REAL BAD GIRLS:
THE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF OFFENDING BY GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN INVOLVED WITH A COUNTY YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM AND SYSTEMIC RESPONSES TO THEM

Jeanette Deborah Williams

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire for the Professional Doctorate in Youth Justice

October 2009
Abstract

Amidst growing concerns about a rise in girls entering the Youth Justice System and official data highlighting increases in girls violent offending this doctoral thesis focuses on girls in the Youth Justice System.

Drawing on case files and in depth interviews with a cohort of girls supervised by a Home Counties Youth Offending Team (YOT), and interviews with YOT practitioners it explores their needs and offending patterns and examines contemporary system responses to them. It aims to contribute to practice knowledge and understanding about girls offending, and to identify approaches and interventions most likely to be effective with them.

Findings point to girls having multiple and interrelated needs and troubled backgrounds. Exclusion from school and non attendance, experience of severe family conflict and violence, heavy alcohol use and poverty and disadvantage are all cited as key risk factors for girls’ involvement in offending and other types of behaviour which can lead to social exclusion.

Minor assault and the influence of alcohol emerge as key features in girls offending patterns. Assaults commonly arise from disputes with friends or family members, or occur whilst girls are in a mixed peer group where assaults are perpetrated against another young person or a Police Officer.

The impact of more formal responses by Police and YOTS are evident and show that the highly regulated and male oriented Youth Justice System hampers the likelihood of successful interventions with girls.

This study cites the importance of gender specific responses and interventions which are holistic, informal and flexible to meet the distinct needs and offending patterns of girls in the Youth Justice System. More widely early identification of girls at risk, information sharing across
children, health and adult services, and the provision of a range of support and positive opportunities to girls which extend beyond the life of a Court Order are identified as key aspects of strategies aimed at improving future outcomes for girls.
In loving Memory of

Frances Marjorie Williams
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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Professor John Pitts who supervised and guided me in the writing of this thesis and whose knowledge and wisdom, and willingness to impart this, made this doctorate thesis possible. I must also thank Tim Bateman for sharing his extensive knowledge of the Youth Justice System, past and present and for his encouragement and clarity which helped me develop my understanding and writing.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my employer and manager without whose support I would never embarked on this academic journey and whose sustained support enabled me to finally complete it.

Thanks should also go to the staff at the YOT who willingly reflected on their practice and shared their valuable experience with me in both in interviews and within the day to day practice which gave me the insight to enable this research to be meaningful. Particular thanks go to Jackie, Natalie, Maggie, Nicky, Carol, and Shelly who were instrumental in developing the YOT Girls Group Programme and whose expertise and professional practice has benefited both the girls and colleagues they work with.

I am indebted to the girls whose stories I was able to tell and whose spirit and strengths this thesis aims to celebrate and to ensure they get the chances they deserve.

Most of all and unequivocally I must thank my family, and the friends who have shared in my enthusiasm and frustrations over the last four years, they have held me up when I have been down, and most of all believed in me.
Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 1 is an extended literature review. It explores the key themes relating to girls offending and Youth Justice responses to this. It looks at contemporary patterns and concerns about changes in girls offending patterns and locates these in the contemporary Youth Justice landscape. This chapter sets the scene for the research study that is being carried out.

Chapter 2 introduces the YOT area in which the research is conducted including its organisational structure and a brief history of its responses to girls who offend. It sets out the aims of the research and the key questions that the author sets out to answer. The research design and methodology is defined, outlining the three different elements of the research: - the case files study; the interviews with girls; interviews with YOT practitioners and the research methods used. Ethical considerations arising from the study are explored and finally the limitations of the research are considered.

Chapter 3 sets out the findings from the three elements of the research. Part 1 examines the findings from the case files study, and looks at the characteristics, patterns and context of offending amongst the girls in the study cohort. Part 2 identifies findings from interviews with girls in the Youth Justice System, focusing on the girls’ experiences of the Criminal Justice System and the YOT itself. Part 3 highlights YOT practitioners’ perceptions and understanding of the girls in the Youth Justice System, drawing on upon their professional experience and practice wisdom. The overall findings are then summarised.

Chapter 4 discusses the emerging themes and the relevance of key findings from the research from both the case file study, and interviews with girls and practitioners. It links the emerging themes with the wider
literature review and highlights current practice issues in Youth Justice and children services.

Chapter 5 considers the implications of the research for Youth Justice Practice and sets out principles for effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System.

Conclusions
Final conclusions are drawn together, reflecting on the original aims and research questions.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The issue of girls and young women in the Youth Justice System has not been a central concern of criminologists, policy makers or practitioners. This is partly because of their lower numbers compared to boys and young men, further compounded by the typically minor nature of girl’s and young women’s offending and their shorter criminal careers (Graham & Bowling 1995). Indeed in the past, girls were more likely to come to the attention of the police and agencies for ‘being out of parental control’ or ‘in moral danger’.

Yet in the last decade, girls have consistently comprised a quarter of the youth offending population (Nacro 2008a) and there are now signs that the number of girls in the system is increasing, with fewer being diverted from court. Alongside this, there is a growing public perception that girls’ violence is on the increase (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006).

Yet within the Youth Justice System the invisibility of girls persists, and is compounded by the absence of any national Youth Justice Policy or strategy that addresses girls offending. This hampers both the development of gender sensitive programmes and effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System, as well as preventative strategies for girls at risk of offending.

This literature review explores these themes beginning with an overview of theoretical perspectives and historical system responses to girls’ criminality, before going on to looking at the nature and context of girls
offending, gender differences and similarities in youth offending, and girls’ pathways into and out of offending. It highlights recent trends in girls offending including the increases in girls entering the Criminal Justice System and in girls violent offending. Contemporary Youth Justice System responses are considered, finishing with a look at examples and principles of effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System.

**Scope of this literature review**

The focus of this literature review is primarily on girls¹ in the Youth Justice System in England and Wales, although some research findings from Scotland, United States and Canada are also highlighted where relevant or where there are gaps in the national picture. Literature related to young women (18-21 years) and adult females in the Criminal Justice System² is included where it adds further insight. The search terms included girls and young women and: offending; crime; delinquency; violence; gangs; the Youth Justice System, risk factors for female offending; gender differences in youth offending; gender specific programmes; effective interventions with female offenders.

Recent national reports and official data (from the UK) relating to youth offending and children services supplemented the review to complete the contemporary picture and to include current practice wisdom.

The overall aim of the literature review is to introduce the main themes relating to girls offending and responses to it, and locate these into the wider Youth Justice context in order set the scene for the current research study, and to inform the discussions of its findings in subsequent chapters.

¹ The term 'girls' is used throughout to refer to girls and young women aged 10-17
² The term ‘criminal justice system is used when referring to the adult system including Police, courts, crown Prosecution Service, Probation and NOMS
1. Theoretical perspectives and historical response to female offending

**The absence of girls in the literature**

Female offending has largely been absent from criminological theory and research. Whether this is due to the smaller numbers of females involved in offending, and to the more minor nature of their offending, or due to sexism on the part of traditionally male theorists, it has meant that the knowledge and understanding about female offending and effective responses to females in the Criminal Justice System, is still relatively under theorised. In respect of younger girls (those under 18) these gaps are even more marked. Thus Belknap and Holsinger observe that:

…”malestream” criminological theories have questionable applicability to girls’ offending largely because they were developed to understand boys’ delinquency and even then almost always fail to explain the role of gender in boys’ lives (e.g., masculinity).

(2006:49)

Indeed females have either been ignored in theories and explanations of criminality, or seen as rare and unusual, or as suffering from a psychiatric disorder. Thus Lombroso (1895) for example, linked deviance to primitive masculine traits of aggression and atavism. Biological explanations for the differential involvement of male and females in offending are still put forward in modern theories, for example linking offending to male aggression and male sex hormones (Maccoby & Jacklin 1975) and female criminality to female hormones and the menstrual cycle (Pre menstrual tension, post natal depression etc) (Gelsthorpe 2004).Psychiatric explanations developed in the late nineteenth century attributed female criminality to personality disorder and mental illness, thus deviant girls
were often seen as psychiatrically disturbed, hysterical and neurotic and this legitimised professional intervention (ibid).

Psychological explanations of criminality have generally focused on personality traits (impulsivity etc) which determine criminality, and on poor cognitive development and these explanations remain popular.

Likewise sociological theories have concentrated on male criminality, thus Cohen (1955) argued that “the delinquent is a rogue male”. Indeed the focus of studies of delinquency in Britain between the 1960’s and 1980’s was almost exclusively on white working class boys (Cohen 1955 cited in Newburn 2007).

Traditional theories of crime and deviance have generally been presented as ‘gender neutral’ and as equally applicable to both male and female offending (Steffensmeier and Allen 1998). Thus social control theory is based on how social institutions restrain individuals to abide by societal norms. Hirshi (1969) refers to the importance of social bonds in criminal behaviours. Strong social bonds including attachment to significant others, involvement in conventional activities, having a stake in conformity and a belief in society’s laws, all make deviance less likely and weak social bonds make deviance more likely (Cited in Chesney- Lind & Pasko 2004: 20). Similarly Strain theories relate criminality to ‘blocked opportunities’ and the pressure people experience when they feel they cannot achieve their goals (financial or material success, status etc) by legitimate means. Drift theory suggests that individuals temporarily ‘drift away’ from society’s normative values. Thus Matza (1964) argues that individuals learn neutralisation techniques which lessen social controls and enable the justification of criminal behaviours (for example by arguing that they committed an offence in self defence or to help a friend). Conflict theory argues that there is a link between structural disadvantage in society and crime, thus factors such as class, poverty and inequality are
significant in determining criminality. (Chesney –Lind 1997, Steffensmeier and Haynie 2000)

Whilst these ‘mainstream’ theories can help us to understand female offending at a general level, they fall short of accounting for differences in male and female offending patterns and fail to apply a gender perspective to criminality. Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe thus note:

> Theories of crime must be able to take account of both men’s and women’s criminal behaviour and that they must also be able to highlight factors which operate differently on men and women (Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe 2007:384)

It is still only relatively recently that gender is considered in contemporary research and race was similarly absent from the criminological literature and under theorised until the politicisation of ‘black crime’ in the 1970’s (Newburn 2007).

Feminist critiques of criminology began to emerge from the late 1960’s inspired by the women’s movement. Critiques were based on the neglect of women in the criminological literature, and their misrepresentation where they were acknowledged in the discourse, based on sexist stereotyping of women as passive, domestic and maternal ( Smart 1976). The invisibility of females in criminology is regarded as characteristic of their position in society. Thus Chesney-Lind notes:

> Girls and young women in conflict with the law are overlooked, and excluded, whilst demonised, sexualised and masculinated (Chesney Lind 2006:7)
Liberal feminist discourse centred on promoting equality of opportunity and women’s rights in health and welfare, education and employment. Radical feminism focused on gender and power relations, questioning the relevance of theories of criminality based on patriarchy and male dominance and which largely ignored female victimisation.

Female delinquency must be understood in the context of socialised gender roles, female vulnerability to abuse from males, and the structural oppression of women (Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe 2007).

Feminist perspectives highlight the role of the family in controlling female delinquency, through the greater family controls placed on females and their closer supervision (private control rather than public control). Hudson (2002) highlights the explanatory codes that were developed which portrayed girls as passive and in need of protection, or as dangerous and needing to be controlled where they don’t conform to codes of sexual respectability and domesticity (Hudson 2002: 297).

Thus female delinquency was often equated with sexual delinquency and girls’ behaviours such as running away from home and stealing, and involvement in drug taking or prostitution have all been highlighted as girls’ survival strategies, developed in response to sexual abuse and tight family controls (Campbell 1981, Hudson 2002, Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004).

Feminist discourse was particularly influential in drawing attention to violence against women in the home (domestic violence and child abuse) and to the experiences of female victims of crime (rape, sexual assault / harassment etc) (Heidensohn & Gelsthorpe 2007). Indeed feminist commentators maintain that sexual abuse and harassment are major rather than minor themes which shape the lives of females, particularly in adolescence (Chesney-Lind & Pasko 2004).

3 In simple terms patriarchy refers to systems of power, hierarchy and dominance that oppress women (Heidensohn & Gelsthorpe 2007)
Explanations of female criminality based on differential gender roles and patterns of socialisation (boys are socialised to be ambitious and aggressive and girls to be passive and ‘domesticated’, girls were also seen as having less opportunity to become involved in crime) also emerged in the 1960’s and 70’s (Gelsthorpe 2004). Indeed female emancipation and the changing roles of women in the seventies were briefly heralded as likely to lead to their greater criminality (see Adler 1975) although this never came to fruition (Gelsthorpe 2004). These ideas re-emerged in the late 1990’s in ‘moral panics’ about:

younger and younger girls becoming increasingly aggressive, mushrooming girl gangs, increased use of drugs and, especially alcohol, and the wilful abandonment of gender role expectations


Also since the 1990’s, broader concepts of gender have been developed which have promoted it’s recognition as a social construct and contemporary feminist criminology began to recognise female difference in respect of class and race, rather than treating women as a homogeneous group. (Heidensohn & Gelsthorpe 2007).

The reasons for the lesser involvement of females in persistent and serious offending have yet to be fully explained and gender continues to be marginalised in contemporary Youth Justice wisdom.

**Historical responses to girls offending**

Historical system responses to girls largely reflect these themes. Concerns about girl’s sexual behaviour and morality have dominated the way girls were treated by both social care and Criminal Justice agencies (Hudson 1989, Gelsthorpe 2004). This paternalistic and ‘protective’ response from
the Criminal Justice System has sometimes led to unwarranted interference in girls' lives on welfare grounds, with girls being placed in the care of the local authority for behaviours such as running away from home, being out of parental control, considered to be ‘in moral danger’ or ‘at risk’ (McIvor 1998). Indeed the Youth Justice System has been held responsible for criminalising girls’ survival strategies developed in response to their experiences of abuse and violence.

Thus in the mid nineteenth century girls were admitted to industrial or reformatory schools, and later to approved schools, both for offending and for sexual misconduct and ‘immorality’ (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006, Cox 2003, Chesney – Lind and Pasko 2004).

Whilst the last approved school was shut in the late 1960’s (following the Children and Young Persons Act 1969), girls continued to be overrepresented in secure establishments for ‘welfare reasons’ (running away, considered at risk’, etc) rather than for offending (Chesney – Lind and Pasko 2004, McIvor 1998, Nacro 2001).

Smart (1976) reported that 64% of girls were institutionalised for non criminal offences compared to 5% of boys. Indeed it is still the case that the proportion of girls in secure establishments on welfare grounds is growing, despite more girls now being dealt with through the Criminal Justice System. Thus in 2001 girls made up 24% of the secure children’s home population and by 2004 this had risen to 33% (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006)

The differential treatment of girls in the Youth Justice System
Within the Criminal Justice System itself, feminist commentators have highlighted the gender bias in the processing of offenders, which serve both to reproduce and reinforce stereotypical gender roles and expectations. Girls committing trivial offences or offences that are typical
of females are thus treated more leniently than males for similar offences based upon ‘chivalrous’ responses exercised by, usually male, system agents. Conversely, if girls engage in atypical crimes, they are more likely to be regarded as worse than boys committing the same act because they are stepping outside the appropriate gender role, and are seen as ‘doubly deviant’ and thereby treated more harshly in the system (Hudson 1989, Nagel and Hagan (1983) and Naffine (1987) in Zaplin 1998, Gelsthorpe 2004).

Thus it is claimed that the Youth Justice System reflects and reinforces the myths that ‘bad’ girls are immoral rather than criminal and that it reflects traditional female roles and expectations in it’s preoccupation with girl’s sexual behaviours (Belknap and Holsinger 1998).

Indeed there is still more stigma attached to girls involvement in offending, and it is still the case that boys’ minor offending continues to be legitimised in the context of adolescence and masculinity (‘boys will be boys’).

It is also argued that girls have experienced both the advantages and disadvantages of welfare approaches in the Criminal Justice System, through greater diversion and more lenient treatment than boys when they are seen as vulnerable and in need of protection, and by harsher treatment and ‘Uptariffing’ (receiving a higher sentence than would be expected for the offence) when female offending challenges gender norms and expectations (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2006).

Media portrayal of violent and drunk girls on the streets challenges stereotypes of expected female behaviour and may impact on the treatment of girls and young women in the Youth Justice System, particularly where they fit the media stereotypes of troublesome girls (uncooperative, aggressive, unrepentant) (Zaplin 1998).
A study of the sentencing of women (Hedderman and Gelsthorpe 1997) for example suggests that magistrates were much more likely to comment on ‘appearance and demeanour’ and the ‘inappropriate (gender) behaviour’ of defendants, and suggested that these were possible factors in the differential outcomes of male and female offenders with similar antecedents in court.

Whilst a report by the Howard League for penal reform (1997) also notes:-

We suspect that magistrates and judges are being drip fed stories of “girl gangs” and “girl violence” and that some are handing down custodial sentences to teenage girls who previously would have received non custodial alternatives

(Howard League 1997 Report Introduction)

However a recent study (Feilzer and Hood 2004) commissioned by the Youth Justice Board to investigate differential treatment within Youth Justice System on the basis of ethnicity and gender produced mixed results, highlighting the complexities of unravelling discriminatory practice. This study found that a greater proportion of mixed parentage females were prosecuted than their white counterparts, and more Black than White females were sentenced to Crown Court. At the same time less Black girls were sentenced to custody than would have been expected based on their case characteristics (Feilzer and Hood 2004).

Indeed several reviews of the differential treatment of women in the Criminal Justice System have also shown that a range of variables including age, race, social class, type of offence, and other individual features of the offence or the offender, as well as gender and organisational features are likely to influence the treatment of offenders (Gelsthorpe & Heidensohn 2007).
Changes in the Youth Justice System since the 1990’s which have resulted in more girls entering the Criminal Justice System (themes which are discussed later in this review) suggest that welfare responses to girls are diminishing and that there is a move towards more punitive responses to girls offending, indeed that they are now more likely to be treated like their male counterparts. Thus Worrall (2004) argues that responses to girls are now more likely to be based on ‘straightforward punishment’. She contends however that girls are now disadvantaged by a Criminal Justice System that was developed overwhelmingly in response to male offending and which fails to take account of girls offending patterns and needs. Thus the more ‘equitable’ treatment of girls in the Youth Justice System has resulted in their greater criminalisation and incarceration.

Worrall also draws critical attention to two other responses to girls offending which have emerged in the late twentieth century: Firstly, the use of restorative justice approaches, which she argues fail to recognise that girls ‘bad’ behaviour often relates to their victimisation in the home, whilst in turn, the ‘informal’ conferencing process can also serve to reinforce attitudes about appropriate female behaviour. It can also be used to emphasise ‘shame’ and guilt which has connotations and risks for girls, particularly those who have suffered abuse and victimisation themselves (Worrall: 2004:157). Secondly, what Worrall describes as ‘the appeal of childhood innocence’ (ibid: 161) whereby ‘bad’ girls are reconstructed as innocent victims. (For example within the context of child prostitution and teenage pregnancy). Girls are thus portrayed as helpless victims of predatory males, emphasising their dependence and vulnerability in a similar vein to welfare and chivalry responses (ibid).
2. Girls offending patterns

The extent of girls offending
It is well documented that girls offend less, commit less serious crimes, have shorter criminal careers than their male counterparts, and are less likely to continue offending into adulthood (Heidensohn 1991, Burman 2004, Rutter et al 1998, Home Office 2003, 2004, Nacro 2008b).

Accordingly in England and Wales the male-female ratio for offending is 4:1 and 5:1 for serious offences (Home Office 2003) and in the last two decades this has remained fairly consistent. In 1984 for example, 84% of known offenders were male, and in 2004, this figure was 80% (Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe 2007).

Thus girls offending accounted for between 20% and 24% of all detected youth crime between 1992 and 2002, more recently rising to 26% in 2005. Accordingly girls make up approximately a quarter of the youth offending population in England and Wales (Nacro 2008b).

Official data is not always fully disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and age (for example YJB data is not disaggregated by each of these combined) thus the picture of BME\(^4\) girls ‘offending patterns remains incomplete although the overrepresentation of BME young people at all stages in the Criminal Justice System has consistently been highlighted in contemporary research (Feilzer and Hood 2004, Goldson and Chigwada-Bailey 1999). Thus during 2005/06, while Black or Black British young people made up 5.7% of the youth offending population, they accounted for 11.2% of those receiving a custodial sentence (YJB 2007a).

\(^4\) The term BME (Black Minority Ethnic) is used by the Youth Justice Board
The nature of girls offending

In England and Wales official data shows that the most common offences committed by girls are ‘theft and handling’ and ‘violence against the person’ (See Fig 1) Thus in 2006, 65% of detected offending by girls in England and Wales was for theft or handling stolen goods (this figure was 37% for boys) (Nacro 2008b). Girls being returned to court for breaching their statutory Order has increased year on year since 2002 (YJB2007a and Youth Justice Annual Workload Data 2007/08).

Fig 1: Common offences committed by girls 2006/07

![Bar chart showing common offences committed by girls 2006/07]

Source: Youth Justice Board Annual Workload Data 2006/7

Typically girls commit offences of shoplifting and more minor assault. National self-report studies carried out by the Home Office thus found that the most common offences committed by girls under sixteen are criminal damage, shoplifting, buying stolen goods and fighting (Flood - Page et al 2000).

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5 Official data referred to here is based on detected crime from the Youth Justice Board 2006/0.
6 Self report studies are based on interviews or questionnaires which are completed by adults or young people about any offences, numbers /type of / seriousness of offences they have committed.
Despite the greater prevalence of offending by boys, commentators have also highlighted significant similarities between male and female offending in the youth offending population.

Findings from self report studies for example, indicate that more girls offend than official crime data shows and suggest that there is little gender difference between offending, drug use or drinking alcohol in the 12 and 13 year old age range, with the gender difference after age 14 becoming more marked (Flood-Page et al 2000).

Likewise the Edinburgh study of Youth Transitions and Crime\(^7\) found that involvement in what it termed ‘broad delinquency’ was common amongst both girls and boys between the ages of 14 and 15. This ‘broad delinquency’ included more trivial incidents such as theft from home, writing graffiti, truancy, and fare dodging for example, which is often limited to adolescence. Offences that were found to be very common amongst girls and boys almost equally, were fare dodging, breach of the peace and shoplifting (Smith & McAra 2004:13).

Gender differences thus were most apparent in relation to serious delinquency which was more common for boys than girls at all ages. Thus ‘Carrying a weapon, housebreaking, robbery, cruelty to animals, joyriding, theft from cars and vandalism’ were all much more prevalent amongst boys (ibid: 9).

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\(^7\) The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions is a longitudinal self report study based on a cohort of approximately 4000 children who started secondary school in Edinburgh in 1998.
McIvor (1998) observes that both boys and girls commit trivial offences most often and serious offences rarely and that:

For females as well as for males, crime is very much a youth related phenomenon in Scotland (McIvor 1998:2)

Indeed a high proportion of self report ‘offences’ or delinquent behaviours are very minor and don’t come to the attention of the Police. However the reasons for the lesser involvement of females in serious and persistent offending remain under theorised.

In summary, the evidence suggests that offending in adolescence is a common feature in girls as well as boys, particularly in relation to minor offending between the ages of 13 and 15.

Girls’ detected offending peaks at age 15 and becomes less frequent thereafter, whilst the peak age of detected crime for boys is 17. In self report offending, the peak age for girls is 14 years and 18 for boys.

Over the age of 22 the gender ratio for male to female offending becomes more marked, increasing to 11:1. Indeed girls commonly ‘grow out of offending’ as they reach adulthood whereas this is not so often the case for boys (Graham and Bowling 1995).

