also in care

# Appendix C.

11 April 2016

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Dear Donna-Maree

## **Female Violent Offending and Care; an Intersectional Analysis of Pathways and Professional Perspectives**

The Research Ethics Committee has considered your application for ethical approval for the above project. The reviewers were in agreement that the ethics issues had been satisfactorily considered and addressed. I am therefore happy to confirm that ethical approval has been granted and that you can now begin your study.

It is a requirement of your approval that you should report any adverse events that may have occurred, these being defined as “any unanticipated problem involving risk to subjects which ultimately results in harm to the subject or others”.

If you plan to make any significant changes to the design of your study, you should also contact me.

With best wishes – I hope your research goes well.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jonathan Dickens'.

Prof Jonathan Dickens

# Appendix D.

18 May 2016

Donna-Maree Humphery  
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Dear Donna-Maree

## **Female Violent Offending and Care; an Intersectional Analysis of Pathways and Professional Perspectives**

Thank you for your e-mail and revised documentation setting out your plan to change your research method to semi-structured interviews. I have considered your changes and am happy to confirm that I can approve these.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jonathan Dickens'.

Prof Jonathan Dickens

# Appendix E.

8 December 2016

Donna-Maree Humphery  
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Dear Donna-Maree

## **Female Offending and Care: An Analysis of the Perspectives of Professionals from Youth Offending Teams**

The Research Ethics Committee considered your application for ethical approval for the above project in April 2016. The reviewers were in agreement that the ethics issues had been satisfactorily considered and addressed. I am happy to confirm that ethical approval was granted and you were able to begin your study. I note since then the title has been changed to the above.

It is a requirement of your approval that you should report any adverse events that may have occurred, these being defined as “any unanticipated problem involving risk to subjects which ultimately results in harm to the subject or others”.

If you plan to make any significant changes to the design of your study, you should also contact me.

With best wishes – I hope your research goes well.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jonathan Dickens'.

Prof Jonathan Dickens

# Appendix F.

## **Invitation to participate in the following research project:**

### **FEMALE OFFENDING AND CARE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF PROFESSIONALS FROM YOUTH OFFENDING TEAMS.**

*I would like to invite you to take part in this research project. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being undertaken and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask any questions if you find anything unclear or would like more information. Your participation is entirely voluntary.*

#### **Why is this project needed?**

Research conducted in the UK has found that young people in care are at greater risk of offending than the general population. Research has also found that girls with care histories who are also young offenders are more at risk of their offences escalating in frequency and seriousness, often into violent offending. They also make up 61% of girls in custody.

This project aims to gain a better understanding of frontline youth offending practice with female offenders from care. To achieve this it will draw on how youth offending team practitioners understand youth offending practice with girls from care, what they identify as the main needs and any challenges they face. It also aims to build a better understanding of how this work is balanced within multidisciplinary teams. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of the best way to support these young women and will inform policy and practice.

#### **Where is the project based?**

This project is based in the Centre for Research on Children and Families (CRCF) at the University of East Anglia (UEA). The Centre conducts high quality research which informs policy and practice that directly impact the lives of children and families.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

Youth offending practitioners who have experience in case management with looked after girls are in an ideal position to provide this project with valuable first-hand experience of the challenges and opportunities working with young women from care brings. The questions you will be asked in the interview are designed to try and capture your perspectives on the specific needs of looked after girls who engage in offending pathways and your experience what interventions are both successful and unsuccessful in meeting these needs.

### **What is involved?**

Research data will be collected via a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews would be expected to last about 45 minutes. The interviews will predominantly be conducted via telephone, however if you'd prefer a face-to-face interview this can be arranged.

The interviews will start with a brief discussion about the participant's role in the Youth Offending Team and experience with young offenders in general and with young offenders who are looked after, male and female. Then there will be a focus on discussion of a case from their own practice involving a female offender from care which highlights issues for practice. This will then broaden out into a discussion about the participant's views of some of the issues affecting the pathways of female offenders from care, but also comparisons with their experience with male offenders from care. There is a focus on the opportunities and challenges facing YOT practitioners in working with the young people, but also (as relevant) their families, carers, LAC social workers - and the multi-agency networks including the courts. Because the information discussed in the interviews may be sensitive we ask that practitioners find a private space to participate in the interview. The interviews will provide insights into how practitioners currently experience working with this group and what they identify as the needs and challenges. All analysis will be made confidential and anonymous.

As with all research interviews, there is flexibility, and participants will be able to direct the discussion to areas that they think are important and relevant.

### **Who is undertaking this research?**

This project is being undertaken by Donna-Maree Humphery, a qualified social worker and a PhD researcher. Donna-Maree has frontline experience of working in trauma recovery with young women and case managing young offenders considered at high risk of reoffending. Work on the project will be supervised by Professor Gillian Schofield, who is experienced in researching the outcomes for children in care, including those involved in offending. Ethical approval for this project has been granted by the University of East Anglia Ethics Committee.