Girls offending patterns thus differ to boys’ in the volume, persistence and seriousness of their offending.
Girls’ violent offending

Whilst the typical young female offender is still likely to be involved in shop theft, as highlighted above, this perception has begun to be replaced by images of violent girl gangs, and binge drinking girls involved in anti social behaviour as media headlines such as these demonstrate, also serving to remind us of gender norms of expected female behaviour:

‘Nasty violent mean girls’ (Radio 1 Listen Live 2 November 2005)

‘Sugar n’ Spice but…Not all nice’ (Sunday Times 27th November 1994)

‘The Feral Sex: The terrifying rise of violent girls gangs’ (Mail Online 16 May 2008)

‘Why are girls fighting like boys?’ (5 May 2008 BBC news magazine)

‘Police must toughen stance on anti social girls’ (15th May 2008 Telegraph)

The presence of aggression and violence in girls’ everyday lives has been increasingly highlighted in contemporary literature and the part that adolescent girls play as perpetrators alongside boys in family violence, in school bullying, and within peer or friendship groups has also been acknowledged (Phillips 2003, Pearce 2004).

Indeed official statistics indicate that violent offending by girls has increased in recent years fuelling concerns that girls are becoming more violent than ever before. Despite the increases highlighted in official data (discussed in more detail below), girls violent offending still involves mainly minor assaults, rather than more serious violence, and is commonly
located in the lower end of the scale in the broad offence category of ‘violence against the person’\(^8\) (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006).

Thus reviewing the literature Batchelor and Burman (2004) conclude that:

in all jurisdictions, the data reflects increases in young women charged with minor assault, rather than increases in serious violent offending by females

(Batchelor and Burman 2004:269)

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**The context of girls violent offending**

Studies have shown that girls' violence commonly occurs in the context of the ‘falling out’ in personal friendship groups, arising from other girls spreading rumours about them, defending their sexual reputation or involving family related conflict (commonly siblings/mother) (Bachelor et al 2001; Phillips 2003).

Batchelor et al (2001) in a Scottish study of 800 girls found that friendships were highly valued amongst girls commonly and spending time with their friends was their main social activity. Thus falling out with friends and breaches of trust impacted significantly on girls (Ibid: 10).

In addition girls' offences of violence are aimed at Police and care workers, often whilst under the influence of alcohol. The need to understand the importance of relationships to girls violent offending or the 'relational' context in girls offending has been highlighted in the literature (Zavlek et al 2007, Zahn et al 2008).

Thus girls' offences often involve a victim that is known to them such as a family member or friend (Harper and Chitty 2005). In the Howard League study of girls in custody, half of the girls had been convicted of violent

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\(^8\) ‘Violence against the person’ encompasses all types of violent offending, from common assault up to a murder (Nacro 2008)
offences, the majority of which involved fights within girls’ own friendship groups (Howard League 1997).

Physical violence in school or on the journey between school and home is also highlighted as common amongst girls and boys. Boys are more likely to be involved in overt bullying which is physical, and girls’ involvement in bullying (as both victim and perpetrator) is more often indirect and relational such as spreading rumours and psychological bullying (Zahn et al 2008, Phillips 2003).

Family related aggression is also a feature of girls’ violence. Studies in the United States indicate that violence against a family member is the second most common type of violent offence committed by girls, the most common being violence against same sex peers as it is for boys, and boys more frequently commit offences of violence against a stranger (Zahn et al 2008). Chesney –Lind 2001) argues that girls’ aggression often occurs in the home or intra-family. In one study of girls referred to the juvenile justice system in Maryland in 1997, half of assaults committed were “family centred”, whilst a California study of girls assault charges found that most were the result of “non serious mutual combat with parents” (Chesney –Lind 2001:42)

Alcohol is also a significant factor in female violence and this has been highlighted in a range of studies of females in custody (Howard League 1997, Douglas & Plugge 2004, HM Inspector of Prisons 2003).

Batchelor (2005) in a study of violent crime amongst girls and young women9 in custody found that the majority of offences were related to alcohol or drugs in some way, suggesting that substance misuse is a particular problem amongst young women sentenced for violent crimes. This study found that “four fifths of offences were committed while the

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9 This study referred to girls and young women aged between 16 and 24 years
offender was intoxicated’ and ‘one third were committed alongside acquisitive crimes carried out to fund a drug addiction’. The girls and young women in the study acknowledged that they had problems with their alcohol consumption or drug use and reported binge drinking and drinking alcohol to excess on a daily basis, and three fifths said they were addicted to heroin at the time of the offence (Batchelor 2005:262).

Drunkenness and resisting arrest also seems to be a factor in cases of girls arrested for assaulting a police officer. Beikoff for example notes that for Australian girls ‘the assault charge is frequently one of ‘assaulting a police officer ‘accompanied by a charge of ‘resisting arrest ‘arising out of a public order incident involving drunk and disorderly behaviour (Cited in Worrall 2000:163).

Recent concerns have also focused on girls’ gang related violence although there is no strong evidence that girls are becoming more involved in gang related violence in the UK. Batchelor et al (2001) in the large Scottish study described above, which involved a cross section of ‘ordinary’ girls drawn from inner city and rural areas, for example found no confirmation of any gang related female violence. The study highlighted that whilst girls were both the perpetrators and victims of high levels of verbal abuse, there was little evidence of physical violence amongst the majority of the girls.

Although there has been a rise in youth gang activity in UK cities in the last eight years, girls’ involvement is often on the margins, playing more of an ancillary role to male gang members (holding weapons or drugs) and often sexually exploited. A recent London based study on gang activity, girls constituted 5% of the perpetrators of ‘gun enabled’ crime and strikingly, 30% of the victims (Pitts 2007).
In a study of gang and group related youth offending amongst girls and boys in the Youth Justice System commissioned by the YJB (YJB 2007b) girls who had been involved in group violence indicated that they associated in both mixed sex peer groups, and some female-only groups, and that these were often based on long standing friendships. Most of the girls had experienced significant family problems resulting in them being thrown out of or leaving home. In this context the girls saw their group or ‘gang’ as having a positive role in their lives, and that being in a group offered them protection in public space. The girls drew moral distinctions between their offending and the types of crime committed by male gangs. Some had more negative experiences of gang involvement and had been raped by gang members, forced to carry drugs or were indebted to gangs for drugs (ibid: 14).

Clearly violence is a part of many young people’s lives, including girls but within this, females are still more likely to be on the receiving end of violence rather than be the perpetrators of it.

*Recent increases in girls offending*

Since 2003, official data has shown a significant rise in girls detected offending. Thus the most current data published by the Youth Justice Board shows a 25% rise in the offences committed by girls resulting in a disposal (From 47,358 in 2003/04 to 59,236 in 2006/07), compared with a 2% drop for boys (YJB Annual Workload data 2006/07:15).

Violent offences committed by girls accounted for the biggest increases as mentioned above. Thus offences of ‘violence against the person’ committed by girls almost doubled in number between 2002 and 2007, from 8,702 in 2002, to 15,672 in 2007(YJB Annual Workload Data 2002-2007).
However it is widely argued that these increases relate more to changes in the processing of girls in the Youth Justice System, than to changes in girls offending patterns. Indeed girls are increasingly likely to find themselves in court, rather than being cautioned, reprimanded or warned by the Police. Thus whereas in the past girls were likely to have been dealt with informally by Police (as their offending was often minor), and diverted from the court process, they are now finding themselves being dealt with through the same formal routes as boys (Burman 2004, Nacro 2008b, Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006).

These formal responses have been driven by national targets to increase detected crime (known as sanction detections$^{10}$). Thus since 2002, Police recording of all reported crime, however minor, to meet these targets, has resulted in more girls entering the formal Youth Justice System.

This point is strikingly illustrated by the drop in the number of girls receiving a Police Reprimand (Caution pre-2000) or Final Warning$^{11}$ and a sharp rise in the number of girls convicted at court. Thus between 1992 and 2002 the number of girls convicted at court rose by 57%, despite a decrease in this time period in total girls detected offending (Nacro 2008b), as shown in Figure 2 below. Accordingly diversion rates fell with the proportion of girls receiving a Reprimand or Final warning declining from almost 88% in 1992 to 72% in 2002 (ibid).

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$^{10}$ Reprimands, Final Warnings, penalty notices for disorder, convictions, and offences taken into consideration are all recognised ‘sanction detections’ for children and young people (ages 10-17) and thus count towards the national target to ‘bring offences to justice’ (Nacro 2008a).

$^{11}$ Reprimands are usually given by the Police for a 1st offence. A Final Warning can be given for a further offence where the offence is not considered serious and where the young person admits guilt. Thus if guilt is not admitted or the offence is considered serious the young person will be remitted to court (Home Office 2006).
This rise in girls in the court population is also reflected in a rise in the numbers of girls entering custody (Nacro 2008a) Thus whilst the number of girls given custodial sentences remains small compared to boys, at 6.5% of all custodial sentences imposed on young people, custody figures for girls in the last twelve years have almost trebled from 2.4% in 1992. February 2008 saw girls accounting for 7.3% of children in custody (Nacro 2008a).

Indeed it is notable that in the early 1990’s it was considered that most girls could more appropriately be dealt with through supervision on community programmes, and that custody would only be necessary for the very few girls that committed a serious or ‘grave’ crime (Home Office 1990 cited in Bateman 2008) Yet in fact the opposite has occurred. The introduction of the Secure Training Order in 1994 (as part of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994) and the subsequent Detention and Training Orders (DTO) which replaced it in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, both allowed for children as young as 12 to be incarcerated (Goldson and Peters 2000) and provided greater opportunities to impose custodial sentences than ever before.
Changes in female youth culture

Changes in female youth culture in recent years have also resulted in the greater visibility of girls in public space. Whereas adolescent girls once spent significant amounts of their leisure time in the home environment with their friends (the bedroom as the meeting place for girls, compared to the streets as the meeting place for boys) they are now increasingly likely to make use of public space and socialise on the streets in mixed peer groups. (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2006, McRobbie 2000). Thus girls are involved alongside boys in anti social behaviour, particularly where it entails ‘hanging around’ and ‘drunk or rowdy behaviour’ (Wood 2004:30). Pearce (2004) in a study of violence in inner city estates, notes that girls as well as boys make use of public space and are involved in ‘everyday violence and disorder’(Pearce 2004: 143).

Consequently girls as well as boys are now at greater risk of coming to police attention for anti social and offending behaviour than in previous eras when young people were not subject to such high levels of surveillance and when girls were not so visible in the public domain. Young people are often the main target for Police efforts to ‘bring offences to justice’ (Faulkner 2008) and the high profile of anti social behaviour throughout the late 1990’s to present day has resulted in the greater system intervention as young people become subject to Acceptable Behaviour contracts/ Anti Social Behaviour Orders, Curfew Orders, and Penalty Notices for unacceptable, rather than offending behaviour.

In addition diminishing neighbourhood youth provision in recent years has displaced more young people onto the streets, particularly young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Locally based youth services have largely been replaced by more formal structured provision such as Youth Connexions and prevention initiatives, most of which are aimed at the younger age range (Youth Inclusion and Support Programme, Positive
Activities for Young People\(^\text{12}\) etc) whilst the commercial leisure industry (leisure complexes which house cinema, bowling etc) has expanded rapidly (Measham 2004), excluding young people who don’t have the financial means to partake in these activities. Detached and outreach youth workers deployed to engage with young people on the streets have largely been replaced by Police and Police Community Support Officers.

Further, the emergence since the mid 1990’s, of the extremely lucrative alcohol driven leisure sector and night time economies (‘café society’, 24 hour society, the promotion of the modern European city etc), is largely targeted at youth. Thus Hobbs (2005) describes alcohol as the core commodity which attracts individuals to the night time economy and is responsible for:

altering the mundane, pressurised, regimented, and unattractive world of daylight and comportment, realigning meaning and understanding to fit a more seductive alluring world of hedonism and carnival

(Hobbs et al 2005:163)

Although primarily aimed at older youth (with economic power) the younger audience is both lured and groomed by the leisure industry marketing of desirable lifestyles. Indeed marketing strategies are often targeted at females (free entry to clubs and bars, alcopops etc) and draws girls in at a young age, who see entry to this glitzy ‘clubland’ as a rite of passage to young adulthood (Measham 2004). The focussed policing of the night-time ghetto makes girls more susceptible to arrest for alcohol induced violence and disorder and criminal damage. Indeed public disquiet about girls’ alcohol related behaviour echoes earlier concerns about their sexual morality and behaviours.

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\(^\text{12}\) PAYP and YISP are part of the national prevention and early intervention agenda aimed at preventing youth crime. See [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk)
3. Girls’ pathways into and out of offending

Pathways into offending are broadly similar for both boys and girls, although most studies have focused solely on male offending, and factors thought to contribute to girls offending specifically have only been considered more recently and remains under theorised.

*Risk factor Paradigm*\(^{13}\)

The ‘risk factors’ as they are commonly known are generally treated as established causes of crime rather than as correlates for which causation has yet to be established (Wilstrom and Butterworth 2006). Indeed it is widely acknowledged that many young people with multiple ‘risk factors’ do not go on to offend and commentators also argue that risk factors are often indistinguishable from social need (Pitts 2001, Armstrong et al 2005, Pitts 2005, Wilstrom and Butterworth 2006). In addition the emphasis on protective factors remains under explored and under emphasised.

Since the mid nineties, approaches to understanding youth offending within the Youth Justice System have been based upon an assessment of ‘risk factors’ (in the YJB Asset\(^ {14}\) assessment) which predispose young people towards offending (See YJB 2001 for examples of risk and protective factors and Fig 3 below for common risk factors associated with youth offending).

Factors which are thought to influence young people's pathways into offending are related to a combination of difficulties within their family, education, community, and to individual circumstances or characteristics

Thus family factors such as deprivation, low parental supervision, ‘inadequate’ parenting, family conflict, parental/sibling criminality and

\(^{13}\) See Nacro Youth Crime Briefing (2007) Effective Practice with children and young people who offend Part 2 for discussion on the risk factor paradigm for example

\(^{14}\) See [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk). The YJB Asset young offender assessment profile
unstable living conditions are all highlighted as risks which are thought to contribute to young people’s likely involvement in offending.

Similarly exposure to education ‘risk’ factors such as lack of attachment to school and low educational achievement are seen as significant. Community factors include disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the ready availability of drugs, and lack of attachment to the neighbourhood. Individual risk factors include involvement in delinquent peer groups, holding anti social attitudes, substance or alcohol misuse, aggressive/hyperactive or behaviour in early childhood or temperament or conduct problems (Graham and Bowling 1995, Audit Commission 1996, YJB 2001, Home Office 2004b, Stephenson et al 2007).

**Fig 3: Risk factors associated with youth offending**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk factors associated with youth offending</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Family conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Poor parental supervision and discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Family history of criminality,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parental attitudes that condone anti social/offending behaviour</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Low income, poor housing, large family sizes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Low achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of commitment to school</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Disadvantaged neighbourhoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Availability of drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hyperactivity or impulsivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Early involvement in crime and drug misuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Friends involved in crime and drug misuse</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Protective factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being female</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Strong relationship with at least one parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Commitment to school</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Resilient temperament</td>
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<tr>
<td>• High intelligence.</td>
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Source: YJB 2001
Gender differences and similarities in risk factors for youth offending

Simourd and Andrews (1994) in a meta analysis of studies exploring risk factors and delinquency found that the same risk factors in the same order of significance were important for both boys and girls:- anti social attitudes and peers, temperament or misconduct problems, emotional difficulties, educational difficulties and poor parent child relations (Cited in Hubbard and Pratt 2002). However the authors also recognised that although similar risks are present in the lives of girls and boys involved in offending, these risks are likely to operate or be experienced differently, and result in different ‘problems’ and outcomes.

Indeed it is widely acknowledged that there are likely to be additional risks that may be more specific or relevant to females (Howden– Windell and Clarke 1999, Simourd & Andrews 1994, Farrington and Painter 2004, Harper and Chitty 2005, Hedderman 2004, Hubbard and Pratt 2002).

Hubbard and Pratt (2002) conducting a meta-analysis of the predictors of delinquency among girls note:

Most of what is currently “known” about the predictors of individual level delinquency is based on research conducted on male samples

(Hubbard and Pratt 2002: 4)

Investigating gender differences in risk factors for offending amongst the brothers and sisters of the original 411 families contacted in the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development15, Farrington and Painter found that the most important risk factors for boys and girls were low family income, large family size, attending a high delinquency school, a convicted mother/father/sibling, parental conflict, separation from a parent, harsh or erratic parental discipline and poor parental supervision.

15 This is a longitudinal study of 411 males who were first contacted in 1961- 1962. Farrington and Painter investigate the 494 brothers and 519 sisters of these original boys.
However they too concluded in reviewing the existing research, that the knowledge base about important risk factors for girls delinquency compared to boys’ is weak (Farrington and Painter 2004:13). Their study found that factors which predicted delinquency more strongly for girls were: socio-economic factors such as low family income, low social class and poor housing; and child rearing factors such as low parental praise or interest, poor parental supervision, parental conflict, and low parental interest in education.

Hubbard and Pratt (2002) found similar risk factors for girls and boys: - a history of anti-social behaviour and delinquent peers were strong predictors of delinquency for both genders. They also found that important risk factors for girls delinquency were school relationships and physical or sexual abuse.

*Girls’ experiences of violence and abuse*

The link between children who suffer abuse and neglect and their subsequent involvement in the Youth Justice System has been highlighted in a range of research (Widom 2000, Jones and Pitts, 2001, Hubbard and Pratt 2002, Farrington 2007). Studies of females in custody have consistently shown experience of childhood abuse above the levels found in the general population (Prison Reform Trust, 2005, Fawcett Commission 2004, Batchelor 2005, YJB 2006a, Belknap and Holsinger 2006).

Children are more vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime than adults, and many crimes of violence against children go unreported to Police or parents (Pitts 2005). Victimisation surveys\(^\text{16}\) indicate that victimisation is crucially shaped by age, gender and race and is compounded by social

\(^{16}\) The British Crime Survey is the most well known victimisation study and is based on interviews with randomly selected heads of households in England and Wales (Pitts and Bateman 2003)
disadvantage (poor housing, lone parents managing on state benefits, unemployment etc) and abuse or neglect.

A study of young people under the supervision of an Inner London YOT (Jones and Pitts 2001) found high incidence of sexual abuse, parental mental health problems, care histories including child protection registration and social services and education welfare involvement amongst the young people (Cited in Pitts 2003:7).

McIvor (1998) argues that the impact of childhood sexual abuse may be a more significant risk factor for girls’ involvement in offending and is considered to be a factor in girls running away and their involvement in prostitution.

Bloom et al (2003) in a study of girls and young women in the American Juvenile Justice System identified the significance of victimisation, especially physical sexual and emotional abuse amongst the girls’ histories (Bloom et al 2003:128).

Batchelor (2005) in a study of girls and young women in custody suggested ‘a pattern of female offending that begins with family problems and experience of abuse (ibid: 364). In her study half of the young women experienced significant family disruption, three quarters had previous social worker involvement and involvement in the Children’s Hearing System (CHS), and half had been ‘looked after’ by the local authority. Two fifths of the girls and young women had suffered sexual abuse, usually by a family member (This figure is likely to be under reported for a range of reasons, particularly for younger girls who may not yet have disclosed their abuse). Likewise two fifths of the girls and young women reported a significant amount of ‘serious’ violence in the home mostly between parents, as a result of alcohol abuse.
Widom (2000) found that abused and neglected girls are more than twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes, more likely to use alcohol and drugs and to turn to crime and violence when under stress in their lives than girls who have not been abused or neglected.

Indeed girls’ reactions to adversity are thought to be significant and girls and boys adopt different coping strategies to deal with stressful life events and emotional problems. Girls are likely to internalise emotional problems resulting in depression, anxiety, and deliberate self harm, whereas boys are more likely to externalise problems through ‘acting –out’ behaviour (Coleman and Dennison 2000, McIvor 1998, Greene, Peters & Associates 1998) Girls are more susceptible to post traumatic stress and other emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders etc (Hennessey et al 2004). Thus girls who offend are also more likely to have taken overdoses, frequently in response to emotional stress, which is demonstrated in studies of girls in custody (Douglas and Plugge, 2006 Prison Reform Trust, 2005, Fawcett Commission 2004).

**Girls’ multiple and complex needs**
The troubled backgrounds and the complex and multiple needs of many girls and young women in the Youth Justice System have been widely documented. Thus mental health needs including depression, anxiety and self harm; ‘care’ histories; serious alcohol and drug abuse; experience of family violence; physical and sexual abuse; and low educational attainment following exclusion from school and prolonged truancy, have all been highlighted as significant amongst girls and young women as well as adult female offenders in custody (although equally these needs and experience also differ between girls and women) (Gelsthorpe 1999, Prison Reform Trust, 2005, Fawcett Commission 2004, Douglas and Plugge, 2006).
The Howard league Inquiry ‘Lost Inside’ (1997) which focussed on 61 girls under 18 who were in custody, found that a high percentage of girls had been in care; abused drugs or alcohol, had stress ridden and violent lives, had experienced family breakdown, were excluded from school or were long term non attenders (Howard League 1997: Executive Summary).

Similarly the HMIP ‘Juveniles in Custody’ report 2003 which surveyed young people in all secure establishments holding children under 18 between November 2001 and March 2003, found that sixty five per cent of girls had been excluded from school, eighty four per cent said they truanted from school and fifty four per cent said they truanted every day, whilst forty three per cent of girls had spent time in care or foster homes or both.

The health needs of females in the Criminal Justice System have been widely acknowledged including physical health, mental health and drug abuse. Research has highlighted psychiatric disorders, serious self harm and attempted suicide amongst imprisoned girls (Belknap and Holsinger 2006, Prison Reform Trust 2005, Fawcett Commission 2004, Bateman 2008).

A recent study of the health needs of girls in custody also highlighted significant mental ill health amongst girls and high levels of self harm observing that: -

71% of respondents had some level of psychiatric disturbance, which rose to 86% when factoring in longstanding disorders (Douglas and Plugge 2006 cited in Bateman 2008).

Female mental health needs are also likely to be exacerbated by the experience of custody itself as girls and women are separated from support networks, placed in establishments which are often long distances
from their home, and in the case of many adult women and some younger women, separation from their children.

Although mental health problems are also significant amongst boys in the Criminal Justice System, there is a general consensus that mental health problems are more common amongst female than males (Howden-Windell and Clark 1999, Home Office 2001). Thus studies indicate girls are more likely to experience depression deliberately physically harm themselves, and attempt suicide than boys. Girls’ suicide attempts are often seen as a way of them communicating their emotional distress (Dennison and Coleman 2000).

The absence of data on which to assess the needs of BME women was found in a recent study into the health needs of BME women in custody (Fawcett Commission 2004) highlighting the marginalisation of these women despite concerns about their over representation in the prison population as noted earlier.

Whilst the girls’ needs cannot be ascribed to have a direct causal relationship to their offending, the presence of multiple and often interrelated needs clearly play a role in making girls vulnerable to offending and other types of social exclusion such as drug abuse, homelessness and sexual exploitation (Melrose 2004, Chesney-Lind & Pasko 2004). Understanding these needs and risks is critical to responding effectively to girls both within the Youth Justice System as well as in prevention and early intervention strategies. Indeed Rumgay (2000) maintains that the backgrounds and circumstances of women’s lives are inseparable from their involvement in crime and that ‘far from being irrelevant to an understanding of women’s offending, personal difficulties and welfare problems are inextricable from it’ (Rumgay cited in Gelsthorpe 2004: 29).
Girls’ pathways out of offending

Girls’ pathways out of and desistance from offending are much less researched than pathways in. As highlighted earlier, girls commonly grow out of crime at a much earlier age than boys. Indeed girls’ desistance from offending is associated with the transition to adulthood and achieving independence (leaving school, getting a job and leaving home etc) and taking on family responsibilities. Boys are less likely to achieve independence and responsibility until later and the transition to adulthood is more prolonged (this transition is often not completed until after they have reached their mid twenties) and even where boys do leave home and form their own families, they often fail to desist from offending.

Factors which are more influential in whether boys’ desist from offending are linked to their offending histories (persistent offenders being more likely continue their offending), to their continued contact with delinquent peer groups, and to their heavy alcohol and drug use (Graham & Bowling 1995:65).

Jamieson et al (1999) noted both social and cognitive factors influencing young people’s desistance from offending. This study found that girls alluded to the moral dimension of crime in explaining their desistance including feeling guilt and shame and to considerations such as having practical responsibilities, whereas boys explained desistance in broadly utilitarian terms (Cited in Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006:54).

4. Contemporary Youth Justice Responses to girls

A new punitiveness
The more formal responses towards girls (and young people generally) highlighted above, can be traced largely to political and legislative changes in England and Wales since the early 1990’s which heralded a
‘new punitiveness’ towards children, away from diversionary, welfare and rehabilitative approaches, and towards practices rooted in philosophies of individual responsibility and active citizenship of families and the community (Garland 2001, Pitts 2003).

This more punitive tone in the Youth Justice System was in part engendered by the political climate following youth ‘riots’ and disturbances in the early nineties and the murder of two year old James Bulger in 1993 by two ten year old boys (Pitts 2001a). Thus more punitive and formal responses to children who offend emerged, coupled with the growth of managerialism and performance management culture in public services which together changed the Youth Justice System landscape for the decades to come.

The Crime and Disorder Act (CDA) 1998 established the Youth Justice Board (YJB) as a national body to oversee 155 multi agency youth offending teams (YOTS) and to administer a new, highly prescribed Youth Justice System.

It replaced the more discretionary police cautioning system, with a more formal system of Police Reprimands and Final warnings. Although intended to reduce inconsistencies in cautioning practice across the country and reduce repeat and multiple cautioning per say, the new pre court system removed any flexibility and discretion in the treatment of young people who came into contact with the police at these early stages for very minor ‘delinquent’ behaviour, serving to draw more children into the Criminal Justice System, particularly girls whose offending was typically minor and less persistent (Pitts 2001, Smith 2007, Nacro 2008).

Children as young as 12 were now able to be imprisoned for committing an offence, and the legal principle of ‘doli incapax’, the legal right of a child to be judged as incapable of understanding that they had done
something seriously wrong, based on their age and understanding, was abolished\textsuperscript{17} (Goldson and Peters 2000, Smith 2007).

\textit{The impact of managerialism}

The legislative changes were accompanied by wide ranging managerialist policies in the Youth Justice System which placed a new emphasis on YOTS meeting centrally prescribed targets and key performance indicators to specified timescales, and which reduced professional judgement to administrative tick boxes. Thus Pitts (2001) observes of the new Youth Justice:

\begin{quote}
[The] unprecedented concern with implementation, which comes to be specified in ever closer detail, in an attempt to minimise the scope for innovation and professional discretion (Pitts 2001: 8)
\end{quote}

Similarly, changing Police practice in response to national public service targets meant that from 2002 onwards, Police recording and decision making shifted to meet targets to increase detected crime. Thus the formal recording of all incidents and offences reported to the Police, counted as sanction detections (Nacro 2008a). Informal Police responses (i.e. non sanction detections) declined, as did both the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) exercising their powers of discretion in relation to the decision to prosecute in some cases. (ibid: 7)

Indeed as Alder and Worrall note:

\begin{quote}
\ldots crime statistics may not so much disclose “facts” about “criminal acts” as they do changes in police policies and\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} the legal principle of ‘Doli Incapax’ required the prosecution to demonstrate that a child between the ages of 10 and 13 understood that they had done something that was ‘seriously wrong’ (as opposed to having been naughty or mischievous) before they could be convicted of a criminal offence (Goldson and Peters 2000: 4)
the political manoeuvring of criminal justice agencies as a response to such issues as changes in management objectives, budget structures and other organisational issues.

(Alder and Worrall 2004:3)

More recently the culture of targets and counting rules has been criticised by HM Chief of Constabulary who suggested that Police could improve their professional judgment by adopting a more proportionate response to lower level crime. This and other concerns such as Police bureaucracy and lack of public confidence are highlighted in the Flanagan Report (Home Office 2008) and are set to be addressed in the Policing Green Paper (ibid).

Girls marginalised in national Youth Justice Policy
Despite more girls entering the Youth Justice System, and increasing numbers entering custody, they continue to occupy a marginal position within Youth Justice Services and have attracted little attention in the policy arena.

One exception to this is that the YJB signed up to the 2004 Women’s Offending Reduction Programme Action Plan\(^{18}\) (Home Office 2004b). Within this was a target to remove girls from adult female establishments (This was a target set for 1999 which was finally achieved in 2005).

The YJB was thus allocated funding to set up specialist units for 17 year old girls within prison service custody to avoid them being placed with adult females. Further the YJB pledged its commitment to researching the criminogenic needs of girls in order to develop appropriate interventions and programmes whilst ensuring in its research strategy that girls are over sampled to achieve statistically significant outcomes (ibid).

\(^{18}\) The ‘Women’s Offending Reduction Programme’ Action Plan was developed by National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in 2004 to promote effective interventions for women offenders. It called for greater use of community sentences for lower risk offenders and for custody to be reserved for dangerous and serious offenders. It was mostly aimed at adult female offenders although the YJB also signed up to.
Whilst an informal ‘Girl’s and Young Women’s Practitioner Meeting’ was established by the YJB for practitioners to share and develop effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System towards the end of 2004, it has only recently been more widely publicised and its remit and mandate have yet to be established (Community Care 2008).

*Lack of gender sensitive and gender responsive YOT interventions*

Similarly, the neglect of girls and young women in the policy arena coupled with practitioners’ more limited experience with girls than boys in the Youth Justice System (there being fewer girls in the system), has resulted in significant gaps in practitioner understanding and knowledge about their needs and of effective interventions with them. Girls remain largely invisible in provision and gender specific provision is rare and patchy (Bateman 2008, Owers 2004). Girls, in the main, are dealt with in the same way as boys though their needs and pathways in and out of offending are often very different (Batchelor & Burman 2004).

For girls in the Youth Justice System, assessments and interventions based on risk are still questionable. Firstly, on the basis of the significance of risk factors for offending which are constructed from aggregate data of adult male offending patterns to girls and young women’s offending, and secondly, on the premise that risk based approaches which are based on managing and reducing risk (risk of re offending, risk of serious harm to other and risk to the public), have only limited relevance to female offending patterns (girls offending careers being generally shorter and involving less serious offences) (Rumgay 1996 cited in Kemshall 2004).

Equally, girls in the Youth Justice System frequently have wide ranging and interrelated needs which call for a comprehensive assessment of their needs and holistic interventions to address these needs, rather than a narrow focus on criminogenic risk factors.
Gender neutral resources are largely used by Youth Offending Teams which are more suited to boys offending types and patterns. Thus offending behaviour programmes commonly focus on offences committed by males, such as car crime, or more recently, gun and knife crime, or utilise adult programmes related to crime and its consequences based on cognitive behavioural therapy (Owers 2004, Bateman 2008).

Specific programmes for girls in the Youth Justice System are often seen as an optional extra, rather than as part of the core work of the YOT and as Worrall (2001) notes:

…requiring constant justification and being the first provision to be cut when time and funding are at a premium

(Worrall 2001: 90)

A YJB mapping exercise (Owers 2004) to identify specific resources or programmes for girls and young women in community and custodial settings confirmed the gaps in both community and secure provision, both in terms of the lack of specific offending behaviour /accredited programmes for girls and young women, and in the lack of evaluation of programme effectiveness Indeed YOT staff, though often keen to provide gender specific programmes, are constrained by their lack of knowledge about effectiveness of gender specific programmes.

A recent review of provision for girls in custody (Bateman 2008) also found that few gender specific programmes are available, and those that exist are for the most part not independently evaluated or widely implemented (ibid). Thus for example a YJB funded programme for girls on ISSP, adapted from the established American programme ‘Oregon Guidelines for Effective Gender programming’, has not been adopted beyond the pilot area (ibid).
Arts based projects which use drama or dance to address girls offending have also been employed by some YOTS to explore issues related to the girls offending/behaviour (heavy alcohol use for example), some of which have been evaluated (‘Miss Spent’ project (see www.cleanbreak.co.uk) an accredited programme evaluated by South Bank University, and Dance United Academy project evaluated by Manchester University for example). These approaches have shown promising results particularly in relation to improved confidence, self awareness, self control, enhanced coping skills and re engagement with education (Bateman 2008).

Outside of the United Kingdom despite a more developed knowledge base, there are still few gender specific programmes that are ‘proven’ to reduce girls offending behaviour. Thus a review of American programmes conducted by the Girls Study Group (2007) funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, identified 68 such programmes, though only 18 had been independently evaluated. Only four of the 18 were subsequently judged as ‘promising’ within the very specific criteria for demonstrating effectiveness (Girls Study Group cited in Bateman 2008).

Nonetheless it is clear that gender specific programmes are more established in the United States and that they can help inform developing responses to girls offending in the UK, whilst also acknowledging that there may be differences in translating the American experience to the UK.
5. Identifying Principles of effective practice with girls

Indeed some key principles have emerged from the examination of the literature, (Worrall 2001, Patton and Morgan 2002, Batchelor and Burman 2004, Nacro 2008b).

The importance of relationships
The importance of relationships in girls and young women’s lives has been highlighted in a range of studies. Thus the basis for effective intervention with girls is the ability to establish a positive worker – young person relationship, based on mutuality rather than on reinforcing girls’ subordination. Further practitioners need an understanding of the importance of close and supportive relationships in girls’ lives and the impact on girls when these relationships are threatened or in conflict. The ‘relational’ element in the context of girls’ offending is also significant, particularly in offences of violence which in the case of girls, often occurs as a result of conflicts with, or about family or friends.

Listening to girls
Talking with and listening to the girls as well as including their insights in interventions have also been identified as important. Patton and Morgan (2002) propose that evaluations, focus groups, providing an e-mail address for participants to use to give comments or suggestions on programmes, the use of exit interviews, and for staff to collect feedback at the end of the programme, are all ways of ensuring that girls’ views can be heard. Bloom et al (2003) observe that a way of reducing the invisibility of girls in the Youth Justice System is to listen to their voices to add to our understanding of their gendered experiences.

Recognition of girls experiences of violence and victimisation
Commentators have highlighted the complex range of difficulties and life experiences of girls and young women passing through the Youth Justice
System particularly experiences of violence and abuse. Programmes need to provide a safe environment (small group size; appropriate venue; skilled staff who can effectively manage group processes, foster a supportive and emotionally safe environment, set boundaries and deal with conflict). Programmes are most likely to be effective where girls are offered individual programmes as well as a group programme and/or activities (Patton and Morgan 2002: 18). Specialist support and counselling will need to be available to help for girls and young women deal with these experiences. Informal and flexible responses (drop in facilities, outreach youth work etc) may be important in order for girls to take up provision.

**Strengths based approaches**

The importance of using strengths based approaches in programmes has also been cited. Thus programmes should seek to change girls’ behaviour by playing to their strengths rather than a ‘deficit’ model which focuses on unacceptable behaviour or attitudes. A ‘strengths based’ model nurtures and encourages girls’ natural resilience and resourcefulness (Patton & Morgan 2002: 49).

**Holistic responses and relevant programmes**

The literature further indicates that successful interventions should be holistic and take account of the range of factors that may contribute to girls’ involvement in offending and delinquency (Batchelor and Burman 2004, Bateman 2008). They should be age appropriate and reflect girls’ culture and needs in order to ensure they remain relevant, and to enhance the likelihood of girls’ engagement in programmes and of positive outcomes for them in these areas of need (Batchelor & Burman 2004).

American research likewise indicates that gender specific programmes should be based on an understanding of female adolescent development and on a holistic approach that builds confidence and self efficacy, and takes account of relevant risk and protective factors for girls and young

Chesney-Lind and Pasko note that successful programmes:-

- Value the female perspective
- Celebrate female experience
- Take account of female development
- Empower girls to reach their potential
- Are gender, age and culturally specific
- Build positive gender and ethnic identity
- Provide emotional and psychological support
- Include advocacy and counselling provision

(Chesney – Lind & Pasko 2004:91)

Similarly, the ‘Oregon’s Guidelines for Effective Gender specific programming for girls’ (Patton and Morgan 2002:7) highlight the need for:-

- Gender specific policies which outline the principles and values on which the programme is based
- Data to be collected to ensure that programmes are effectively targeted
- Appropriate and trained staff to run programmes
- An environment which is physically and emotionally safe for females
- Girls to be included in the design of the programme
- Girls to be offered after care and follow up services
- Girls to be assessed appropriately
- Outcome measurements and evaluations to monitor the effectiveness of the programme
- Quality assurance processes
Patton and Morgan (2002) also stress the value of health based interventions in programmes for girls as health related issues forms an important part of girls adolescent development. Thus elements of physical health including body image, healthy lifestyles, sexual and mental health as well alcohol and drugs will all be relevant in programmes aimed at girls (Bateman 2008).

These principles can be incorporated into programmes and interventions with girls both provided by YOTS, and equally, they can be utilised in prevention and early intervention strategies.

Indeed this review indicates that the multiple and interrelated needs which girls in the Youth Justice System commonly experience require cross agency strategies and interventions, rather than single agency responses to part of the problem. This is also borne out in contemporary children strategies, legislation and research (Children Act 2008, Department of Children Schools and Families 2007 etc).

Furthermore, girls’ pathways into offending are likely to also be their pathways into other types of risk taking behaviours and social exclusion. As such responses to girls need to be located in a broader context than simply their risk of offending, based on criminogenic risk factors if they are to be effective in improving outcomes for girls.

Indeed YOTS have a responsibility within the new Children Act (2008) to contribute to the wider Children Services agenda in a preventive role, as well as in their statutory role. The challenge for Youth Justice is how to take these roles forward.
Conclusion

This review has highlighted contemporary issues surrounding girls offending and offered some insight into their offending patterns and needs. It has highlighted some of the gaps in practice knowledge and sketched out principles of effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System.

It also illustrates the need for gender sensitive responses in both Youth Justice Agencies and related Children Services in order for positive outcomes for girls to be achieved. These are the themes which are developed in the subsequent research study.
CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

This chapter begins by introducing the background to the research detailing the researcher’s starting point and professional background, the YOT area in which the research is conducted and giving a brief history of its responses to girls who offend.

It also outlines the aims of the research and the key questions that the author sets out to answer. The research design and methodology is defined and the three different elements of the research are explained: - the case files study; the interviews with girls; interviews with YOT practitioners.

Ethical considerations arising from the study are explored and the limitations of the research are considered.

Background to the research

About the Researcher

The motivation for this research emanates from a desire to investigate an under researched contemporary area of Youth Justice, and to marry academic and practice perspectives in order to contribute to wider Youth Justice Policy and Practice. Most of the research about female offending focuses on adult females or girls and young women in custody. In the light of this, coupled with reported increases in girls entering the Youth Justice System and a lack of policy or practice guidance about effective approaches with girls who offend, I chose to focus my research on offending amongst girls (10-17 years) who were subject to YOT supervision in the community. In particular the aim was to give a section of
marginalised and ‘hard to reach’ girls the opportunity to voice their views and experiences, and for these to be used to inform and improve future Youth Justice Practice.

I was keen to draw on and utilise my experience of working with children and young people in a variety of youth work, social work and Youth Justice Settings as both practitioner and manager spanning twenty years or more years, as well as my professional training in youth work and social work and my earlier research experience which focused on parents in the Youth Justice system. As such the research reflects on the contemporary Youth Justice landscape as much as it does on girls who offend.

My practice insight and knowledge is reflected throughout the research investigation at all levels- in the analysis of case files, in the interview process, in the interpretation of research material and importantly, in the outlining of the implications for practice derived from the research as a whole.

This research is also influenced by my own life experiences as a white working class female which shape my socialist and feminist perspectives and values.

Introducing the YOT area

The YOT area in which the research is conducted is located in the Home Counties and is made up of both rural villages and more densely populated urban towns. It has a general population of just over a million, approximately ten per cent of whom are between the ages of 10 and 17 (2001 Census). Most current data show that girls make up 27% of the total youth offending population in the YOT (taken from the YOT Race Audit workload 2007/08\(^\text{19}\)) (This figure was 26% in 2006/07). Approximately 6% of the general and 9% of the youth population is from a Black and Minority

\(^{19}\) Local YOT data
Ethnic background. The YOT operates from four local teams coordinated by a central Youth Justice Service comprising a Head of Service, Policy Officer, Management Information officer and an administrator.

Each local team has a YOT manager and two operational managers, 2 Police Officers, 2 administrators, 5 social workers, 3 YOT Professional Assistants, a Probation Officer, a Victim Liaison Worker, a Connexions Worker, an Education Worker, a Substance Misuse worker, a Health worker, and 2 ISSP practitioners.

A Brief history of gender specific responses in the YOT

The YOT in the study has a history of offering gender specific group programmes, although similar to the national picture, none of these programmes have been externally evaluated. Nonetheless programmes that are available are routinely evaluated with the girls who participate in groups, and by the YOT staff who deliver them. These programmes include:

A First Aid Course for girls
A First Aid course was organised as a ‘reparation’ project using YOT staff and a First Aid trainer. This was an accredited course which was adapted to include personal safety and themes which were relevant to the girls offending and to the girls’ ages (for example using ‘scenarios’ which were related to alcohol/ drugs/ violence).

Healthy Lifestyles Group
The Healthy Lifestyles group was offered in the school summer and Easter holidays and was run by the YOT health worker and YOT Professional Assistants for boys and girls separately. It included healthy eating, sexual health, alcohol and drugs, and emotional health and wellbeing including stress.
Girls ‘Keep Out Of Prison’ (KOOP) programme

Links were established by the YOT with a female Young Offender Institute (YOI) for girls and young women up to age 21 years. This programme operated over an eighteen month period with approximately 30 girls attending one day events, on a quarterly basis. Although this was a one day event, YOT practitioners met with the girls and their families before the event to gain parental consent and to discuss the programme content, and afterwards to talk about the impact of it. The programme was also followed up in the girls’ one to one supervision sessions with YOT case workers.

YOT Girls Group Programme

The YOT Girls Group Programme was devised by YOT practitioners following on from the Girls KOOP programme. It comprised a six to eight week programme which covered relevant themes to the girls who were supervised by the YOT including: consequences of offending, positive image, alcohol and drugs awareness, relationships, dealing with conflict and sexual health. This programme was further developed as part of this research and is outlined in Appendix A.

YOT Working with Girls and Young women Practice Forum

The YOT Working with Girls and Young Women Practice Forum was established in the YOT area as part of the current research for practitioners to share and develop practice and to plan and coordinate groups and events for girls in the Youth Justice System locally (See Appendix B for aims and terms of reference of the practice group). It runs on a quarterly basis and involves 12-15 practitioners and managers.
The aims and purpose of the research

The literature review highlights some of the reasons why this research is important:- namely that more girls are entering the Youth Justice System, girl’s ‘violent’ and alcohol related offending is purported to be increasing, more are entering custody and more girls are being returned to court for breaching their statutory Court Orders. At the same time it is widely recognised that there are gaps within the Youth Justice System both in knowledge and understanding of girl’s offending, their specific needs and ‘what works’ with them, and in the lack of gender sensitive or gender specific provision. This research aims to focus the Youth Justice spotlight on girls in the system and add to the overall body of knowledge about the nature and context of girls’ offending, and effective practice with them. It is hoped that the research will contribute to Youth Justice Practice by developing a guide to effective practice for working with girls in the Youth Justice System

The research questions

In this context the research focuses on a number of key questions:-

- What is the nature and context of girl’s offending and is this changing?
- What are the important risk factors for girls offending?
- How responsive is the Youth Justice System to girls?
- What approaches are currently used by the Youth Offending Teams and how can these be improved?
- What are the principles of effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System?
Research design and methodology

This study comprised three different stands:

- A comprehensive Case Files Study of 54 girls subject to Court Orders supervised by the Youth Offending Team
- Semi structured interviews with 13 of these girls
- Semi structured interviews with 13 YOT practitioners
  (See Appendix C for interview schedule details).

The Case Files Study

A comprehensive case files study of 54 girls from a Youth Offending Team was undertaken. This element of the research provided information that girls themselves or practitioners may not have been able to recall or recount in sufficient detail in one to one interviews. The case files study also gave the agency perspectives and information about types and range of offences girls committed and the context of these as well as insight into girls needs and the interventions provided by the YOT.

All of The girls were on Court Orders supervised by a YOT in the Home Counties between 2006 and 2008. The cohort of girls were selected because they had taken part, or been offered the opportunity to take part, in a specific girls programme run by the YOT, or because they had agreed to be interviewed when approached by their YOT worker. The girls had all experienced a range of YOT Orders from Referral Order to Detention and Training Order.

A content analysis was made of the girls’ individual case files on the YOT electronic case management system (YOIS). Files included the girls’ assessment (YJB Asset), offence details and the offending history, details of the YOT intervention plans, contracts, any reviews undertaken with the young person and or their parent/carer, ‘Contacts’ which record who the
young person saw, telephone calls, meetings etc and whether the young
person kept the contact and the detailed Case Diary entries made by YOT
practitioners, specialist YOT workers and case managers.

Rather than being constrained by the YJB Asset assessment
information and scores, case files as a whole were examined to draw out
characteristics, features and needs, and these were then analysed in
detail to clarify and confirm their context. This process requires the
researcher to be able to recognise patterns and themes in the data based
on in depth knowledge of the subject matter (Neuman 2006)

Previous research on risk factors for youth offending has noted that similar
risk factors exist for both girls and boys, but that these may operate
differently or have different relevance to girls (Simourd and Andrews 1994,

This study therefore also sought to explore these points. It was hoped that
the approach used would offer the opportunity to look at risk factors
afresh, rather than being constrained by the risk factors identified in the
Asset, as well as to build a more complete picture of the nature and
context of the girls offending.

Indeed, it was felt important to identify the whole range of the aspects
appearing in the case file records, in an attempt to fully explore their
meaning and context, and to ensure any subtle factors or nuances were
captured, rather than initially grouping any factors together (although these
were later combined into categories), even where themes emerged that
were interrelated (e.g. abuse, domestic violence, family conflict).

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20 The Youth Justice Asset assessment tool is organised by identified ‘risk factors’ (sections include family,
education, lifestyle, health etc) which are subsequently scored by the person carrying out the assessment (YJB
2006).
This open coding approach enables the researcher to identify themes and assign initial codes as well as being open to creating new themes which can be refined at different stages of analysis (Neuman 2006:461).

Each of the cases were examined against a set of basic categories which were collated on an excel spreadsheet to enable the data to be collated. The categories were generated from the researchers’ professional experience, and background knowledge of the subject matter developed from undertaking an extensive literature review, and from the research questions.

Data categories examined included:

- Age of onset of offending
- Ethnicity
- Number of offences committed and offence types
- Number of and type of Court Orders
- Involvement of social care agencies (whether the young person had ever been accommodated/‘looked after’/on the child protection register)
- Whether girls had breached their YOT Order and reasons
- Whether girls had experienced custody and length of sentence.
- Whether a violent offence was committed
- Whether the offending was alcohol related
- Whether ‘Risk of serious Harm’ Assets were completed
- Whether YOT mental health referrals were made

Alongside the spreadsheet an individual ‘Case File Research Template’ was also assigned for each of the girls (Appendix D). This recorded more detailed notes on individual cases than could be captured on a spreadsheet and helped to generate further categories. For example words or phrases were noted which stood out in the file reading such as ‘in
with wrong crowd’, ‘absconds’ ‘sexually abused’, ‘mum attempted suicide’ etc.

Emerging issues were recorded from the detailed examination of files and formed a further set of categories or refined categories against which all cases were examined. These included:-

- Education difficulties
- Heavy alcohol or drug use
- Alcohol related offending
- Parental substance abuse
- Parental mental health
- Incidents of self harm
- Violence in the home
- Delinquent peers
- Experience of abuse
- Poverty/poor living conditions/
- Homelessness

Many of these categories were then expanded upon. For example where high numbers of the cases showed education difficulties, the type of education difficulties experienced were then explored which were then broken down further into poor/ non attendance at school, exclusion from school, attending part time education programmes, and special educational needs. Similarly the care histories category was examined more closely to identify reasons for girls being involved in the care system:-sexual abuse and neglect, parental drug or alcohol abuse and parent mental health needs were all subsequently identified and considered across the cohort of girls. Likewise where it became apparent that violent offences were common amongst the girls, the types of violent offences and context of these were looked at in detail.
Interviews with Girls supervised by the YOT

It was also important to hear the views of the girls firsthand – young people are rarely heard in the Youth Justice Field and this research sought to promote this practice. The girls themselves were able to give significant insight into their own situations that were not always conveyed in case files in the same way.