### **Contact details**

Donna-Maree can be contacted at [d.humphery@uea.ac.uk](mailto:d.humphery@uea.ac.uk). If you have any further queries about the research please contact Professor Gillian Schofield, School of Social Work, Elizabeth Fry Building, University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ by letter or email [g.schofield@uea.ac.uk](mailto:g.schofield@uea.ac.uk) Tel: 1603 592068



# Appendix G.

## Semi Structured Interview Schedule

**Introduction:** *Thank you for agreeing to take part of my research. My name is Donna and I am a PhD student with the school of Social Work at the University of East Anglia. I am also a qualified social worker and have worked in youth justice in Melbourne, Australia. Have you had a chance to read the participant information sheet? In a nutshell this research is expanding on findings from a previous UEA research project which explored issues affecting looked after children in the criminal justice system. The aim of this current project is to examine in greater detail the impact gender has on service provision for female offenders who are in care. So, in order to achieve this we are interviewing youth offending team practitioners across the country as this will enable us to draw on professionals' practice wisdom and provide us with a greater understanding of the opportunities, challenges and complexities facing youth offending teams when working with this group. Findings from this project will be based within practitioners' experiences and will inform policy and make recommendations to improve outcomes for looked after girls within the CJS.*

- *Do you have any questions about the project?*
- *Do you understand that this interview will be audio recorded and that all transcribed data will be made anonymous? Is that OK?*
- *Do you understand that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw without giving any reason at any time during the interview?*
- *Do you understand that you can also withdraw from the study within three days post interview?*
- *Do you agree to take part and are you happy to proceed?*

*Just quickly, how are you for time...is an hour OK?*

### Professional role and training

- *Ok, for this first section we are just going to talk a bit about your career pathway.*
- 1. What is your current role within the YOT?
  - a. How long have you been employed as a \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Where were you employed before here?
- 2. Can you tell me a little bit about your professional training?
  - a. Have you found this training helpful for your current role?

### Experience of working with girls from care

- *This next section I am going to ask you a few questions about your experience of working with girls from care within your role. I'll start off by asking you about your general experience overall and then I will get you to talk me through a particular case. Ok?*
- 3. How many girls in care would you estimate to have worked with?
- *Now, thinking of your work with a specific female offender from care, what I am going to do is get you to talk me through the case from referral to closure (or to where you are now)*
- 4. To start with, can you tell me a little bit about this case?
  - a. Can you talk me through the referral process?
    - i. What was she referred for?
    - ii. Who referred her?
    - iii. Did she have a previous history with the YOT?
      - What were the offences? At what age?
    - iv. What were you told about in terms of her care history? Can you tell me a bit about that?
  - b. Was there a period of assessment? Can you talk me through this process?
    - i. What were the main needs identified?
  - c. Can you describe your work with this young person?
    - How much of the intervention was focused on desistence?
    - How much on welfare?
    - Was there victim empathy work?
    - Did you find these interventions successful?

- Were there any barriers to using this intervention?
  - Was there any escalation in offending?
  - Was restorative justice a process which was explored?  
In your opinion was this a successful intervention?
5. Where is this young person now?
    - a. How did this case close?
      - i. Did the case go on to probation...? How was that transition?  
Who decides/why
  6. Was there any work done with CSE?
    - a. What did that work look like?
    - b. How did the young girl respond to this?
  7. What ethnicity did the young women identify as?
    - a. From your experience how what is the balance of ethnicity in CJS with young women
  - *Now, thinking about your experience of managing this case....*
  8. In your opinion what worked well in this case?
  9. Were there any challenges? (Emotional? Practical?)
  10. Would you say these challenges are similar in other cases of working with girls from care?
    - a. How do these challenges differ from your experience of working with young male offenders in care?
      - i. (Can you give a brief case example?)
    - b. How do these challenges differ to your experience of working with young female offenders who are not in care?
      - i. (Can you give me a brief case example?)
  11. More generally what do you think girls from care who are involved in CJS feel about social services?
    - a. What about youth offending services specifically?
      - i. Where do you think this attitude comes from?
      - ii. How do you work with this attitude?

12. Now thinking about female offenders with care histories, are there any specific concerns, needs or particular issues specific to this group that you can identify?

### **Multi-Agency Working**

- *Now I'm just going to ask you a few questions about your experience of multiagency working*

13. Can you tell me your experience of working with CLA social workers?

14. Can you tell me your experience of working with residential care workers?

15. What's your experience of how foster carers work with young female offenders?

- a. Is this different to your experience of how they work with male offenders?

16. What is your experience of how the probation services respond to girls from care?

- a. Is that different to how they respond to boys from care?

17. What is your experience of how the police respond to girls from care?

- a. Is this different to how they respond to boys from care?

18. What is your experience of how the court respond to girls from care?

- a. Is this different to how you find they respond to boys from care?

### **YOT Practice Training**

- *I'm now going to ask you a couple of questions about role specific training within your organisation*

19. What type of training have you received on working with girls?

- a. If so what did you find useful? Do you have any suggestions for improvement? Or anything to add?
- b. If not, do you think this type of training would be beneficial?

20. What type of training have you received on working with LAC?

- a. If so what did you find useful? Do you have any suggestions for improvement? Or anything to add?
- b. If not, do you think this type of training would be beneficial?

- c. Do you have any experience of working with gender specific programs within YOTs?

- i. How have you found these programs
- ii. Do you think gender specific programs would be of benefit?

### **The wider context**

- *Finally, just a few questions around your overall experience of working as a YOT practitioner with girls from care*
21. Do you find youth offending practice emotionally challenging?
    - a. Do this challenge differ when working with girls than it does with boys?
    - b. What about LAC kids?
  22. Do you feel that your gender influences how you work with female offenders from care?
  23. What about in allocation of cases?
    - a. Where does this come from?
  24. Just to summaries, how would you say your work with female offenders from care differs from your work than male offenders?
    - a. How do you working with this/ how do you adjust your practice?
  25. Looking forward what would you like to see change within youth offending practice or other agencies which you think might improve outcomes for girls in care?
  26. Is there anything else you'd like to add about youth offending practice with girls in the care system?