Indeed as noted earlier, Bloom et al (2003) argue that listening to the voices of girls and young women involved in the Criminal Justice System is a way of reducing their invisibility and adds to our understanding of the gendered experience.

In depth one to one interviews were conducted with girls on YOT Orders to hear their ‘stories’ and views about reasons girls get involved in offending, their experiences of being on a Court Order, and their opinions about how the YOT could improve it’s responses to girls. Twenty two girls agreed to take part in interviews although not all interviews went ahead for a range of reasons: - one of the girls was sent to custody; another girl who was in care was placed in another area and despite the researcher liaising with the YOT practitioner to go ahead with the interview, this proved not to be possible in the end; and other girls missed their interview appointments due to illness, family crisis, or cancelled and rearranged appointments on one or two occasions.

Thirteen girls eventually took part in interviews. Only two of the seven girls who were from a BME background in the overall cohort took part in interviews (These girls were from ‘Other White’ backgrounds). The reasons for the BME girls not participating did not appear to be any different to the reasons not all of the White girls took part. The ethnicity and gender of the researcher was unknown to the girls so was not a factor in non participation. Given the small numbers of BME girls in the study overall, the research process should have been devised to ensure the
views of BME girls were included and this is undoubtedly a failing of the research design.

The interviews were semi structured to focus on broad areas but also gave the opportunity for free flowing conversation to explore any particular areas that participants wanted to follow in more detail.

The aim was to gain as detailed a story and understanding as possible. A number of research questions (see Appendix E) and a card exercise were used as a basis for exploring the topics. Indirect questions were used as well as direct questions so that the participant could answer in the third person (what sort of problems do girls face, rather than what problems did you have for example). Cards with written comments relating to broad reasons for offending were made (problems at home, area I live in, alcohol, not in school etc). The card exercise involved the girls picking out cards that they thought related to girls' offending. This was set up as 'warm up' exercise to introduce the subject and to be less threatening than asking about the girls offending directly in the first instance.

Pilot interviews to help clarify whether the questions were clear and elicited the information that was being sought were carried out with some of the girls who were attending a YOT Girls Group Programme which ran simultaneously with the research. These pilot interviews meant that the researcher also benefited from the relationships the girls had already established with YOT staff running the project. Thus the YOT staff introduced the researcher and paved the way for relaxed and open interviews that were relatively free flowing.

Even in this context the importance of relationship came across as important to the girls. It was clear that a having a positive relationship with the YOT worker was a key factor in girls engaging with the interview. Thus workers collected the girls or arranged for them to be collected and
brought to them to the venue for interviews in most cases. They introduced
the girls to the researcher, and made arrangement with them to meet after
the interview to take them home, or to take them out informally (for a
coffee and a chat).

The interviewing environment was also conducive to a relaxed and
informal dialogue – the rooms were those used by the YOT Girls group
and as such had comfortable chairs and young person friendly pictures
and information in the room, rather than a formal office type setting.

These things all helped to make the girls feel more at ease and are
essential engagement skills needed when working with young people and
as pointed out in the earlier chapter, engagement and relationship are
especially important to girls. Thus staff were also modelling positive
elements of relationships: - trust, choices, boundaries, respect, being up
front and approachable, negotiation etc. It was also apparent in most
cases that extremely positive relationships existed between the YOT staff
and girls, and where they did not have this, it was apparent. In these
cases girls were more mistrusting and slow to settle into the interview and
harder to engage in the interview process, needed more prompts, or were
less willing to share their experiences. Although of course some of the
girls were more nervous or less vocal than others in any case and some
participants will always be more or less articulate or able /willing to reflect
on or share their experiences in the research context.

The researcher was familiar with the subject area and able to draw on
professional social work and youth work training and experience in the
interview process, and to respond to the issues as they arose. Even so
interviews became more productive after the first three or four as the
researcher became more confident at interviewing and drawing out
responses.
Establishing a relationship or rapport is important to get the most from the interview. Developing a rapport, establishing trust and familiarity are identified as important in the research process (Miller and Glasner 1998). A rapport means that the participant feels comfortable enough to talk so that narratives convey meaning from the social worlds around them. Thus what is meaningful or relevant to the participant is revealed. Factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, social background etc can all influence this rapport and the impact of these in the research process need to be considered and acknowledged at all levels.

Notes were taken in the interviews rather than tape recording interviews. The notes made at the time were brief so as not to disrupt the flow of conversation and as an aide memoir, with the view that interviews would be fully transcribed directly after the interview had ended. Direct quotes were written verbatim (with the agreement of participant) so that they could be used later. The researchers’ previous experience in conducting interviews/ assessments with young people and parents for court reports based on notes taken in interviews also helped with this recording process.

*Interviews with YOT practitioners*

Practitioner interviews were designed to draw on workers’ direct experience of their work with girls in the Youth Justice System, to highlight the type of difficulties girls experience and problems they present, as well as approaches and interventions practitioners believe to be most successful in their work with them.

Information was sent out by email to YOT practitioners introducing the research and inviting them to take part in interviews. Further information was then sent to twenty two practitioners who expressed an interest in taking part in the research. Where practitioners indicated that they would
like to be involved, suggested dates were sent by email with the offer of the researcher meeting them at their chosen venue and time.

Some of the interviews did not take place with practitioners who had expressed an interest because they did not respond to a follow up email. As indicated earlier the researchers’ role in the YOT management team could have influenced staff participation, therefore no follow up was made where practitioners did not respond to the email which offered interview dates in order to avoid chasing staff, and potentially making them feel as if they had to participate. A small number of interviews also failed to materialise because practitioners had to rearrange appointments due to other work commitments and it became difficult to find alternative dates within the research timescales.

Thirteen practitioners were eventually interviewed including:- 5 social workers, 1 YOT Manager, 1 Probation Officer, 3 YOT health workers, 1 YOT substance misuse worker and 2 ISSP workers.

In the YOT area none of these roles are singular (there are at least 4 posts for each of these roles and in most cases 8 or more staff hold these roles), therefore participants could not be identified in the research. Five participants were from a BME background. Ten were female and three were male.

Drawing on practice examples, interviews focused on why girls start to offend, the type of problems girls face, types of interventions and approaches undertaken by the YOT to meet girl’s needs, and practitioners’ own views of what they consider to be successful approaches or interventions with girls, and finally, how responses to girls can be improved (See Appendix F).
Qualitative research methods

Qualitative research methods were chosen to reflect a feminist standpoint. These methods offer the opportunity to explore a subject in depth, allow for meaning to emerge, and provide rich data which is contextual and gives understanding to the research topic. Rather than seeking explanations in numerical terms, qualitative approaches seek to uncover meaning and understanding and to locate these in normal everyday interaction (Jupp 1989: 120).

Feminist research has been critical of traditional ‘malestream’ sociological and criminological enquiry, which focused largely on studies of white working class males and produced generalised findings, without taking account of the female perspective or experience (Abbott & Wallace 1997). Further, quantitative approaches which focus on numerical and statistical data and analysis and which attempt to apply ‘objective’ scientific approaches utilised in the physical sciences, to the social sciences, reduces the research subject to objects rather than treating them as human beings (Gelsthorpe 1990).

Feminist research has a commitment to making research relevant to women. It has been traditionally located in the political struggles of the Women's Movement and been emancipatory in nature, seeking to contribute the female perspective to knowledge and develop an understanding of women’s experiences (Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe 2007).

Feminist research also draws attention to power differentials between the researcher and the research subject and seeks to employ methods which engage the subject of the research more fully in the process and allows their voices to be heard. It requires the researcher to acknowledge and recognise their own personal experiences and the impact of these on the research agenda. An important part of the present study is to hear girls’
voices and to promote a greater understanding of this marginalised group in the Youth Justice System amongst Youth Justice Professionals.

Validity and reliability
Quantitative research is seen as producing more reliable results as it usually involves large samples and its results are able to be replicated if the same methods were used, in a way that qualitative research is not. Qualitative methods however can also produce highly valid results as they are seen to present a ‘true’ representation of the area of investigation. They give participants the opportunity to express their views and experiences which are valid in their own right.

Data triangulation - the use of different types of data within one study which enables the investigation of the different aspects of a phenomenon, can also help to validate and corroborate findings (Jupp 1989: 72, Denscombe 1998:138). The different elements of the research are able to compliment each other, and the combination of data sources lead to a more complete and valid contribution.

In the present study, three different data sources were examined. These data sets were then able to be compared and explored more fully. For example alcohol as an important factor in the girls offending was evident across all three data sources. Likewise both interviews with practitioners and girls both indicated the importance of the relationship between the worker and young person which was not captured in any way in the case files study.

Access
Support and permission to carry out the research was granted by the YOT Head of Service. As indicated earlier, the researcher is currently employed in the role of Youth Justice Policy and development manager and was sponsored to undertake the research as part of the doctoral study. Access
was granted to the YOT case management information (YOIS) for the case file study and permission was granted for the researcher to invite staff and girls to take part in the research.

Access to girls for one to one interviews was gained via the YOT practitioners who were able to approach girls they were working with to see if they wanted to take part in interviews. It was stressed to practitioners that girls had to engage voluntarily in the process, rather than it being seen as a requirement of their YOT Order, although if they did choose to take part, the interview could be counted as a ‘contact’ for their Order. Written information about the research was provided to the girls via the YOT practitioner and parental consent was sought for those under 16.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidance clearly outlines the researchers’ obligations to the research subject and wider ethical issues that need consideration in any research programme. Ethical considerations are critical when the research represents vulnerable or marginalised groups such as children and Issues of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, possible harm to the research subjects, data protection, use of and storage of data should all be considered and addressed. These issues are discussed below.

Use and storage of data
Permission to carry out the case file study was granted by the YOT in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. All data was fully anonymised and was not able to be traced to any individual. Information was excluded from the study where identification of any of the girls could have been possible.
Cases were identified solely by case numbers. The data was stored on the secure YOT system and accessed via a laptop which is encrypted. A paper file which held individual records (case file individual template see appendix) and records of one to one interviews were stored securely at the researchers’ home. These paper records were also coded by case number only rather than by personal details. Electronic and paper data has now been destroyed.

It was important in the research that girls took part in interviews voluntarily and that they gave their informed consent. As well as the written consent required from a parent/carer if girls were under 16, verbal consent was also sought at the start of the interview to reiterate that taking part in the interview was voluntary (and not a requirement because they were on a YOT Order). At the start of the interview girls were also reminded that they could choose not to answer any questions.

Confidentiality and anonymity
Confidentiality was discussed at the start of interviews. It was explained that the information disclosed in interviews would be treated as confidential unless it indicated a current risk of harm to them or anyone else. The girls were told how the interview information would be used, that their anonymity is protected and that if there were any direct quotes that the researcher wanted to use, they would be asked for their agreement.

Social Research Agency Ethical Guidelines (2003) state:

The principle of informed consent is, in essence, an expression of belief in the need for truthful and respectful exchanges between social researchers and human subjects. It is clearly not a precondition of all social enquiry. Equally it remains an important and highly valued professional norm. The acceptability of social research depends increasingly not
only on technical considerations but also on the willingness of social researchers to accord respect to their subjects and to treat them with consideration

(Social Research Agency Ethical Guidelines 2003: 29)

A further ethical concern is consideration of possible harm to participants – undue stress or psychological damage for example (ibid). Thus it is important to build in support for the participants should they need it, for example if the interview process brings up painful issues or experiences. The girls were familiar with the YOT environment and were brought to the interview and taken home afterwards by YOT staff that they knew. This also meant that if the girls needed any further support as a result of the research interviews, these could be followed up the YOT staff as soon as possible.

A further possible area of harm would be if the girls were identifiable in the research particularly if the offence was serious. Current Social Research Agency Ethical Guidelines (2003) for example point out:

A particular configuration of attributes can, like a fingerprint, frequently identify its owner beyond reasonable doubt. Social researchers need to remove the opportunities for others to infer identities from their data. They may decide to group data in such a way as to disguise identities or to employ a variety of available measures that seek to impede the detection of identities

(Social Research Agency Ethical Guidelines 2003:39)

Thus protecting anonymity was an important consideration throughout and at times led to information needing to be left out even though it could have
added further insight. Indeed this was also important in the Case Files Study where the data was secondary data, although the Data Protection Act in the UK allows data collected for one purpose can be used for other statistical and research purposes without explicit informed consent (ibid).

Researching sensitive areas and vulnerable groups
It also has to be acknowledged that the research is exploring sensitive subject areas (alcohol use, family experiences etc) which will understandably make participants feel wary or make some feel uncomfortable. Thus the researcher needs to be able to handle the issues raised in the interview sensitively and appropriately and be familiar with the subject area in order for this to happen. Maier and Monahan (2007) note that the researcher must become as familiar as possible with the issue or people studied.

Ethical responsibility is amplified when the research represents vulnerable or marginalised groups such as children, reminding us that children’s views are rarely heard in the public sphere and that they exert little power as a social group. Aldred (1998) questions whether adult researchers can legitimately represent children’s voices suggesting that the researcher needs to distinguish between when they are representing children’s voices and when they are presenting an adult analysis of children’s voices.

An important responsibility of the researcher is to ensure that information is fully utilised to validate it being imparted. Thus social researchers:

should use the possibilities open to them to extend
the scope of social enquiry and communicate their
findings, for the benefit of the widest possible community

(Social Research Agency Ethical Guidance 2003)
This obligation feels particularly pertinent for both the stories imparted by girls and practitioners as part of the interview process, and for life histories and accounts the researcher was privileged to read in case files.

Thus an implicit aspect of this current research study is that it is disseminated widely to raise the profile of the needs of girls in the Youth Justice System and to help practitioners determine more effective ways of responding to them. Thus this research has already been discussed widely both in the YOT area in which it being conducted with practitioners, managers and partner agencies, and emerging findings have helped to drive a number of practice initiatives (funding for the Girls Group Programme, formation of the Practice forum) as well as being presented more widely at a range of events and conferences. It is anticipated that the research findings will be more widely disseminated on completion, in workshops and through presentations, both locally and nationally.

There remains a risk that research reinforces assumptions about the research participants. The dilemmas and responsibility of the researcher extends to how to interpret and represent the research, notwithstanding the influence the political context has on the interpretation of any research which is not wholly within our control (Foucault 1983). Thus our wording and its qualification can be lost and in other contexts, can produce different meanings that we could not have predicted (Foucault cited in Aldred 1998: 51). Indeed Hammersley and Atkinson argue that ethnography 'is produced as much by how we write as by processes of data collection and analysis' (Cited in Aldred 1998: 158).

The duty to ensure findings are not misunderstood through self censorship is acknowledged here. This was reflected in the researchers self reflection in the research process and in the representation of the research in the written thesis. For example it is important not to make unsubstantiated or unbalanced statements which feed into popular stereotypes and value
judgements, or political rhetoric. The researcher was anxious not to represent the girls as victims when reporting on the complex backgrounds and high levels of need of some of the girls and wanted to balance this with their strengths and resilience. Similarly when reporting on girls and alcohol use it was important to provide a balanced account and to ensure the context of the prose addressed this balance.

‘Insider’ research

Jupp (1989) highlights that the research process is constrained by the organisation in which the research is located, which produces formal and informal barriers which needs recognition. Not least, the possibility of conflict when the research is ‘in house’ if the research findings are unfavourable or critical in any way of the agency, thus ‘not lending itself to radical critique of the research enterprise’ (Aldred1998:158)

Thus the researchers’ relationship with and commitments to funders and/or employers should be clear and balanced. These should not compromise a commitment to morality and to the law, and to the maintenance of standards commensurate with professional integrity’ (Social Research Agency Ethical Guidance 2003:13). At the same time it is also recognised that research from within can also help to locate research in practice and inform policy (Aldred 1998).

In the present study potential conflict or concerns were more likely to be felt by practitioners who took part in interviews and the researcher with responsibility for interpreting the data, rather than experienced by the girls interviewed. The researcher had not had any contact with any of the girls in any way and as such was an outsider in their eyes and indeed was introduced as a researcher.

Practitioners however were aware of the researchers’ role in the organisation as part of the senior management team. Steps were taken by
the researcher to identify the research as an academic study which was
distinct and separate from the researchers’ role in the organisation. This
was reflected in the information which introduced the research both in its
format and style (content of the research flyer, consent form etc). The
research information made it clear that participation in interviews was
voluntary, that interviews were confidential and findings would not identify
any of the workers individually. Only practitioners who expressed an
interest were followed up, rather than ‘chasing’ participants who had
expressed an interest in taking part in interviews. Confidentiality and the
voluntary participation were reiterated at the start of all interviews.

The researcher maintained a distance between the research role and the
position in the organisation and did not share any findings with the YOT
management team formally or informally until they were completed and
widely disseminated in a research presentation. Clearly if an issue had
arisen which suggested serious inappropriate action, or a legal or
safeguarding matter the researcher would have had a responsibility to take
this up formally.

In the writing up of findings and recommendations there is also the
potential for conflict if findings are unfavourable in any way to the
organisation, which is also the case in sponsored research. The present
study was framed as an academic exercise subject to ethical guidelines
and the responsibilities of the researcher was made explicit at the start of
the study to the Head of Service who sanctioned the research.

**Limitations of the research**

Despite every effort to ensure appropriate methodology some problems
were encountered and some flaws became apparent throughout the
course of the research. Indeed at times it felt that the research raised more questions than it answered.

The small number of BME girls included in the study meant that no distinct themes or patterns pertaining to BME girls in the Youth Justice System could be identified. This was compounded by the lack of interviews with BME girls. A larger number of BME girls should have been identified in the cohort to take account of this.

A further consideration has to be that the research is conducted in a home counties YOT area, whose population will not reflect all areas of the country across measures such as BME populations, deprivation, types and extent of offending etc.

One of the main concerns is that case files may not fully reflect the case and will always be dependant upon the accuracy and quality of the worker’s recording, which will often reflect the quality of the relationship with the young person and/or their families, or of agencies information sharing. Furthermore as the case files were electronic, recording was not always detailed and reports/meeting minutes were not readily available.

Many of the aspects of the research are sensitive, areas such as abuse will only feature in the case records if the abuse has been disclosed and/or agencies have been involved. Some features of young people’s lives will only be recorded by workers if they are current or a recent event (for example bullying, pregnancy, alcohol or substance misuse).

Recording is also dependent on who is recording within the YOT, their professional background, assessment abilities etc. For example social workers will normally record incidents of abuse even if they are historical and YOT education workers are more likely to record more specific details of special education needs.
There is also the danger that incidents or factors are played up or down /given more importance by the practitioner. Information may only feature in the file records if the young person shares it with the worker, or it appears from other agency records and its importance is only as significant as the worker’s perception and insight or otherwise. Thus some aspects in the case were emphasised by some staff prominently on the front sheet of the file (child protection concerns, violence etc) whereas for other staff the same concern was a line in a Case Diary record.

Some themes which it was assumed would be prominent were only mentioned rarely in case files – sexual exploitation and bereavement for example. It seemed that practitioners were sometimes reluctant to record in case files that girls were possibly involved in commercial sexual exploitation perhaps because these concerns were not substantiated, although a number of practitioners highlighted this as a concern in the interviews.

Whilst another approach would have been to look at a sample group of boys on YOT Orders as well as the girls, or a sample group of non offending girls alongside the girls in the study to give a more ready comparison, it was felt that this would be too time consuming, and gaining access to a group of non offending girls would have been more difficult. In addition comparing the girls to a group of boys would have detracted from the richness of the girls stories being considered in their own right and from the overall aims of this research, which was to increase practice knowledge about girls’ offending and effective approaches with them.

Lastly, the use of three data sets whilst invaluable in highlighting the different facets of the research subject and corroborating the findings also proved time consuming and complex to ensure data from all data sets were fully integrated in the research analysis.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This Chapter presents the findings from the three elements of the study:

- Part One outlines findings from the case files study
- Part Two identifies findings from in depth interviews with girls subject to supervision by the YOT
- Part Three examines findings from interviews conducted with YOT practitioners.

The Chapter concludes with a summary of the overall findings from the research.

PART ONE: FINDINGS FROM THE CASE FILES STUDY

Part One of this chapter introduces the findings from the Case Files Study of 54 girls supervised by the YOT. The characteristics and needs, and offending patterns of the girls in the study cohort are examined including age, the types of offences girls committed and Youth Justice disposals imposed, the context of the girls’ offending, with a specific focus on violent offending.

It became apparent early on in this study that violent offending was significant amongst the girls and therefore in the light of contemporary concerns about increasing violence amongst girls, it seemed pertinent to explore this as fully as possible.

Quotes and examples from the case files are used throughout to illustrate the points being made. The Case Example used is referred to by name
(although not the girls’ real names), and quotes from case files are referenced by numbers: Case files 1, Case file 2 etc. All quotes and examples from girls in the study are displayed in text boxes in this chapter and throughout.

Characteristics and needs of girls in the study

Ages of the girls
Most of the girls in this study were between the ages of 13 and 15 when they committed their first offence, and the average age of onset of offending was 13 years and 8 months (Fig 4).

Figure 4: Age of Onset of offending by girls in the study

Most of the girls in this study committed a first violent offence between 14 and 15 years (Fig 5) and few of the girls committed a first violent offence when they were over the age of 16 (15%).
Figure 5: Age at which girls committed their 1st violent offence

*Ethnicity of the girls*

The majority of the girls in cohort of girls studied were White, with just seven girls from a Black and Ethnic minority background (BME).

In the YOT area that this study took place BME girls make up 9% of the overall youth offending population and BME girls make up 13% of the cohort in this study. The small numbers (7 girls) makes it difficult to highlight any patterns or differences or make any robust generalisations here.

*The girls' backgrounds and needs*

The lives of many of the girls in this study were characterised by disrupted education including poor or non school attendance and exclusion from school, severe family conflict and violence in the home, serious alcohol/drug use and experience of poverty. Self harm, accommodation problems, experience of being in care and physical, sexual abuse and neglect, and parental serious drug or alcohol use also featured in girls’ lives. Absconding/ going missing from home without permission, involvement with older men and known offenders, being bullied, parents with mental ill health and early teenage pregnancy were a characteristic of some of the girls in the study. The prevalence of these characteristics noted in
individual case files is illustrated in Figure 6 and the characteristics are each explored in more detail below.

**Fig 6: Characteristics of the 54 girls supervised by the YOT in rank order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No of girls</th>
<th>% of girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education – exclusion/non attendance</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>85%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious family conflict</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty and deprivation</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy alcohol/ serious drug use</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends in trouble</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health needs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation problems</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care histories</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in family</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of abuse</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ serious alcohol/drug use</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absconds/goes missing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy at a young age</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents mental health problems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*calculation based on 53 girls as one girl was over school age

- **Education factors**

Problems relating to education featured in 85% of the cases with few following what would be regarded as a ‘normal’ school career up to school leaving age. Exclusion from school featured in 40% of cases. Fixed term exclusions with subsequent poor attendance was a characteristic, as well as permanent exclusion from school, and some of the girls attended part time Programmes at Pupil Referral Units or Projects (Year 10/11 projects at local Colleges or units for example), as an alternative to mainstream school. Poor or non attendance featured in 29% of cases.
Only three of the girls were identified as having ‘a Statement of Special Educational needs’: Two of these were assessed as having Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD); one other girl with a statement was being supported in mainstream school. Indeed almost all of the girls in this study had attended mainstream schools and were often referred to as being academically ‘bright’, or ‘very bright’, in the case files.

Nonetheless girls’ behavioural difficulties, including verbal aggression and altercations with teachers and pupils were highlighted in case files.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case file 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She has trouble fitting in school; she is disruptive and was excluded for fighting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case file 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult behaviour in school, she is defiant to her teachers and is on a pastoral support programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case file 44</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor behaviour in school – she has to spend time in the integration unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case file 4</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Serious family conflict**

Serious family conflict was present in 61% of the cases and was the second most common feature amongst the girls studied. A whole range of significant family dysfunctions and adverse circumstances were chronicled in case histories. Thus factors such as domestic violence leading to the mother and children leaving the family home, physical fights between the young person and parent/step parent(s), conflict resulting in young person’s homelessness, as well as parent’s mental ill health and depression or alcohol or drug dependency, and child protection concerns were all present in case files to a varying degree. Records also showed that in some cases siblings were also in care suggesting that these

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21 Serious’ family conflict here is defined as extreme conflict/ disputes that occurs on regular occasions, based on the detail in case file records and ascertained from the researchers professional judgement
families were experiencing complex problems and had longstanding involvement of social care agencies. Family poverty including overcrowding and threats of eviction were also experienced by some of the families. Such factors undoubtedly contributed to pressures in family relationships and family functioning.

Family conflict often meant the girls stayed away from, or were not allowed in the family home for long periods of time. Records note girls staying with friends or other family members on an ad hoc basis, sometimes breaking into the house to get belongings, sometimes Police or social care agencies being involved because girls were considered homeless and at risk. Anger at their mothers was a common feature recorded in case files, with girls challenging their mothers about their personal relationships with step fathers or new partners, often resulting in rows and violent incidents.

Some case files reported mothers choosing a new partner over their daughter, leading to girls being taken into care, or forcing them to leave home at a young age with inadequate accommodation available to them. For example one 16 year old girl was asked to leave home by her mother as she didn’t get on with her step dad. The YOT worker recorded:

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She still wants to live with her mother but her mothers partner does not want her in the family home.
Case file 41
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- Poverty and deprivation
Fifty nine per cent of the girls in the study came from poor or deprived neighbourhoods as assessed in the YOT assessment (Asset) This includes neighbourhoods where there is obvious signs of drug
dealing/using; lacking in facilities/provision/ transport; in isolated locations; racial or ethnic tensions; other problems\textsuperscript{22}.

A poor area - there is obvious signs of drug use - there are some youth facilities within the area. The area itself appears destitute and unkempt which would also impact on people's feelings of self worth

Case file 41

Thirty six per cent of the girls in the study were identified as coming from a deprived household in the YOT assessment\textsuperscript{23}.

Case records themselves rarely referred to financial difficulties experienced by the girls and their families, rather, YOT workers referred to financial difficulties in case records. For example they recorded needing to provide food for some of the girls, taking them to claim state benefits, providing them with bus fare to get home or to work placements.

- **Alcohol and substance misuse**

Alcohol and drugs featured significantly in the girl’s lives, both in respect of their offending, and in their lives in general. Heavy alcohol use was present in 56% of cases.

Although alcohol use was more common than drug amongst the girls in the study, there were some examples of regular drug use (daily cannabis use, heroin and cocaine use were mainly identified) Where girls were involved in serious offending (though only small numbers), these were mostly drug related offences: - for example Robbery with an adult co-defendants to fund a drug habit.

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\textsuperscript{22} Taken from YJB Asset in the ‘Neighbourhood’ section( YJB Asset 2006 accessed http://www.yjb.gov.uk/eng/ gb/practitioners/Assessment/Asset.htm

\textsuperscript{23} The YJB ASSET requires a Yes or No response from the person assessing the young person as to whether they are living in a ‘deprived household’. It includes prompts e.g. dependant on benefits/entitlement to free school meals"
Aggressive confrontations whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs was a common theme, either against girls they had ‘fallen out’ with, whilst in a group in a public place leading to concerns about their anti social behaviour as cited earlier, or in incidents of assaulting police officers whilst drunk and approached by police to move on, or where police wanted to question them or their friends.

In addition, almost a third of the girls with serious alcohol/ drug problems and alcohol related offences also had parents with serious substance misuse problems. In fact looking at it another way, in the group of parents who were identified as having serious alcohol or drug use (mothers or fathers in these cases were described as alcoholics, heroin users and drug addicts in case files), nearly all (three quarters) of their daughters in this study were serious alcohol/ drug users as well.

- **Friends in trouble**
  Fifty per cent of the girls in the study associated with older peers or had friends who were in trouble with the Police, some of whom were currently known to the YOT, or had been previously. Case files frequently noted this as a concern. Thus comments such as ‘associates with criminal peers’, ‘older peers, wrong crowd’, ‘associates with young people known to the YOT’, ‘boyfriend with a history of offending’ were all common in case files.

- **Self harm/mental health needs**
  Self harm featured in 33% of cases studied. This mainly took the form of attempted suicide (usually an overdose) and the subsequent need for hospital treatment. Forty four per cent of the girls in this study had been referred for a YOT mental health assessment because practitioners were concerned about their emotional health and wellbeing:- depression, low mood and anxiety as well as girls at risk of deliberate self harm were all recorded.
- **Accommodation needs**

Thirty per cent of case files indicated that girls were homeless, living in overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation, or living informally with friends or other family members on an ad hoc basis. Homelessness was often temporary where the girls had been thrown out of home following a family row. They then stayed with friends or drifted to different addresses before returning home or moving in with other family members.

Most of the 16 year olds in the study cohort were already living separately to their families and YOT staff were involved in helping them access accommodation, and supporting them when they were housed. Sustained support from the YOT was needed as the girls often were placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and in hostels where there were frequent problems and changes of address.

- **Care histories**

Thirty per cent of the girls in the sample group had experience of the care system. This includes residential and foster care. Some of the girls were taken into care due to family breakdown and serious family conflict as described earlier. This emanated from behaviours such as staying out all night or away from home for long periods of time, mixing with older peers who were known to the Police, disputes including stealing from parents or physical assaults and damage to the home, and alcohol or drug related behaviour that brought them to the attention of the Police or other agencies.

Some of the girls had been on the child protection register due to neglect, including their parents’ mental ill health or alcohol/substance abuse, or for physical or sexual abuse (experience of abuse is discussed as a distinct category below). A number of the girls had been on and off of the child protection register from a young age and had also spent periods of time in foster care. Some had made allegations of sexual or physical abuse by a
family member which led to them to be placed temporarily in care before being returned home.

Forty three per cent of the girls in the current study had been placed in residential children’s homes. Residential care was portrayed as a negative experience in case files, seeming to escalate girls ‘risky’ behaviours, rather than making them safer which would no doubt have been the focus of the intervention.

Assaults on care home staff and criminal damage at the care home, resulting in girls’ receiving a criminal conviction, were also common features in the present study amongst cases of girls who were in care. Indeed, girls in the care system were most likely to be escalated through the Criminal Justice System for breaching their Court Order or for further offending in similar circumstances (further assaults and criminal damage in the care home).

Whilst the numbers of girls in this study who were placed in residential care homes were relatively small, five out of the 7 girls acquired criminal records for offences of assault on care home staff and criminal damage (for example breaking a window, damage to doors or furniture) whilst in the placement.

Almost all (93%) of girls who had been in care had committed a violent offence following the circumstances outlined above: thus most violent offences committed by the girls who were in care homes were against staff, and violent offences committed by girls with care histories (those who had been on the child protection register, admitted to care for a temporarily or into foster care)were family related, or took place in group related anti social behaviour settings and were largely alcohol related.
- **Violence in the family**

Domestic violence was present in twenty six per cent of cases in this study and these circumstances overlap with many of the family factors described previously. Domestic violence was mostly against girls’ mothers. It was often drug or alcohol related. In some cases, violence was also suffered by the girls themselves either within their own relationships or where they had intervened when their mother or sister was being attacked.

Comments from case records of one of the girls highlight how problems are often interrelated and their wider impact on the children in the family:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extracts from Case File 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police were called to the address for domestic violence to mum by her partner on two occasions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The family went in a refuge;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mum is a serious alcohol user;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her brother was excluded from school for attacking another child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The experience of domestic violence in their families was significantly less common amongst girls who had only come to the attention of the court on one occasion and who had received a Referral Order. Eighty three per cent of these girls had no identified family violence (domestic violence, physical violence etc) in their case histories. Thus experience of family violence was found to be more prevalent amongst girls with more persistent offending histories.

- **Experience of abuse**

Girls’ experience of abuse featured in 24% of cases in this study. Physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect are all included where they are recorded as such in the case. ‘Allegations’ of abuse were also counted where these are recorded. A separate category was used to record violence in the home.
The type of abuse (sexual, emotional, physical abuse or neglect) girls experienced was not always specified in the case files, making it difficult to accurately identify the prevalence of different types of abuse amongst the girls. Sexual abuse was recorded in 13 per cent of cases which is much lower than other studies (Widom 2000, Cawson 2006 etc) For example studies of adult females in custody report high levels of childhood abuse (Hedderman and Gelsthorpe 1997 cited in Hedderman 2004, Loucks 2004).

The detail of any recording of abuse in YOT case files will be dependent on how recent the abuse is, whether it was formally investigated by social services, and its perceived relevance to the girls’ current offending. In addition child abuse is often underreported particularly when the victims are still children and is more likely to be acknowledged when it is sufficiently in the past.

Neglect was indicated in some of these cases, generally relating to a parent’s alcohol or drug dependency, or mental ill health. For example one of the girls was on the child protection register for neglect as her mother was a heroin addict, and she lived with her grandparents most of the time, another was on the child protection register as her mother was an alcoholic.

Others reported a range of serious sexual assaults and allegations of sexual and physical assaults on girls with some of the assaults happening at a very young age (under 10 years) as noted in the following extracts from case files.
- **Parental alcohol/ substance misuse**

Parental alcohol or drug abuse featured in 24% of cases. Some of the girls had been on the child protection register or been in care because of this, often from a young age. As noted above, many of the girls whose parents were identified as having heavy or serious alcohol/drug use were also serious alcohol/ drug users themselves.

- **Staying away from home/ absconding**

Going missing and staying out without permission was highlighted as a concern in 22% of cases. For example case files note:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case file 10</th>
<th>Case file 48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>....doesn’t come home at night, frequently staying out without permission or not coming home at all</td>
<td>...there were frequent police missing person reports before she was taken into care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The girls absconding or going missing was sometimes identified as being related to them being at risk of sexual exploitation. Girls were particularly vulnerable where there was frequent family conflict resulting in them staying at away from home at different addresses with friends and
acquaintances rather than go home, and where they were mixing with older men, or had older boyfriends.

- **Being bullied in school**

A small number of the girls (13%) had been bullied at school. These were serious bullying incidents resulting in girls’ non attendance at school or the need to change schools.

Bullying by the girls themselves did not feature in the case files. However as with factors such as abuse, domestic violence etc, this is less likely to be disclosed by girls themselves. It is less likely to be included in an assessment by YOT practitioners, unless it is significant to the offending or unless it is a recent incident reported on by other agencies involved.

A number of the girls had been excluded from school either temporarily or permanently for fighting which suggests physical bullying by girls themselves. For example one case involved an incident at school whereby the girl who was previously friends with the victim, grabbed her causing her to fall and fracture her wrist. Conversely, one of the case files noted the girl not attending school for fear of bullying:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case File 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She was punched by a pupil at school so is refusing to attend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case file 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.....regularly disappears to London, prostitution concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case file 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She is sleeping with people for accommodation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However there is too little information in case files to support any definitive conclusions, aside from acknowledging that some violence against friends and peers took place in the school setting or was likely to have stemmed from the school environment, and some girls refused to attend school because they were bullied.

Bullying is important in terms of its links to girls’ violence towards their peers and within friendship groups as clearly this can spill over into violent acts that come to the attention of police and school authorities.

- **Parental mental ill health**
Parental mental health problems featured in a small number of cases (11%) although this may be under reported as case files relate mainly to the young person and information about parents is unlikely to be detailed. In addition parents’ mental ill health was only ‘counted’ as such where it was specifically identified as such in the case files.

  Depression amongst girl’s mothers was also commonly cited in case files. This related to bereavement (of their own mother, or a child/baby), to pregnancy, relationship problems with their partner and was often linked to their alcohol use.

- **Pregnancy at a young age**
Pregnancy at a young age featured in six of the cases in this study. Two of the girls went on to have the babies. The others had terminations or suffered miscarriages. Risk of pregnancy was a regular theme recorded in case files, as girls shared with the YOT practitioner that they thought they could be pregnant and sexual health and keeping safe became a focus of the YOT interventions. YOT practitioners expressed concern about girls’ sexual health and vulnerability whilst under the influence of alcohol or where the girls were known to have older boyfriends or ‘disappear’ from home for periods of time on a regular basis.
Girls’ Offending Patterns

The girls’ offence types

The most common offences committed by girls in this study ‘violence against the person’ and ‘theft and handling’ which reflects national data on girls offending (see for example YJB Annual Workload data 2006/07).

Eighty three percent of the girls had committed a violent offence, albeit often of a more minor nature, and fifty seven per cent of girls had committed a theft from a shop. Although an offence of theft from a shop (usually clothes, food, or alcohol from a high street store, supermarket or small local shops) was common amongst the girls, it was not always the girls first offence. Indeed the first offence committed by 44% of the girls in this study was a violent offence.

The girls offending most commonly took the form of more minor offences of violence, criminal damage or public order arising from involvement in incidents whilst in a mixed peer group in a public place (outside local shops, parks etc), whilst girls’ were under the influence of alcohol. They were thus charged with minor public order offences (threatening behaviour, drunk and disorderly) criminal damage and assault.

Case files typically recorded offences of common assault and Actual Bodily Harm (ABH), Public Order and Affray, Harassment, Drunk and Disorderly, Criminal Damage. The range of offences committed by girls in the study is listed below (Fig 7).
Fig 7: Offence types\textsuperscript{24} committed by girls in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical offences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual Bodily Harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal damage (graffiti, to shop window/door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breach of the peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public order (affray)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault by beating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault on a Police Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common assault (including aggravated, and to children's home staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft (from mother, father, credit cards, money)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunk and disorderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of mobile phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting arrest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other offences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attempted Burglary non dwelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from motor vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson (setting fire to a bin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial abuse and harassment (towards a shopkeeper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grave offence (an offence that in the case of an adult carries 14 years or more imprisonment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of offences\textsuperscript{25} girls committed

Most of the girls were charged with a number of offences which took place on two or three occasions. Thus thirty one per cent had committed between 1 and 5 offences, twenty eight per cent between 6 and 10 offences, whilst forty one per cent of the girls committed more than ten offences. Although the majority of the girls in this study committed more than five offences ( see Fig 8), they were usually charged with multiple offences on each occasion that they were arrested( e.g. threatening words and behaviour and assault of police officer x3, criminal damage x 3 etc).

\textsuperscript{24} Common offences committed by the girls are described as ‘typical’ and offences that are committed by uncommon amongst the girls in this study are described as ‘other offences’.

\textsuperscript{25} Offences details were taken from YOT electronic records on the YOIS offences screen. Offences that were discontinued were also included in these figures.
Fig 8: Number of offences committed by girls in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of girls</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>54 girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of offences</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>11-19</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reprimand and Final Warnings
Forty four per cent of girls in the study had previously had a Reprimand and similarly forty four per cent had had a Police Final Warning. Twenty four per cent had had both a Reprimand and Final Warning. These pre court measures are now highly regulated and can only be given by Police for a first and subsequent offence (within a range of specified less serious offences) and where the young person admits guilt (Home Office 2002). Previous convictions, multiple offences, and insufficient admissions of guilt can all be taken into account by Police in determining whether to give a Reprimand or Final Warning and the way this is interpreted can vary across police areas (Home Office 2006a).

Therefore some of the girls in the present study may not have been considered eligible for a Police Reprimand or Final Warning if they were arrested and charged with more than one offence, or if they did not fully admitted the offence. Equally, girls who resisted arrest, and were charged with assaulting a Police Officer, particularly when they were under the influence of alcohol, may not be eligible for a Reprimand or Final Warning as the offence could be considered too serious (ibid).
Types of Orders imposed by the Court

The girls had experienced the whole range of Court Orders, from Referral Order\(^{26}\) to Detention and Training Order (DTO) as shown in Fig 9. (See Appendix G for a list of current Youth Court sentences)

Fig 9 Types of Orders girls received from the court

Seventy eight per cent of the girls received a Referral Order and this was the most common Order. Thirty seven per cent of girls had received a Supervision Order and thirteen per cent had undertaken an Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). Fifteen per cent of girls had been sentenced to custody.

\(^{26}\) A Referral Order is given to a young person who pleads guilty to an offence when it is his/her first time in court. It can be of varying length (3 months, 6 months etc, up to 2 years depending on seriousness of the offence). The only exceptions are if the offence is so serious that the court decides a custodial sentence is absolutely necessary, or the offence is relatively minor (i.e. a 'non-imprisonable' offence such as a traffic offence) in which case a fine or an absolute discharge may be given (YJB 2009). The Referral Order is changing as part of the new Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 see www.yjb.gov.uk
In thirty five per cent of cases in this study, the girls had short offending careers and were not subject to any further sentence following their first court appearance where they received a Referral Order.

Only a small number of offences (committed by 5 girls) were considered serious enough to warrant a Crown court appearance\(^{27}\).

*Non compliance (Breach of a Statutory Order)*

Thirteen per cent of girls in the sample group (7 girls) failed to comply with their Court Orders and had been returned to court by the Youth Offending Team. Four out of these seven girls consistently failed to comply with any of the Orders that were imposed and were returned to court for breach, each time receiving another Order which they subsequently breached. The circumstance of one such case is illustrated in the case study below.

\(^{27}\) The Youth court can impose a custodial sentence of up to two years Cases are remitted to the Crown Court where offences are serious enough to warrant a custodial sentence of more than 2 years
Case Study

Katie Case File 19

Katie’s offending began when she was 14.7 months. Her first offence was an assault (ABH) for which she received a Referral order. She was with three female friends when a girl confronted them and an argument ensued. As the girl walked away Katie grabbed her and hit her around the head.

The second offence occurred three months later when Katie was charged with theft from a friend’s house whilst at a party. She was drunk at the time of the offence. She was given a Supervision Order with conditions (curfew).

Subsequent offences related to breach of the Supervision Order and breach of the curfew for which an Attendance Centre Order was imposed alongside a continuation of the Supervision Order. Katie did not comply with the Attendance Centre Order and was taken back to court for this, for which she was given a Reparation Order. She also failed to comply with this and was taken back to court for breach of this Order. At the same time she committed further offences:- assault (a girl she had fallen out with); criminal damage (of the victims property); ‘Allowing to be carried’ (in a stolen car with two others); and theft (of alcohol). Again Katie was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offences. She was also charged with failing to appear at court three times whereby a summons was issued. Katie was given an ISSP which she failed to comply with and was returned to court where she was sentenced to a 4 month Detention and Training Order.

Background

Katie committed all of her offences whilst under the influence of alcohol. She often presented as depressed, was a binge drinker and regularly self harmed and threatened suicide. She was taken to hospital for excessive alcohol consumption (age 15.2 months)

Katie was permanently excluded from school at the age of 14. She was sent to the education support centre for 1 hour a week’s tuition until she was placed on a Year 10 college project which she attended irregularly.

Family circumstances

Katie had experienced long term violence at home; mostly this violence was directed at her mother by her mothers’ partner although Katie and her younger brother had also been threatened. She had recent been threatened with a knife by her mothers’ partner whilst he was drunk. The Police were regularly called to the address and the mother and the children had been admitted to a refuge on a number of occasions. Social services were involved with the family. Katie’s mother was said to have an alcohol problem which she denied. The family were subsequently evicted from the home for rent arrears. Katie went to stay with her grandmother and then into a hostel with her mother, but was evicted from there following a party to which the Police had been called for a violent incident.
Girls and custody

Eight of the girls in this study had experienced custody (15%), of which one was on remand and was subsequently given bail and sentenced to an ISSP, instead of a custodial sentence.

Five out of the seven girls sent to custody were given sentences of between two and six months. In these cases the sentence was imposed for the girls' failure to comply with a Court Order, or for further minor offending, rather than for the seriousness of the offence committed.

The nature and context of girls' violent offending

Whilst the majority of the girls in this study had been charged with committing a violent offence, these offences usually involved Common Assault and Actual Bodily Harm, rather than more serious violent offences. This is not to say that no girls were involved in more serious violence, rather that these were uncommon in the cohort studied.

The context of the girls violent offending in this study could be divided into four categories (see Fig 10)

i. Violence against an unknown peer
ii. Violence against a known peer
iii. Violence against the police/other authority figures
iv. Violence against a family member
i. **Violence against an unknown peer**

Violence against another young person that was not known to them typically occurred when girls were in a mixed group of young in a public place (in the park, in the street, near local shops). This type of violence occurred in 33% of cases.

Offences often took place whilst girls were under the influence of alcohol or drugs whereby they were argumentative and challenging both to their peer group, and to members of the public. Some incidents involved an altercation with a random victim and led to a minor assault e.g. asking to borrow money or property (mobile phone, bike etc) and then hitting or pushing the person who refused; or challenging a passer by who said something about them or looked at them. For example:-
She hit a girl who gave her a ‘funny look’. She asked the girl what she was looking at and when the girl denied looking at her and tried to push past, she hit her.
Case File.15 Age 14, charged with ABH

She went to the victim and demanded his bike, when he refused she hit him round the head
Case File 11 Age 17, charged with Robbery

This type of incident was often linked to anti social behaviour involving a mixed group of young people who were ‘hanging around’ or ‘hanging out’. At times this category of violence also spilled over into peer violence as arguments and disputes in the group between friends led to aggression which again, was often alcohol fuelled.

ii. Violence against a known peer
Thirty two per cent of violence was directed at young people known to the girls either through school, or in their local neighbourhoods. Many of the offences involved common assaults on other girls whom the girls believed had spread rumours about them or their family, or had 'upset' them or their family or because they had ‘fallen out’ (with friends).

Most assaults took place outside of school with girls confronting the victim in the street, after a party, or going round to where the victim lived. These offences were often alcohol related.

Examples from case files show the context of some of the peer violence that occurred amongst girls in the study:-
She went to the victims’ house to challenge her about what she had said about her when she knew there was a party. She went with some other friends and had been drinking alcohol. Case File 25, Age 13

An argument developed into a fight. She punched the victim after the victim hit her friend and threatened her. Case File 24, Age 14

The assault was committed against an ‘ex’ friend, at another friend’s house over something that she said – she punched her. Case File 27, Age 13

There was an argument which broke into a fight between the girls. The girl tripped up her friend’s boyfriend as a joke; the victim subsequently grabbed the girl who head butted her. Case File 20, Age 17

### iii. Violence against the police/other authority figures

Assaults on Police officers or other authority figures (security guards/ care home staff) occurred in 22% of cases. Girls commonly assaulted a police officer (often biting or kicking) after being warned about their behaviour and then resisting arrest. This was often whilst girls were under the influence of alcohol and/or where they were being restrained by Police.

A number of case files referred to girls lashing out when manhandled by Police albeit with good intentions (to calm them down) and girls give accounts of being grabbed inappropriately, and of their clothes being in disarray revealing their bodies or underwear, causing their aggression to escalate further.

### iv. Violence against a family member

Thirteen per cent of the girls committed an assault against a family member, in most cases their mothers. This violence often occurred in the context of a family row and was part of a regular pattern in the girls lives,
with conflict emanating from the girls' poor relationships with stepfathers and mothers' boyfriend, or rows regularly erupting girls' behaviour such as stealing money, refusing to accept parental boundaries (not being allowed out, about coming in times etc) the girls’ alcohol and drug use etc, often leading to violent incidents and criminal damage to the home.

When the Police were called to such family disputes, and attempts to calm the girls down failed, the girls lashed out at Police who tried to restrain them, thus incurring an additional conviction for assault on a police officer.

Many of the girls’ case files chronicle the turbulent lives they experienced, often involving significant violence and aggression including domestic violence, or extreme conflict related to a parent’s new relationship, serious drug or alcohol use by parents and/or abuse and neglect. Examples in case files include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[She] lost her temper in an argument with her mother and trashed the house</th>
<th>Case File.26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She had been drinking and smashed a window in a row with her mother</td>
<td>Case File.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She assaulted and was threatening to her mother –she lashed out at her and smashed her belongings, she was stoned and drunk at the time.</td>
<td>Case File.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Girls and serious violent offences**

Serious offences leading to immediate custody or ISSP as an alternative to custody were uncommon, and five cases were identified as such in the sample group. These offences of serious violence were perpetrated against an unknown peer, mainly for serious acquisitive crime (robbery) with adult co defendants, or against a known peer. The details of the small number of cases falling into the category of serious violence are not explored in this study due to their sensitive nature and the possibility of compromising the anonymity of the girls involved.
PART TWO: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH GIRLS SUPERVISED BY THE YOT

Introduction
Twenty two girls in the case file study cohort were approached via YOT practitioners who were their case workers. A number of the girls missed their interviews for various reasons (unwell, forgot, mixed up the time, crisis etc) despite appointments being rearranged. Thirteen girls eventually took part in interviews which were held at local YOT offices. The girls were offered transport and received a voucher to show appreciation for them taking part. All of the girls were White or from ‘White Other’ backgrounds. Two Black girls were due to be interviewed but were unable to attend. Six of the girls were aged 16 or 17 and seven were aged 14 and 15 years (See Appendix C for interview schedule with details of girls’ ages and ethnicity).

Some of the girls had taken part in a YOT Girls Group Programme and were able to reflect on this and give their views about what is important in gender specific programmes for girls in the YOT.

The interviews covered a range of themes but were informal and exploratory rather than formal and rigid, to allow the most opportunity for the girls to talk unhindered with prompts only where necessary to help the flow of discussion. The following themes were explored in the interviews:-

- The girls’ views about why girls get involved in offending.
- How they thought their offending has affected their lives.
- Their experience and perceptions of being on a Court Order and of the youth offending team.
- The girls’ views about gender specific programmes.
- Whether they thought girls should have a YOT worker of the same gender.
- What they thought about how to prevent girls getting involved in offending.
- What type of support and programmes the YOT should offer and how the YOT could improve its responses to girls in trouble.

The themes and the girls’ responses from the interviews are detailed below. Quotes from the girls are presented throughout. These are referenced as Girls Interview1, 2, 3 etc.

**Girls’ explanations for their offending**

Fig 11: Reasons girls gave for their involvement in offending

Alcohol and drugs, family conflict and relationships with parents, influence from friends, the area they lived in and alcohol were the most common reasons girls gave for their involvement in offending, although most of the girls said it was a combination of these things, rather than just one specific reason.

It was acknowledged by the majority of the girls interviewed that their offending was alcohol related and they spoke of being drunk and ‘out of control’. Some of the girls spoke about having to deal with family problems. Examples (in the girls’ own words include: - their mum being
Some of the girls identified boredom and ‘a bit of fun’, lack of transport and facilities, the area they lived in, lack of money, self defence and ‘temper’ as reasons for offending, suggesting that offending is linked to both adolescent behaviour and disadvantage.
I kicked someone and had a fight with a girl at the youth club
[after it closed] I didn’t like the girl; it was a bit of fun that went too far.

Girls Interview 7

I’ve had everything (types of Court Orders) – I got in a stolen
car, I did criminal damage, ABH, public order. I was having
fights with people and I didn’t know when to stop

Girls Interview 9

Adolescent risk taking and seeking excitement was most apparent in the cases involving alcohol related group violence and anti social behaviour, suggesting that the effects of alcohol fulfils the girls’ need for excitement in the way that stealing cars does for boys.

Confrontations with the Police sometimes added to this excitement. In one example, the Police seeking to arrest the girls’ boyfriend led to the girl, who was drunk, challenging the Police officers about this and resulted in her assaulting one of them.

In some cases it was clear that the alcohol use was related to more complex problems experienced by the girls interviewed.

Both my parents were alcoholics – I said I wouldn’t drink
because of this but I started drinking in the end when I was
14 or 15. We had to move away from my dad who was violent.
They wouldn’t let me stay at my school as it was too far away.
I had to move schools - I never liked the new school and I
ended up not going. I was ok until then, I liked school

Girls Interview 11

Some topics are less likely to be identified by the girls themselves such as poverty or financial difficulties, abuse, domestic violence, or their parents’
mental health or substance misuse. However the girls did share, or allude to some of these more sensitive issues, particularly where they were sufficiently in the past, rather than more recent occurrences.

One of the girls disclosed that she was raped when she was five years of age (this was not new information and was also recorded in the case file) and another (a 17 year old) who was living independently from her family in a hostel described why she got arrested:

```
I was asleep in the front room and the lodger came in drunk. She
[my mum] had given him my bedroom and he wasn't meant to
come in the front room. I went mad and attacked him
Girls Interview 13
```

Others referred to their offending as being related to going into care or occurring whilst they were in care, to having a drug habit or related to a parents’ alcohol use:

```
I started offending when I went in to care and stopped when I came out. Being
in care you had to prove yourself and let others know who you are’
The children’s home winds you up. They called the police about a
chair being broken and you go to court; they take the cost of it out of
your pocket money but then you still end up on an Order
Girls Interview 9

I was doing burglaries and stealing for drugs. My dad had a drink problem,
mum always let me have a drink, it made me feel better – happier
Girls Interview 8

My parents were alcoholics so we never had any food in the house
Girls Interview 11
```
Girls views on the effect of their offending and involvement in the Youth Justice System

Some of the younger girls (14 and 15 year olds) said that they were not affected by getting a Court Order. Some also said that their mothers thought it was wrong that they had had to go to court for what was perceived as a trivial incident that the police got called to.

_Girls bitch – it gets into fights. I'm not affected by it – I dint do anything serious. It was stupid getting arrested for it, it was just a fight._

Girls Interview 7 Age 15

The slightly older girls (16 and 17 year olds) were more able to reflect on how their involvement in the Criminal Justice System had affected them. They talked about their family disowning them or not trusting them, or kicking them out of home, about having a criminal record and being labelled, or being expelled from school because of it.

_I was affected because I got a criminal record and I fell out with my family. They disowned me, my grandma didn’t trust me, none of them could trust me._

Girls Interview 8 Age 17

Again this is likely to be because it is slightly less recent for them and they can reflect and refer to their experiences as past rather than current. These girls implied that they were no longer offending, whereas the younger ones didn’t give that impression (one 14 year old girl said she knew that she would carry on offending for a while yet as she wasn’t ready to stop!).
A number of the girls felt that they had been most affected by always having someone in their life (YOT workers) and ‘constantly having to go to meetings’ and to court, or being ‘threatened with breach’ for non compliance. The effect of being on a Court Order, as well as being in care seemed particularly onerous for them. One of the girls who was in care recalled:

| It has affected me a lot. Always having someone in my life, constantly having meetings, always seeing someone because of it [offending]. I wanted my life back, I got taken away from my family and friends as I was put in another area, you should be nearer, they are meant to keep you near your own home |
| Girls Interview 9 |

It was hard here to distinguish between what was being said about the impact of offending and the effects of being in the care system as they were clearly intertwined.

**Girls’ experiences of YOT supervision**

The girls were asked what they were required to do as part of their Court Orders, and whether they thought the YOT had helped them and if so, in what ways.

**Meetings**

Girls most frequently referred to having to attend meetings and appointments with YOT staff and filling in forms (worksheets) and home visits from their YOT workers. Generally this was not seen as positive, even where the girls felt they got on well with their YOT worker.

**Reparation**

The girls talked about having to do reparation and ‘community service’ explaining that they did painting, gardening, and cleaning graffiti off of
walls. Some of the girls said they did this on their own with a worker which some preferred, although others said they didn’t mind being in a group as they knew the boys already. Some talked positively about projects they had attended such as a First Aid course and the LIFE project (an initiative with the fire and rescue services).

**Talking with a YOT worker**

Despite not liking the number of meetings they had to have with the YOT worker, most of the girls spoke positively of having a YOT worker they could trust, and talk to about complex family problems and who could mediate with their family in family meetings to help resolve problems. This view was most common amongst the older girls, particularly those with complex family histories. Indeed the older girls were more able to articulate their feelings and reflect, whereas the younger age girls were more defensive and dismissive of the need for support. Most of the girls saw their YOT worker as supportive and able to help them and their families:

| It was easier to talk to YOT staff than to my mum; it helped to get it out of my system and they got me some counselling which helped. I had help about my drugs and alcohol and family problems. If I hadn't had J and N [YOT staff] I'd have been in prison. I walk away from trouble now. |
| Girls Interview 8 |
| It helped me having my YOT worker to talk to, just talking to someone who understood, it was nice to be listened to. |
| Girls Interview 13 |
| It was easy to talk to my YOT worker. And I had a lot of help from my education worker |
| Girls Interview 1 |
| You can get the help you need from them [the YOT] |
| Girls Interview 11 |

One of the girls was more critical of the YOT. She didn’t get on with a succession of YOT workers and she felt they were critical of her mum.
It's hard to keep talking about an offence that is a year old. I don't think it has helped me – I haven't done much. I don't get on with my YOT worker, she doesn't get on with my mum. The ASBO helped not the YOT – and being put in a cell. But maybe it was because I got older and was ready to stop.

Girls Interview 10

Access to support
Some of the girls said the YOT had arranged counselling for them and their family, or that they had support from a drug and alcohol worker, a Connexions worker or with their accommodation as they were homeless. The girls who were homeless or had drug or alcohol problems clearly valued the support rather than having to sort things out on their own.

Breach
One of the girls said her YOT worker had had to take her back to court for breach, and others said they were threatened with breach by their YOT workers. The girl who was taken back to court for breach saw it as inevitable and something the worker had little control over.

Another girl explained that she had failed to attend an appointment as she had been beaten up by a friend's boyfriend and her face was swollen, so she wouldn't leave the house until it had healed. She had been to hospital but didn't tell her YOT case worker at the time and was subsequently breached by the YOT.

When asked why she hadn’t informed the YOT of the reason she hadn’t attended her appointment, she said she didn’t care (about missing her
YOT appointment or the consequences) at the time; as she didn’t want to go out of the house and didn’t want to explain.

Another girl who was warned for not attending YOT appointments said she was too tired after work. She said that knew she should have attended as it was part of her Order, but she said it was hard to fit it in after work.

The YOT Girls Group Programme
Six of the girls interviewed had taken part in a YOT Girls Group Programme. The girls placed significant emphasis on the YOT workers role, stressing the importance of having ‘Workers who don’t judge you or talk down to you’. They also emphasised the YOT workers’ role in setting the boundaries of the group:-

Workers made it safe – we knew where we stood and what we were meant to do
They helped us to talk and know how to act- how to treat each other
Girls Interview 1

Some of the girls preferred going to a group programme rather than seeing a YOT worker on a one to one basis. They liked that they were in a group with ‘girls in the same position as you’.

Some of the girls felt there were too many guest speakers (YOT specialists joined the group to cover particular topics such as alcohol and drug awareness and emotional health, and an outside speaker came from the college to run a First Aid session) which again suggests the relationships with workers are important.

The girls suggested that dance and jobs advice should be included and that the programme should always include ideas from the girls.
The YOT Girls Group did not focus specifically on the girls offending and two of the girls thought that their offending itself should be discussed in the group.

Some of the girls who participated had reservations about why the Girls Group was being run since they did not experience it as a punishment:

- it doesn’t seem right, we should be scared not get treats
- I didn’t really understand why we were having it [the girls group]

Girls Interview 5

The girls were particularly keen to feel that they had learnt something new. They enjoyed the First Aid for example which included a test and they received a certificate if they passed. One of the girls commented:

- It told me about possibilities, [the First Aid course] about what could happen
  [in relation to drugs], I like learning things that make you think

Girls Interview 4

**Girls’ views about the gender of their YOT worker**

The overriding priority for the girls interviewed was that the YOT worker was easy to get on with, more so than their gender. That said most maintained that they would feel more able to speak more openly with a female worker as illustrated in the comments below:
Don’t mind - problems are easier to talk about to a girl but it depends if you get on with the worker

Girls Interview.1

‘I feel more comfortable with a female worker,
I probably wouldn’t tell a man as much

Girls Interview.8

I prefer to have a woman as I might not be able to speak to a man about some things

Girls Interview.11

It’s easier to talk to a woman – men won’t understand from girls’ point of view

Girls Interview.13

Girls views about preventing their involvement in offending

The girls referred to the situational nature of their offending. Thus some of the girl spoke about how they hadn’t expected to get into trouble with the Police and that young people should be warned of the consequences of their behaviour that could lead to them being arrested.

You need to get the girls to think before they do it [offend]
but it’s easy to drift into it, and they need to realise that’.

Girls Interview.4

I’m not sure [how to prevent girls’ offending]
as didn’t intend to get in trouble in first place

Girls Interview.1

Boredom was also seen as a factor and it was suggested that things to do in their communities would help prevent young people offending. This view that there is ‘nothing to do where we live’ was related to not having the money to take part in activities, or travel to them, as much as there not being provision. This was especially commented on by girls who lived in rural areas.
More things to do in the area would help –
its all boys stuff where we live or not for our age
Girls Interview.7

Where I live I can only hang around,
I have no money and there are no free buses
Girls Interview.12

Having someone to talk to, and somewhere to get advice was also seen as important although a number also recognised that they wouldn’t have accepted any help at the time:

It’s easier to talk to YOT staff than to your mum-they can help
you get it out of your system– they can arrange counselling
Girls Interview.8

Someone to talk to outside of the children’s home may
have helped me- but I may not have accepted help
Girls Interview.9

Some of the girls said that offending could be prevented if the girls drank less alcohol, and if they could see the consequences of alcohol and drugs;

The girls need to drink less alcohol.
Girls Interview.13

You need to get them to see what can happen if you have too much drugs
Girls Interview.3
Some of the younger girls were fatalistic saying that if they were going to get into trouble they would and nothing would stop them, and that they would only stop when they got older and grew up.

They have got to want not to do it again –
You can’t help those that don’t want be helped.

Girls Interview 2

It’s your own decision, I don’t think you can prevent it –
you don’t take it seriously at the time

Girls Interview.10

Being on a Court Order just made me worse –it only made me rebel more

Girls Interview 9

**Girls views about how the YOT can improve its responses to girls**

The girls had clear views about what they needed from the YOT. They talked about ‘help’ and support, particularly the worker talking to, and listening to them. YOT staff being ‘easy to talk to’ and needing to be the ‘right type of person to help’ was also stressed.

One of the girls thought it was important to be told when you are doing well, and telling your family, as they are disappointed with you for getting into trouble. This girl commented:

I felt I let my mum down and was really feeling low, when
they said I had done really well in the (Referral Order) Panel
meeting it made me and my mum feel better.

Girls Interview 1
The younger girls (14 – 15) focused more on the need to be punished. One of the girls said it was hard to talk about offences that have happened a long time ago. The younger age range also thought that it was important that you learnt something and that there should be more of a punishment.

*It should be harder – more of a punishment –
Parents think you are getting treated for being bad*

Girls Interview 3

Other forms of help the girls highlighted as important were: arranging (specialist) counselling, talking through family problems, helping their mothers, support with their education, getting help from an alcohol and drugs worker or advice about safe sex. Some of the girls suggested that ‘Drop-ins’ should be available.

When asked about how the YOT can improve how it works with girls they suggested that having meetings at the YOT office was not helpful:

*Don’t make them come to the office*

Girls Interview 10

*Have counsellors, a coffee shop, meet out, go on a trip, don’t always have meetings, it’s easier to talk when you’re not just in a meeting*

Girls Interview 13
PART THREE: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH YOT PRACTITIONERS

In the main the views of YOT practitioners’ reinforced the findings from the case files, although at times there was a different emphasis and perspective and more detailed explanations than could be found in case files. Further some aspects came across in interviews that didn’t feature very much in case files (for example sexual exploitation). Quotes from YOT practitioners are referenced throughout as YOT practitioner interview 1, 2…15. (See Appendix C for Interview Schedules).

Reasons for girls’ involvement in offending

YOT Practitioners’ opinions about reasons girls become involved in offending related to five main areas: -family, alcohol, peer group, adolescence and youth culture, although a combination of difficulties in a number of these areas was cited rather than one specific problem area alone.

Fig 12: YOT Practitioners views on why girls get involved in offending

- Family issues – family breakdown/lack of role models/rejection/ violence
- Alcohol
- Self esteem issues – pressure to look good
- Relationship problems
- Influence of friends
- Older boyfriends
- Parental drug use
- Media
- Youth culture

Family
A range of family related difficulties were cited that practitioners saw as significant to the girls’ involvement in offending behaviour. These related particularly to parental relationship breakdown, especially conflict with a
stepfather or mother’s partner. This sometimes resulted in girls becoming homeless as described previously, or in them staying away from home for long periods of time, or living temporarily at various friends homes. Thus girls’ feeling rejected by their families was a common thread, and some practitioners also talked about girls not being adequately cared for by their parents due to a parent’s mental health or drug and alcohol problems.

Conflict arising from domestic violence, parental alcohol or drug was also cited. Some practitioners highlighted a lack of positive role models for the girls whereby girls’ experiences were similar to their mothers – thus girls were in their own violent relationships with boys, or had similar alcohol problems to their parents’.

Alcohol

YOT practitioners identified girls regular binge drinking as a concern. This concern appeared to be justified from examples given by practitioners, such as girls drinking bottles of vodka and waking up in a police cell, or falling down the stairs at home whilst drunk. Thus alcohol was seen by practitioners as a key feature in the girls’ aggression and subsequent violent offending. Practitioners also expressed concern about the girls vulnerability and safety (sexual vulnerability with older males) when they had consumed excessive amounts of alcohol. Some YOT practitioners thought girls used alcohol to boost their self esteem and confidence in front of boys, and as a coping mechanism.
Peer group

Also seen as significant in girls offending was their involvement with older boyfriends who were also offenders. This included girls being in a relationship with boys who were also on YOT Orders. In some cases these relationships were violent, with girls needing similar support to adult women in domestic violence circumstances (needing to flee accommodation for fear of violence, etc)

Adolescence and youth culture

Some YOT practitioners also viewed the girls' offending as part of growing up, thus accepting that the girls don't always make good decisions and choices. More generally, wanting to please other people and lacking in confidence and self esteem was seen as one of the reasons girls became involved in offending in their peer groups. Some practitioners suggested that girls with low self esteem get acknowledgement from their peers for their alcohol related behaviour and others cited pressure on girls to be popular and attractive as leading them to drink to gain acceptance.
Sometimes the girls are emotionally unstable and they struggle with how to control their emotions. Often the work we do with them is crisis intervention as they are very chaotic. They don’t always feel very confident and have self esteem issues. Some of them show off in front of the boys to match up to an image. Alcohol helps them get their confidence.

YOT Practitioner Interview 6

The girls can be emotional and angry. They have mood swings and everything is a drama!

YOT Practitioner interview 4

Are girls treated differently in the Youth Justice System?

Asking about whether girls are treated differently to boys in the Criminal Justice System brought out mixed views. Generally YOT practitioners thought that girls were treated more leniently at the early stages in the Criminal Justice System, and that they were given more “chances” both by Police and Magistrates. However it was also thought that girls were more likely to be treated harshly by magistrates, and for their behaviour to be judged by how girls should behave. For example one comment was that:

Magistrates treat girls more severely. Offending is seen as growing up for boys but not for girls’ and that ‘Girls get away with things but as offences escalate they are treated more harshly.

YOT Practitioner interview 1

It was largely felt that girls generally didn’t end up going to custody, and that they seemed to get to a point and then comply.

They go through the system quickly but stop before custody.

YOT Practitioner interview 9

Some practitioners referred to heightened agency reactions to girls compared to boys, particularly if girls were considered vulnerable (e. g
homeless/ thought to be associating with older men) whereas it was suggested the same response would not have been elicited for a boy in the same circumstances.

Another view was that girls themselves believed they would not be arrested by Police.

| Girls expect to be excused by saying they were drunk and didn’t know what they were doing. |
| YOT Practitioner interview 5 |

**Views about the main areas of need amongst girls in the Youth Justice System**

YOT workers cited education problems as a key area of need: - schools sometimes identifying the girls as a problem, girls not wanting to be told what to do by the school, and girls not attending and refusing to go back to school.

Girls’ alcohol use as mentioned above was a common concern with practitioners suggesting that the girls use alcohol as a coping mechanism. Binge drinking was identified as a common concern with girls becoming violent when drunk. Girls themselves acknowledged how their violent behaviour was linked to their alcohol use.

Sexual health, safety and pregnancy concerns were all regular issues raised by the girls when they saw their YOT worker (thinking they were pregnant, sexual assault when they were drunk etc). Thus although it was not always relevant to the offence, YOT practitioners saw the need to provide support about sexual health and contraception or help girls seek advice and support about these areas, including medical advice if they were pregnant.
Concerns about girls’ sexual exploitation were also highlighted by practitioners. This was related to the girls going missing for long periods of time and having older boyfriends, or being befriended by older men (lorry drivers for example who gave the girls cigarettes and alcohol).

Family and relationships at home were highlighted as one of the main areas of need amongst the girls in the Youth Justice System. This included: - a lack of stability in the family situation, domestic violence and violence in the home and in their lives more generally, parental drug abuse, family expectations and girls feeling they had to hold the family together, as well as not always wanting to take on the role expected of them (i.e. staying in to look after siblings, household chores) and girls running away or staying away from home.

YOT Practitioners noted that many of the girls were ‘Looked after’ children (LAC) or had care histories. They pointed out that the girls’ offending in these cases was often linked to the care home including damage/ theft or assaults on staff.

Emotional issues including dealing with rejection and parents not caring, self harm; depression and not caring about themselves; lacking confidence; wanting acceptance; needing to be attractive; low self esteem; girls feeling that they are not being listened to; sexual abuse and not being believed, and neglect were all identified by practitioners as key issues facing girls in the Youth Justice System.
Fig 13: YOT practitioners views on the main issues and need of girls in the Youth Justice System

- Education: -- school seeing the girls as a problem; girls wont go back to school; girls not wanting to be told what to do
- Alcohol and drugs: --violent when drunk; binge drinking; alcoholic parent (often mother’s); drug using parent (heroin- mother)
- Sexual health needs: -- risk of pregnancy, date rape, older boyfriends, Keeping safe; sexual exploitation
- Self esteem issues: -- pressure to look attractive : body image; lack of confidence; lack of caring about themselves; vulnerable
- Family issues: -- lack of stability in family situation; no family; family rejection; domestic violence
- Running away
- Going out with older men
- Abuse: -- sexual abuse – not always believed; emotional abuse; neglect
- Importance of friendships
- Time spent in care
- Homelessness

Do girls need a female YOT worker?

Most YOT practitioners did not see the need for girls to automatically be allocated a female worker. It was felt that if the assessment identified areas that needed a female (because of abuse for example) then they would be allocated to a female worker.

In general though, it was not thought to be an issue as the YOT area where the study was conducted had more female workers than male workers, so the girls would normally be allocated to a female. In addition given that YOT have specialist workers (Police, Health, Education, Connexions, etc) it was felt that girls would usually have a female worker working with them in some capacity.
Views about effective practice with girls

The importance of relationships
YOT Practitioners identified the importance of establishing a trusting relationship based on mutual respect with girls in order to achieve success in working with them. It was seen as important to get to get to know them:

You need to find an understanding with the girls.
YOT worker interview 4

It was also seen as vital to recognise the importance of relationships with friends and family in girls’ lives. Thus if they fell out with friends or had a big row at home, the effects of this could be considerable. Practitioners referred to the girls being emotional and to the emotional dramas in the girls’ lives.

A key point made by one practitioner was that girls need to feel they have choices in relationships. Practitioners talked about girls not wanting to be told what to do, thus the YOT role can be about mediating between the young person and a parent/ school or care home.

Things can spiral and they fight against everything. Girls can be very vocal in meetings
YOT staff need to help find creative solutions
YOT Practitioner interview 10
Bound up with the need to establish a mutually respectful relationship with girls was the need to acknowledge their maturity and emotional awareness.

*Girls are assertive and know what they want – you have to respect that they tend to be strong minded*

YOT Practitioner interview 8

Some practitioners stressed that this recognition and respect extended to challenging the girls where necessary, to make them aware of the impact of what they are doing and the consequences. Indeed working with girls to make them more self aware was also seen as a key area, for example, how they behave when drunk and how intimidating as well as vulnerable they could be in these circumstances.

*Skills, knowledge and understanding to address girls complex needs*

YOT practitioners highlighted the importance of staff having sufficient knowledge, understanding and expertise to work effectively with girls and with the range of problems they present.

Some practitioners talked about topics needing to be explored in depth, and not just superficially. It was acknowledged that this needed to be done individually with girls with complex needs such as those identified in earlier case examples, rather than in a group. However a group programme was seen as a good way to get to know the girls and build a positive relationship.

There was an acknowledgement that practitioners need to ‘start where the girls are at’ and need to have sufficient knowledge and experience to make sure the programmes is relevant. This was seen as particularly important in a group programme where girls will have different needs and workers will need to adjust sessions to ensure they are appropriate. The
importance of an up to date assessment was stressed to help inform this, and information sharing between agencies as girls often had multiple problems and lots of professionals were involved.

Indeed it is clear from the accounts of girls’ lives highlighted, that practitioners running programmes will need a range of skills to work effectively with the girls involved, and that where group programmes are offered, the staff need group work skills to draw upon.

Close collaborative working between professionals
The complexity of problems experienced by girls also means that the practitioner can sometimes become overwhelmed. The importance of working closely with other agencies outside of the YOT was stressed by YOT practitioners:

*Call professionals meetings as you can get consumed.*

YOT Practitioner interview 6

Understanding of adolescence and youth culture
Some practitioners stressed the importance of understanding young people and youth culture and that adolescence was a time of change and risk taking, thus what is important to young people and what is relevant in their lives has to be recognised in programmes and approaches used in the YOT.

This ranges from understanding the impact of factors such as needing to fit in, be attractive, career and employment prospects, personal relationships, concerns about their safety on the street, to wider socio economic factors such as poverty, discrimination, and environment. It was acknowledged that just as with boys, girls are going through puberty with all that this entails; - mood swings, PMT, emotional behaviour, needing to be accepted etc. As practitioners commented:
Many of the issues are the same as for boys, they are both going through puberty and this comes out in different ways

YOT Practitioner Interview 1

You need to understand that they live for the moment and don’t want to miss anything!

YOT Practitioner Interview 4

**Keeping safe**

Looking with girls at them keeping themselves safe was another key theme that was seen an integral to any work with girls. This included risk of pregnancy, sexual health, child protection, and personal relationships as well as keeping safe when under the influence of alcohol or drugs/ on the street/ when out for a night out with friends. Practitioners relayed stories of girls they were working with thinking they were pregnant, being pregnant, alleging sexual assaults, being involved in attacks whilst drunk etc. Thus even where practitioners were not intending to address these types of issues, they were part of the girls’ everyday lives.

**Motivational interviewing**

Motivational interviewing was seen as a positive approach as was signposting girls towards specialist services to enable them to access appropriate support.

**Gender specific group programmes for girls**

Working with girls in a small group was seen as a positive way of working with girls and using a range of resources to stimulate topics such as alcohol use and keeping safe.

Group work is a good way of challenging the girls and raising important issues in ways that are acceptable to the girls. They are more likely to listen when other girls are involved, rather than just one to one with the worker.

YOT Practitioner interview 8
It was also felt that the starting point was often wider than just girls’ offending. As one practitioner noted:

You have to look wider than their offending-get the girls to think about risky situations and their alcohol use.

YOT Practitioner interview 8

At the heart of any group programmes for girls was the belief in trying to build up girls self esteem and self worth, through choices, respect, and channelling their behaviour into positive actions. How the girls see themselves and how they want to be, relationships, health and wellbeing including sexual health and substance misuse and helping girls to access support they needed were all considered to be important areas.

But it was also recognized that programmes should acknowledge why the girls are there (in the group), and ensure that the reasons for their offending and its consequences are explored. As one worker giving an example of one of the girls involved in text and internet bullying commented:

You need to challenge them too – they don’t always realise the impact they are having, you need to make them aware of the consequences of what they are doing. The same goes for bitchiness– they need to be made more aware of themselves and their behaviour on others.

YOT Practitioner interview 8
Generally, practitioners believed it was important that girls know why they are attending a girls group programme and that it should relate to their offending. The context of the group programme can be explained to girls and parents/carers when home visits and discussions about girls taking part in a group programme. Likewise group facilitators need to make explicit links in the group sessions both in the choice of topics covered, as well as in relating the discussions to the offending (alcohol or violence for example). Making use of one to one sessions with the girls if necessary to follow this up is also important.

**How the YOT can improve its responses to girls**

*Reparation projects that are relevant to girls*
Practitioners indicated that Reparation was sometimes problematic for the girls. Reparation Projects were not always as relevant to the girls offending or they are geared to activities seen as traditional male activities (painting fences, decorating, cleaning graffiti etc).

It was acknowledged that it was not appropriate for girls to be in groups with boys where they were the only girl. Practitioners generally thought that this was flagged up in the risk assessment undertaken in respect of reparation, but that it did happen on occasion, if one of the other girls due to attend did not turn up for example this could leave just one girl in a group with four or five boys.

*Greater discretion in the use of breach*
Some practitioners felt that instigating breach proceedings was not always appropriate – for example where alcohol issues were being worked on or where the girl was homeless, but felt that they were constrained by the YOT enforcement process and their lack of discretion in this (This would also apply to boys with similar problems).
Availability of relevant resources
Practitioners noted the need for more appropriate resources to be available for their work with girls, and needing to make sure these are relevant and up to date.

They valued the range of specialist knowledge available to them in the YOT that could contribute to their work with the girls generally both by specialist workers presence in the team with their particular expertise, and their links to other services (e.g. substance misuse or mental health services). Indeed they were often able to utilise the YOT specialist workers in programmes they ran for girls: - Connexions, Substance misuse and health workers were all able to offer resources and run sessions and offer follow up support where required.
SUMMARY OF OVERALL FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

Characteristics and needs of girls in the Youth Justice System
- Girls often had multiple and interrelated needs.

- Interrupted education through non attendance or exclusion from school was a feature in the overwhelming majority of girls’ lives.

- Very few of the girls had been assessed as having special education needs. It may be the case that girls’ special education needs are overlooked in schools.

- Most girls were regularly referred to as being academically ‘bright’

- Severe family conflict relating to violence in the home and step parent relationships was common often combined with girls’ experiences of being thrown out of home, experience of local authority care; and child protection concerns.

- Girls’ experiences of sexual abuse were often perpetrated by a family member or family ‘friend’ and often occurred at a young age.

- Girls’ heavy alcohol use was a strong feature in their offending and in their lives.

- Girls often mixed with known offenders and had older boyfriends.

- Parental serious drug and alcohol use was a feature of some of the girls’ lives. This contributed to girls’ neglect and the involvement of social care agencies in the family.
- Depression and self harm (often girls taking an overdose) meant that girls often had a YOT mental health worker involved in their cases and YOT caseworkers had to manage these issues in their supervision and interventions with girls.

- Girls often had accommodation needs and left home at an early age as a result of their circumstances.

**Girls Offending Patterns**

- Girls offending typically involved theft and minor assault.

- Girls offending did not escalate in seriousness even where it was persistent.

- Minor violence is a key feature of girls offending in adolescence. This is often perpetrated against other young people whilst girls are in mixed peer groups in public space. Minor assaults against a friend, family member or the Police are also common.

- Girls’ offending often occurs whilst under the influence of alcohol.

**Youth Justice Responses to girls**

- Some of the girls’ low level offences and the context (e.g. family related / disputes between friends involving minor criminal damage) point to more formal Police responses to girls.

- Police responses can increase conflict rather than diffuse it, particularly where the girls are under the influence of alcohol.
Physical responses sometimes adopted by Police may mirror violence girls have already experienced and can elicit further confrontational behaviour from girls.

- The highly prescribed and formal processes (National Standards, enforcement etc) which govern YOTS can be a barrier to their success. Girls’ often chaotic lives and complex backgrounds and needs sometimes affected their ability or willingness to meet the requirements of their Court Orders. This created a tension for YOT practitioners between meeting the girls presenting needs and their accountability as YOT practitioners in the Youth Justice process. The relationship with the YOT worker was critical to the success or otherwise of the YOT intervention. This could be undermined by the YOT enforcement process.

- YOT offending behaviour programmes and reparation projects do not always reflect girls offending patterns. Resources and programmes designed for boys are often adapted by the YOT for use with girls. Consequently programmes for girls involved in offending are unregulated and for the most part not evaluated, and good practice that does exist is not widely disseminated.

- Personal safety of girls was a key area of concern highlighted by YOT practitioners. This related to: - their absconding from home/homelessness; mixing with older men; vulnerability whilst under the influence of alcohol/drugs.

**Girls views about offending and YOT interventions**

- Alcohol and drugs, family conflict and relationships with parents, influence from friends, the area they lived in and alcohol were the most common reasons girls gave for their involvement in offending.
They said it was often a combination of these issues, rather than just one specific reason.

- Girls indicated that their offending was related to their maturity. The 14 and 15 year old girls felt nothing would have stopped them offending until they were ready to stop, whereas the 16 and 17 year old girls said they had ‘gone through that now’ and ‘grown up’.

- The girls thought reparation should be more directly linked to their offending and liked to feel there was a value to the reparation they did.

- The girls placed great emphasis on the relationship with the YOT worker citing the importance of having workers they can trust, who listens and understands them and who are non judgemental.

- The majority of girls preferred a female worker.

- Girls valued help with accommodation, alcohol problems, support in sorting out family problems and difficulties at school and help with careers.

- Gender specific group programmes were highly valued by girls and this was reflected in high attendance levels.

- YOT activities where girls felt they learnt something new such as the LIFE Project and First Aid were also popular.

- Informal venues and ‘drop –ins’ where they could get advice and talk to someone rather than formal meetings at the YOT offices were highlighted by girls as ways the YOT could be more responsive.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND KEY THEMES FROM THE RESEARCH

This chapter reflects on the findings and key themes arising from the overall study and makes links between this study and other relevant research.

1. The complex needs and backgrounds of girls in the Youth Justice System

Research has consistently highlighted that girls in the Youth Justice System, particularly those who experience custody, often have complex problems and experience of disadvantage and adversity (Howard League 1997, Widom 2000, Hedderman 2004, Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe 2007, YJB 2006a, Bateman 2008, etc) and this was also found to be the case amongst girls in this study, the majority of whom were found to have significant needs and troubled backgrounds.

The characteristics and needs that were identified amongst the girls in this study cohort were: educational factors relating to school exclusion or non attendance; serious family conflict; poverty and deprivation; heavy alcohol/serious drug use; accommodation needs; care histories; family violence; experience of abuse; parents' serious alcohol/drug use; mental health needs; absconding or going missing from home; experience of being bullied; pregnancy at a young age; and parental mental health problems (See Chapter 3 Fig: 6 for a breakdown of characteristics and needs of the girls in the study).

A substantial majority of the girls (72%) had at least four of these characteristics present in their lives, and some had many more indicating
that girls in the Youth Justice System are amongst the most vulnerable children. This concurs with research which indicates that young people in the Youth Justice System often have multiple and interrelated needs and risk factors (Berridge et al 2001 Jones and Pitts 2001 etc).

The characteristics and needs identified amongst the girls in the current study have been grouped together in related categories and are examined below.

**Educational factors**

The relationship between school exclusion and youth offending has been highlighted in a range of research (Graham and Bowling 1995, Smith and McAra 2004, Jones and Pitts, Berridge et al, Hubbard and Pratt 2002, Melrose 2004a). Similarly there was a strong relationship between school exclusion and non attendance and offending amongst the girls in the present study. Educational difficulties relating to girls’ poor or non-school attendance, risk of exclusion, attending part time educational provision, and permanent exclusion from school featured in 85% of cases. Indeed only 7 of the girls had what would be described as ‘normal’ uninterrupted educational histories. Thirty seven per cent of the girls had been permanently excluded.

A further twenty one per cent had been excluded temporarily, or were at risk of exclusion and were subsequently attending part time education programmes (at pupil referral units, colleges etc) rather than attending mainstream school full time.

Whilst boys outnumber girls in relation to their school exclusion, a significant number of girls are also excluded from school. For example in England between 1995 and 1999 some 10,000 girls were permanently excluded from school (Osler and Vincent 2003:11). 2006/07 data shows
approximately 7000 boys and 2000 girls were permanently excluded from school (DCSF 2009).

Research also suggests that girls’ special education needs are often overlooked, and that attention is generally focused on boys needs in schools (Osler and Vincent 2003, Daniels et al 1999). Daniels et al (1999) for example in a study which surveyed the allocation and identification of special education provision, drawing on data from 35 primary schools and two local education authorities, found that gender differences are most marked in the Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) categories, with few girls being assessed as EBD (ibid:192). Boys outnumber girls both in special education provision, and in receiving school based support for special educational needs.

A study of secondary age girls likewise points to the lack of provision to support girls who are experiencing problems in mainstream school (Osler and Vincent 2003). Indeed only three of the girls in the current study were assessed as having special educational needs although the case files frequently referred to girls as having challenging behaviour, with records noting ‘disruptive’, ‘volatile’, ‘defiant’ behaviour,’ and ‘violent, aggressive behaviour’ in school, as well as some girls being subject to permanent and temporary exclusions for fighting. This concurs with these earlier studies which point to girls’ needs being overlooked and that the education system is more geared to disruptive boys than girls.

Low levels of literacy and educational attainment have also been identified as a risk factor for youth offending (Graham and Bowling 1995, Farrington 2000, Stephenson et al 2007) although research has mainly focused on boys in the youth offending population. However girls in the current study were considered to be academically ‘bright’ or ‘very bright’ by YOT practitioners, and their educational difficulties related to their non
attendance and their exclusion from school rather than literacy or low attainment.

Twenty nine per cent of the girls were poor or non attenders. The impact of domestic violence, parental mental health problems or heavy alcohol use, and the effects of abuse can all impact heavily on children’s everyday functioning and development, including school attendance and behaviour in school (Gorin 2004, Jarvis et al 2005, Folsom et al 2003, Social exclusion Unit 2008). An example from the current study highlights this:

_We moved to get away from my dad. They tried to keep me at my old school for about three weeks but it was too far so I had to change schools in the end. I had to leave my friends, I never settled in the new school, I never went_

Girls Interview 11

Being bullied can also lead to girls’ non school attendance as they see no other way of avoiding victimisation (Phillips 2003, Sharp 1995). Experience of being bullied was identified in 13% of cases in this study and case records of three of the girls indicated that they were refusing to attend school because of bullying. Whilst only a small number, bullying may be underreported and may not be recorded in YOT case files unless it is a current concern, likewise, girls may not indicate the reasons for their non school attendance to their YOT worker.

Research on the gendered nature of school bullying highlights how girls can suffer when their often close knit friendship groups break down, also increasing the potential for conflict and bullying (Phillips 2003:715). Indeed girls’ friendships can be a source of conflict as well as support, and the impact on girls’ when close friendships breakdown can be significant (Osler and Vincent 2003). In the present study, some of the violent offences for which girls were charged that took place outside of school
involved girls’ friendship and peer groups, and are likely to have emanated from, or ‘spilt’ over into school.

Girls interviewed referred to a combination of factors, including non attendance and exclusion from school as exacerbating their offending. As one of the girls reflected:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I had family problems, the friends I was hanging around with were in trouble with the Police and I was getting drunk a lot. There was anger in me and I got into fights at school.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Girls Interview 13</td>
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**Serious family conflict and family violence**

The girls in this study experienced high levels of serious family conflict and violence at home. In some cases, girls’ behaviours triggered conflict with parents; for example where the girls were drunk and abusive or staying away from home without permission, whilst other conflicts related to poor step-parent relationships or antagonisms with mothers’ boyfriends. Conflict sometimes arose from girls challenging their mothers’ boyfriends or step fathers who were attempting to discipline them. The girls were also very vocal about how these new boyfriends or partners treated their mothers.

Family related problems was the second most common reason girls interviewed in this study gave for their involvement in offending. Likewise practitioners interviewed identified step-parent conflict and rejection as the most significant factor in girls’ offending. Case files and YOT practitioner interviews highlighted mothers choosing their partners above their daughters if ultimatums were issued. Indeed all of the girls interviewed who were 16 and 17 were already living independently of their parents, and this was not always out of choice- some girls had been in care, whilst
other girls parents would not allow them to live at home. The National Biennial Scottish Young People’s Study found that family conflict was the key contributor to girls leaving home by the age of 16 (Jones 1995).

Although the literature in this field is limited, American research suggests that girls are less accepting of step-parents than boys, and girls’ reactions to step parents can result in poor educational and adjustment outcomes (Hetherington and Stanley-u Hagan 1999 cited in Dennison et al 2000).

The importance of relationships in girls lives has been highlighted in a range of literature (Batchelor and Burman 2004, Patton and Morgan 2002, Worrall 2001), thus parental conflict, breakdown of family relationships and poor parent/step-parent relationships are likely to affect girls wellbeing and behaviour.

Violence in the home was present in 26% of cases in the present study, resulting in some girls and their mothers and other siblings having to leave the family home for periods of time to live in refuges and in some cases families having to be re housed, resulting in emotional stress, disruption to children’s education, loss of friends, and the loss of valued personal belongings that this brings (Worrall et al 2008).

Violence against girls in their own intimate relationships was also highlighted by some YOT practitioners although these accounts are not fully corroborated by the girls. One case file for instance refers to an incident in which the boyfriend held the girl round the throat which was relayed by the girls’ mother, although the girl herself didn’t confirm this. One of the girls interviewed also shared her experience of being assaulted by her sisters’ boyfriend when she intervened when he attacked her sister.

The impact of domestic violence on children’s development has been acknowledged in research which indicates that children witnessing
domestic violence show poorer outcomes on developmental and behaviour measures than children living without violence, whilst research also indicates some correlation between domestic violence between adults and their sexual and physical abuse of their children (Folsem et al 2003 cited in Worrall et al 2008, Herrenkoh et al 2008).

Yet at the same time, the resourcefulness and resilience of children living with adversity is acknowledged in studies of children living with parental alcohol/ drug abuse and domestic violence. Having supportive extended families, neighbours and friends, who can provide informal support networks, has been highlighted as helping children to cope with such adverse circumstances (Graham and Bowling 1995, Bancroft et al 2004, Turning Point 2006, Melrose 2004a).

In the present study, approximately one third of the girls had been to court only once. In these cases serious family conflict, family violence and experience of abuse were largely absent and these girls had less troubled family histories and backgrounds than the two thirds with greater involvement in the Youth Justice System.

This suggests that positive family relationships can act as a protective factor for girls, and that extreme family conflict and violence presages more persistent or prolific offending. Indeed where positive parent-child relationships existed and there was an absence of family violence and abuse, the girls in this study were much less likely to persist in offending even if they were exposed to other negative factors such as mixing with older peers and heavy alcohol use.

The effects of multiple family and economic stressors such as parental conflict, loss of a parent (through divorce as well as bereavement), changes of parental figures in the family, poverty and disadvantage, alcohol abuse etc, have all been highlighted in explanations of criminality
and social exclusion. Thus lack of parental supervision has been cited as a predictor of both male and female delinquency (Graham and Bowling 1995) whilst attachment theory identifies a lack of emotional attachment and parental love and warmth as a precipitating factor in the onset of offending (Bowlby 1988). Social learning theory points to parents who have weak social bonds failing to ensure their children establish positive bonds to society, thus making them more likely to be involved in anti social behaviour or delinquency (Farrington 2007).

**Girls experience of poverty and disadvantage**

A recent Social Exclusion Task Force study (2007) found that approximately 140,000 families in Britain experience multiple deprivation and complex multiple problems that place them at risk of chronic social exclusion. The study also showed that there was a greater concentration of families with multiple problems in deprived areas (ibid).

Thus having no parent in the family in employment, families living in poor quality or overcrowded housing, living on a low income; financial hardship including being unable to afford clothes or food, at least one parent having a longstanding illness, disability or mental ill health, and the compounding effects of multiple disadvantage on families were all highlighted (ibid: 9).

More generally poverty and disadvantage have been widely acknowledged as playing a part in children’s’ involvement in offending. Indeed studies in the United States have shown the importance of neighbourhood in relation to youth crime. Jones et al (2000) for example in a study of 15,000 young people, found that individual and family ‘risk factors’ operate differently in different neighbourhoods and that individual and family risk factors had less effect on young people’s offending where they came from more affluent and well resourced neighbourhoods (Jones et al cited in Pitts and Bateman 2005).
Socio-economic factors such as low family income, low social class and poor housing have been shown to be particularly important to girls’ involvement in offending (Graham and Bowling 1995, Farrington and Painter 2004).

The majority of girls in this study came from deprived neighbourhoods and/or from families who were struggling with financial problems. Although poverty and deprivation are acknowledged in the YOT assessment (Asset) and witnessed first hand by YOT practitioners in their work with young people and their families, these areas receive little attention in current Youth Justice Practice as the risk factor models of intervention focus largely on individual deficits rather than structural inequalities (Gray 2007).

**Heavy alcohol and substance misuse**

Heavy alcohol use was a significant feature amongst the girls in this study and was often a factor in their offending. A small number were also involved in serious drug abuse, although drug use is less common in this age range and most often begins later in adolescence than other forms of offending. The prevalence of substance misuse amongst females in custody indicates the need for earlier intervention and education with girls in relation to substance use. Research points to girls have more problematic drug patterns than boys and the different biological effects of substance use on females is still widely under publicised with girls (Melrose 2000, Melrose et al 2007).

The girls in the present study often cited alcohol as the reason for their offending and practitioners likewise cited the influence of girls’ heavy alcohol use as one of the key factors in their offending behaviour.

Some YOT practitioners linked girls’ alcohol use to their lack of confidence and self esteem and suggested that alcohol gave the girls confidence in

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28 Graham & Bowling (1995) find the peak age for drug offences for girls is 17 compared to 15 for other types of offending
their peer groups. Pavis et al (1997) examining the social context of drinking alcohol amongst 15 year olds found that girls tended to say that alcohol gave them confidence more frequently than young men (cited in Dennison and Coleman 2000)

Indeed girls’ alcohol-related offending in this study often occurred when girls were in mixed peer groups suggesting they were drinking to socialise and lose their inhibitions whilst amongst their friends and this seems to be a pattern amongst girls in this age group.

Parental alcohol /drug abuse appeared to be a factor amongst the girls in this study who had serious alcohol/ drug use themselves. Although research evidence does not directly link children’s’ drug use to their parents’, drug use in the home can expose children to other vulnerabilities (poverty and neglect, poor parental supervision, domestic violence etc) which impact on children’s health and development and makes them susceptible to problem alcohol or drug use themselves (Bancroft et al 2004:36). For example in this study some of the girls’ mothers also suffered severe depression related to their heavy alcohol use.

Many of the girls interviewed were perceptive about their own situations and were able to reflect on their parents’ alcohol or drug problems and attempted to make positive choices for themselves although in some cases they were unable to sustain them.

Both my parents were alcoholics - I said I wasn’t going to drink but I started drinking in the end when I was 14 or 15

Girls Interview 11

Friends in trouble

Research suggests that having friends in trouble and mixing with offending peers is a risk factor for young people’s involvement in offending. This was
a feature in more than half of the cases in the present study and has become more relevant to girls as they socialise more in mixed peer groups and occupy more public space. Some of the girls had boyfriends who were known to the YOT, or they socialised in groups that included other young offenders. Girls came to Police attention whilst hanging around shopping centres or parks with groups of friends or their boyfriends, and as discussed previously, the girls had often been drinking alcohol and were consequently very vocal if approached by Police.

Experience of abuse and care histories

Forty three per cent of the girls in this study had experience of the Care system or abuse. Typically these girls had long histories of abuse and had been on the child protection register due to neglect resulting from parental mental ill health, alcohol/substance abuse, or physical or sexual abuse. Thirteen per cent of these girls had experienced sexual abuse although as highlighted earlier, sexual abuse is often underreported by children. Cawson (2006) for example found that seventy two per cent of sexually abused children did not tell anyone about the abuse at the time and 31 per cent still had not told anyone about their experience(s) by early adulthood.

The link between children who suffer abuse and neglect and their subsequent involvement in the Youth Justice System has been highlighted in a range of studies (Widom 2000, Jones and Pitts, 2001, Farrington 2007, Hubbard and Pratt 2002), and experience of abuse has been cited in as a significant factor amongst female offenders. Studies of females in custody for example have consistently shown a high prevalence of childhood abuse (Prison Reform Trust 2005, Fawcett Commission 2004, Batchelor 2005, YJB 2006a).

Widom (2000) for example, found that abused and neglected girls are nearly twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes, more likely to use alcohol and drugs and to turn to crime and violence when under stress.
Batchelor (2005), in a Scottish study of 700 girls and young women in custody, found that half of them experienced significant family disruption, three quarters had previous social work involvement and half had been ‘looked after’ by the local authority. Two fifths of the girls and young women had suffered sexual abuse, which was usually perpetrated by a family member. Likewise two fifths of the girls and young women reported a significant amount of ‘serious’ violence in the home mostly between parents, as a result of alcohol abuse.

Jones and Pitts (2001) in a study which looked at the link between early childhood abuse and subsequent involvement in the Youth Justice System, found parental drink and drug abuse (and serious parental mental health problems) to be significant amongst the young people supervised by the YOT.

Yet when young people enter the care system, resources available to help ameliorate these experiences are often lacking and the agency focus particularly where young people are placed in residential children’s homes, is usually on the young people’s challenging behaviour. Jones and Pitts (2001) note the shift in agency focus when children enter the care system, from concern about the abuse and neglect children have suffered at the hands of their families, to the management of the children’s ‘problem’ behaviour (Pitts 2005:244). This challenging behaviour can result in young people being criminalised as staff in children’s homes resort to calling the police to resolve conflict or when children abscond from the care home.

Research suggest that placements in residential children’s homes can impact negatively on young people and increase their likelihood of acquiring a criminal record (Darker et al 2008). This has been attributed to a combination of poorly qualified and inexperienced staff, whilst the young people placed in residential establishments are likely to be the most ‘difficult’, who cannot be placed in foster families. Research also indicates
that prevention strategies and programmes often fail to include children in care (Home Office 2004)

Indeed amongst the girls in the present study who were in care, forty three per cent were placed in residential children’s homes. Many of these (71%) acquired criminal records for offences of assault on care home staff and criminal damage (for example breaking a window, damage to doors or furniture) whilst in the residential establishment.

Mental health needs
The mental health needs of females in the Criminal Justice System have been widely acknowledged. Research has highlighted psychiatric disorders, serious self harm and attempted suicide amongst imprisoned girls (Douglas and Plugge 2006, Prison Reform Trust, 2005, Fawcett Commission 2004, Bateman 2008).

Although mental health problems are also significant amongst boys in the Criminal Justice System, there is a general consensus that mental health problems are more common amongst female than males (Howard - Windell and Clarke 1999, Home Office study 2001) Some studies suggest that girls are three times more likely to deliberately physically harm themselves and contemplate suicide than boys (although males are more likely than females to complete the act of suicide) and twice as likely to suffer from depressive illness.

Girls’ suicide attempts are often seen as a way of communicating their emotional distress (Dennison and Coleman 2000, Belknap and Holsinger 2006). A Home Office study found that females were twice as likely as males to report that they were receiving help for mental health problems 12 months prior to entering custody (Hedderman 2004: 238) However, the higher self reporting of mental health problems amongst women in custody
may also reflect greater willingness of females to report their experiences than males.

It has also been argued that women offenders’ psychiatric needs have been exaggerated and that women in the Criminal Justice System have often been identified as requiring psychiatric treatment in the ‘psychiatrisation’ of female offending thesis (Carlen 1983, 1990).

However the impact of custody on females, the stress of imprisonment and the prison regime itself, the separation from family members and friends and in many cases, children, can serve to exacerbate existing mental ill health amongst women, as well as trigger depression, anxiety and self harm.

Indeed the majority of adult women in custody have dependent children and research suggests that few fathers look after their children when mothers are imprisoned (17% of fathers in a Scottish study compared to 87% of mothers who care for children when their fathers are in prison and in England and Wales, only 5% of children were able to remain at home with their other parent whilst their mother was in custody).

Thus, concerns over the welfare of dependent children can add to emotional distress and anxiety (Loucks 2004:149). Furthermore, the smaller number of female custodial establishments means that girls and women are usually placed long distances from their home towns, which can prevent or reduce the frequency of visits from their friends and families. Indeed the high levels of self harm in female custodial establishments have been widely publicised (Douglas and Plugge 2006, Prison Reform Trust 2005, Fawcett Commission 2004 etc)

Self harm, (usually taking an overdose, resulting in them being admitted to hospital) featured in a third of the cases in the present study and forty four
per cent of the girls had been referred to the YOT health worker for
depression or self harm and suicidal thoughts. Mental health problems
amongst children have been found to correlate closely with social
background and parental mental ill health and with high levels of stress
(Dennison and Coleman 2000) As discussed previously, girls tend to deal
with stressful life events by internalising the ensuing emotional problems,
which can result in depression and anxiety, deliberate self harm and
eating disorders (McIvor 1998, Greene peters & Associates 1998,
Dennison and Coleman 2000), and some research suggests that girls are
more susceptible to post traumatic stress than boys (Hennessey et al
2004).

Girls’ accommodation needs
Almost a third of the girls in the study were homeless and case files
recorded how challenging this area of work is, both in terms of lack of
appropriate housing provision for young people, and the amount of
support young people need in these circumstances.

Many of the girls in the study left home early or had ad hoc living
arrangements with friends or acquaintances, such as living with other
family members or in hostels, making them vulnerable in a range of ways
including being at risk of abuse by older peers, drug abuse, commercial
sexual exploitation, sleeping rough etc. Indeed research suggests that
young people who experience family violence and parental drug and
alcohol abuse are very likely to leave home at an early age (Bancroft et al
2004).

Absconding / going missing
Almost a quarter of girls in the study regularly went missing or stayed
away from home for long periods of time without permission. Bloom et al
(2003) cited running away from home as an escalator into offending as
girls were subject to risky situations, such as involvement in drugs and
sexual exploitation. Girls who absconded usually came from families where there was serious family conflict and abuse and neglect and could be seen as trying to escape from this. One example from the current study is of a sixteen year old girl who had episodes of disappearing from home when she couldn’t cope with her mother who was a heavy alcohol user. She wouldn’t tell the YOT her address, but she was known to stay with older men. The girl was almost breached for not informing the YOT where she was living, which was a requirement of her Court Order and the YOT was also in liaison with social services over the child protection concerns. This example highlights how girls develop survival strategies to help them cope with their adverse circumstances but the strategies they employ can make them vulnerable in other ways.

Some of the girls in the study were known to associate with groups of older men and were considered by workers to be at risk of sexual exploitation and drug abuse, sometimes staying at addresses that were known to the police and other agencies. Only small numbers of girls were identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation in Case Files Study. However, when interviewed, YOT practitioners said that they were often concerned about this issue but were often unable to substantiate their suspicions because the girls were reluctant to disclose this type of information. Formal responses are often less effective in these circumstances and research suggests the need for sensitive handling of such child protection concerns if agencies are to be able to engage with girls who may be at risk of sexual exploitation or commercial sexual exploitation. Less formal, outreach and drop in services and engagement with trusted key workers are cited as approaches that are more likely to prove effective (Pearce et al 2002, Melrose 2004)

**Pregnancy at a young age**

Though only small numbers of the girls in this study became pregnant, sexual health and risk of pregnancy were common themes raised by the
girls when they saw their YOT caseworker. Thus although it was not always relevant to the offence, YOT practitioners found themselves needing to provide information about sexual health and contraception, or help girls seek advice and support in these areas. Practitioners also expressed concern about girls being vulnerable to sexual exploitation, particularly whilst under the influence of alcohol.

2. Understanding girls pathways in and out of offending

The range of needs and complex histories identified amongst the girls in this study mirror the findings of other research on youth offending populations, including girls in custody (Graham and Bowling 1995, Fawcett Society 1997, HMIP Thematic Review 2003, etc). As discussed previously, although causal links have not been established, these risk factors are considered to make young people vulnerable to offending and other types of social exclusion (substance use, sexual exploitation, homelessness, etc.)

Whilst the risk factors identified in the present study are similar to those identified in the wider literature on risk factors (Stephenson et al 2007, Rutter et al 1998, Farrington 1996), it is important to recognise that research into risk factors has largely focused on boys offending, and that these risks are likely to operate and impact differently for boys and girls. Despite the complex backgrounds and life experiences identified in this and other research on girls in the Criminal Justice System, girls offending remains largely an adolescent phenomenon, limited in scope and it most often ceases as they reach adulthood (Graham & Bowling 1995, Smith and McAra 2004).

Factors relating to school exclusion and attendance, severe family conflict and violence, heavy alcohol use, poverty and disadvantage and having delinquent friends were the most influential areas of risk identified amongst
the girls in the current study and these factors were usually combined, thus the majority of the girls experienced multiple risks and needs. Positive family relationships and an absence of abuse and violence in the home were identified as protective factors for the girls.

Poverty and socio-economic status have been identified as important factors in girls offending by Farrington and Painter (2004), whilst poor school and family relationships, and girls’ experience of abuse and victimisation are identified as significant predictors of female offending in a meta-analysis of the predictors of female delinquency by Hubbard and Pratt (2002)

Indeed in common with other research which looks at youth offending, the offending patterns of girls in this study suggest that girls as well as boys engage in adolescent offending (Smith and McAra 2004 for example). The younger girls interviewed referred to their offending as being related to boredom, ‘a bit of fun that got out of hand’ or, ‘mucking around’. A third of the girls’ offending involved only one court appearance. These girls are likely to be those who have been drawn into the Youth Justice System as a result of more formal Police responses as described earlier.

In common with other contemporary research (Graham and Bowling 1995, Home Office 2003 etc), offending amongst the girls in this study commonly began at age 13, and very few were arrested before this age (three of the 54 girls). Graham and Bowling found that the average at which both girls and boys start to offend is 13.5 years (Graham and Bowling 1995).

Many of the girls in the present study were also more persistent offenders, committing multiple offences on a number of occasions, leading to their being accelerated through the Criminal Justice System for relatively minor offences and for non compliance with Court Orders.
The group-related offending amongst the girls in this study, which includes minor assaults and public order offences, supports the evidence from other studies that girls are now socialising more in mixed groups in public spaces (local parks and parades of shops, and shopping centres) than in the past, making them more visible in the public domain and more likely to come to the attention of the police (Pearce 2004, Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006).

The Edinburgh Study (Smith and McAra 2004) found that girls’ delinquency increased most sharply between the ages of 12 and 14 and after this point it declined steadily. Similarly, in the present study violent offences were most often committed by girls between the ages of fourteen and fifteen years. Only three girls committed a first violent offence at 17 years.

The literature on desistance from offending suggests that maturing and reaching independence and adulthood is a key factor in girls desistance (Graham and Bowling 1995, Smith and McAra 2004). All of the 16 and 17 year olds interviewed in the present study were living independently rather than with their families and related their earlier offending to their age and immaturity. They indicated that their offending had now ceased and spoke about having ‘grown up’ or ‘moved on’.

_I had a lot of stuff to deal with at the time, but I’m over that now._

Girls Interview 12 (age 17).

Additionally some research suggests that girls desistance from offending is related to a moral decision to stop offending based on guilt or shame as girls mature, as well as practical considerations such as family responsibilities (Graham and Bowling 1995, Jamieson et al 1999, Bateman 2008:24)
This guilt or shame was a feature amongst the 16 and 17 year old girls in the present study, suggesting that this emerges later in the girls development, perhaps as they mature and become more aware of the stigma of female offending. These girls gave examples of the effects of being known as an offender on their future careers and their family relationships (losing the support of their aunts and grandmothers for example) and particularly the loss of trust from family members and the feeling that they had ‘let them down’.

Whilst girls offending generally diminishes with age, the complex range of needs many of the girls display are likely to persist and the same girls are likely to reappear in other parts of the social, health and welfare systems. Melrose (2004a) for example highlighted a similar range of welfare needs amongst female drug users as those identified amongst girls in the Youth Justice System, likewise sexually exploited girls were found to have similar needs and experiences (Pearce et al 2002, Cusick et al 2003).

3. Girls offending patterns

The nature of girls offending
In common with other recent research (See for example Burman 2004, Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004, Smith and McAra 2004, Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe, 2007) this study found that girls commonly commit minor offences which frequently involve shop theft, more minor assault and public order offences. This was the case for 91% of the girls studied. Amongst girls whose offending was more persistent, their offending rarely escalated in seriousness.

Indeed the nature and context of the offending that girls offending in this study is similar to the ‘broad’ delinquency described by Smith and McAra in the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime which involves
minor delinquent acts such as shoplifting, common assault, theft from home, truancy etc (Smith and McAra 2004:8).

This is not to say that girls never commit serious offences, rather that serious offences constitute a small minority of girls offending, thus in the current study five girls (9%) committed a serious offence.

Nationally, theft and handling stolen goods have consistently accounted for most of girls offending in England and Wales (YJB Annual Workload data 2006) followed by ‘Violence Against the Person’, ‘Public Order’ offences and Breach of a Statutory Order.

Whilst this pattern is similar for boys in the Youth Justice System with the exception of boys’ involvement in motoring offences, gender differences relate to the greater prevalence and seriousness of boys offending within these broad categories. Research evidence consistently reports girls lesser involvement in serious offending than boys at all ages and to girls’ earlier desistance from offending (Graham and Bowling 1995, Smith & McAra 2004, Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe 2007, Bateman 2008)

Mirroring the national picture, theft from a shop was a common offence committed by the girls in the current study; these were most often from high street shops where clothes or make up were stolen or smaller local shops and supermarkets where alcohol, food items or toiletries were stolen, usually involving low monetary value. Other types of theft were from the family home (parents’ credit card or money) or from friends homes (money, mobile phone etc)

29 Offences were classed as serious where they were remitted to Crown Court. The Youth court can impose a custodial sentence of up to two years and cases are remitted to the Crown Court where offences are serious enough to warrant a custodial sentence of more than 2 years.
Understanding girls violent offending

However, eighty three per cent of girls in this study committed a violent offence and a violent offence was also the girls’ first offence in 44% of cases. These offences were largely assaults of a minor nature, and girls were often charged with Common Assault and Actual Bodily Harm (ABH). There were no charges for more serious assaults of Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) but two girls were charged with Robbery. (See Fig 7 Chapter 3 for list of offences committed by girls in the study).

Just over a third of the girls in this study went to court only once and received a Referral Order. By contrast two thirds of the girls appeared in court on a number of occasions and experienced a whole range of Court Orders. This indicates that there is a group of girls in the Youth Justice Systems who are more persistent offenders. Although even amongst this group of girls their offending generally remained of a minor nature and rarely escalated in seriousness as it often does in the case of boys.

As discussed in chapter 3, violent offending amongst girls in this study fell into four categories:-

I. Violence against unknown peers whilst in a mixed peer group (33% of cases).
II. Violence against known peers (32% of cases)
III. Assaults against the police or other authority figures (22% of cases)
IV. Violence against a family member (13% of cases).

Girls’ violence against unknown peers commonly occurred whilst they were in a mixed peer group in public space. Some of the girls were also charged with criminal damage and minor public order offences (threatening words, drunk and disorderly etc) as well as assault. Twenty two per cent of the girls in this study were charged with assaulting a police
officer and most of these assaults occurred when the girls were under the influence of alcohol.

The patterns of violent offending amongst the girls in this study supports research which argues that girls as well as boys are involved in everyday minor violence and disorder on the street, rather than girls' violence being a rarity (See for example Pearce 2004, Phillips 2003). Alcohol related offending and assaults on police relating to resisting arrest are also distinct features of the girls offending in this study. Parallels can be drawn with girls offending patterns highlighted in Australian research. Beikoff (1996) found that 'the assault charge is frequently one of 'assaulting a police officer 'accompanied by a charge of ‘resisting arrest ‘arising out of a public order incident involving drunk and disorderly behaviour’ (Cited in Worrall 2000: 163).Indeed girls alcohol related behaviour in mixed peer groups in public space lends some support to contemporary concerns about girls' alcohol related violence on the streets.

Girls' violence against their peers often involved a common assault against a girl of their own age, often a ‘friend’ or a girl known to them in school or in their neighbourhood, following an argument. Arguments were often triggered by the victim ‘talking about them’ or spreading rumours about them or their family. Zahn et al (2007) exploring trends in girls violence in the United States noted that in a nationally representative sample, violence against their same sex peers is the most common form of violence committed by both girls and boys (approximately 50% of incidents).

In the present study the girls' violence against family members often occurred in the context of serious chronic family conflict and violence, and was most often aimed at their mothers, resulting in charges of assault and criminal damage in the home. Zahn et al (2007) identified family assaults as the second most common type of violence committed by girls (after
violence against their peers) and indicated that mothers were most often the target (Zahn et al 2007:11). The family context of girls violence is also noted by Chesney-Lind (2001) who found that most girls charged with assault were involved in “non serious, mutual combat with parents” (Chesney-Lind 2001 cited in Alder and Worrall 2004: 9). They argue that family based violence was previously less likely to be reported to Police and suggest that changed responses to domestic violence could also have contributed to increasing girls’ arrests for violence (ibid).

4. Youth Justice System responses to girls

More formal responses to girls offending

As we saw in Chapter 1, the Youth Justice landscape has changed greatly in the last decade. The legislative changes brought about by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and the performance management culture of targets, timescales, and performance indicators, has led to more formal, prescriptive, Youth Justice responses which, it has been argued, have drawn more girls and younger children to police attention and, consequently, before the courts (Nacro 2008a, Burman 2004, Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2007, Chesney –Lind and Pasko 2004).

Commentators have argued persuasively against formal responses in the Youth Justice System wherever possible, pointing to the cumulative and often stigmatising effects of formal system contact on young people (Becker 1963, Lemert 1970, McAra and McVie 2007. Pitts 2003). It is argued that the use of diversion, rather than formal responses is more likely to promote desistance from offending (McAra and McVie 2007:17)

Lemert (1970) made the case for ‘informalism’, and ‘diversion’ of children and young people from the criminal justice process, and the ‘normalisation’ of responses to them. Thus he argues that young people who break the
law should be dealt with in non-stigmatising mainstream agencies along with access to any necessary specialist provision (cited in Pitts 2003:11).

The literature also points to the damage that repeated and more intensive system contact can have on young people in the long term, even where interventions are welfare based (See Goldson and Peters 2000 for example). This is summed up by Sampson and Laub (1997):

Offending followed by official legal sanction significantly decreases the availability of positive life chances. A snowball effect occurs in which adolescent delinquency increasingly mortgages their future and especially their later life chances in terms of education and employment which in turn have serious deleterious effects upon their own children.

(Sampson and Laub cited in Pitts 2003:11)

However non statutory provision for young people in the last decade has taken the form of more formal structured provision such as Youth Connexions and prevention initiatives aimed at younger children (YISP, PAYP etc) with less emphasis on informal responses such as local youth clubs, detached and outreach youth work. This coupled with the rapid expansion of the commercial leisure industry (leisure complexes which house sports centres, cinema, bowling etc) (Measham 2004) which often prohibits young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds due to the cost of provision, has led to more of these young people ‘socialising’ on the streets.

Recent legislation (Children Act 2004) and the ‘Every Child Matters’ and ‘Youth Matters’ agendas (DES 2005) has led to a range of initiatives and strategies which have refocused attention on young people’s participation in positive and constructive leisure activities, and the contribution these can make in helping young people to develop the social and emotional
skills which are critical to their making a successful transition to adulthood (DES Youth matters next Steps 2006, DCSF 2008).

The latest government ten year Youth Strategy (DCSF 2008 ) places a greater emphasis on prevention and on supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities (progressive universalism ) (ibid:7). It outlines the responsibilities of local authorities to improve outcomes for young people, and their duty to secure young people’s access to positive activities. Further, the role of Youth Offending Teams in intervening early to prevent young people getting involved in crime and anti-social behaviour, including the provision of structured positive activities is also highlighted (DCSF 2008:1.5).

Police responses to girls offending
The more formal system of Police Reprimands and Final warnings brought about by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for dealing with young people’s offending at the earliest stage of the Youth Justice System, the formal recording of all incidents reported to Police to meet sanction detection targets, combined with the high profile policing in relation to anti social behaviour which has greatly focused on young people in public space, have all served to draw more girls into the Youth Justice System (Nacro 2008b, Burman 2004, Zahn et al 2008 etc).

These formal Police responses are evident in this study wherein a third of arrests were related to girls coming to the attention of the police whilst they were in a mixed peer group in public space for minor violence and public order. Similarly girls coming to the attention of Police for family related criminal damage and assaults, falling out with friends both in and out of school resulting in assaults, and incidents of violence or criminal damage amongst girls in children homes which also feature amongst girls in the present study, further indicate these more formal Police responses.
The complex needs of many of the girls in this study suggests that whereas girls at risk of family breakdown or with substance misuse or mental health needs etc who would previously have come to the attention of Health and Social Services, are now more likely to be picked up in the Youth Justice System.

Almost half of the girls in the present study were given a Police Reprimand or Final Warning, and just under a quarter of girls had had both. These pre-court measures are now highly regulated and can only be given by Police for a first and subsequent offence where it is not defined as serious (within a range of specified offences) and where the young person admits guilt (Home Office 2002).

Factors such as previous convictions, multiple offences, and insufficient admissions of guilt can all be taken into account by Police in determining whether to give a Reprimand or Final Warning, or whether the young person should be charged to court. Thus the girls in this study were not always considered eligible for a Police Reprimand or Final Warning.

Assaults on Police officers are also likely to be considered too serious an offence to warrant a Reprimand or Final Warning (Home office 2006 circular 14/06). This was a common offence amongst the girls in this study. These assaults on Police Officers were often a result of them resisting arrest, and in some cases, were girls’ responses to being ‘manhandled’ by Police officers.

Similar patterns of girls being charged with resisting arrest and assaulting police arising from alcohol related public order offences has been noted in the wider literature and highlight girls responses to physical responses from Police and other authority figures, particularly those who have experienced violence and abuse (Worrall 2000, Alder and Baines 1996, Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2004).
As highlighted earlier girls gave accounts of being grabbed with excessive force or of their clothing being pulled revealing their bodies or underwear. The escalation of conflict as a result of such circumstances poignantly illustrates the gendered nature of girls’ experiences which require different approaches and responses to boys.

**Girls and the court process**

Within the court process, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced a range of new 1st tier disposals (These are listed in Appendix G) in the Youth Court. These included an emphasis on making young people responsible for their actions, underpinned by them being required to make amends to the victim or to their community.

The greater intensity and more intrusiveness of interventions at all stages of the Youth Justice System following these changes have been highlighted by some commentators.

Smith (2007) for example refers to:-

> The implementation of demanding Referral Order Contracts and the rigorous breach procedures

(Smith 2007: 156).

Indeed a step by step look at the requirements of a Referral Order (See Fig 14), the most common type of court disposal to which young people are subject illustrates this point:
Fig 14: The requirements of a Referral Order - A step by step account

- A Referral Order is made in court following a report being submitted by the YOT. For the young person and family this necessitates a meeting with the YOT to provide the information for the report to be written and a court appearance.

- When a Referral Order is made at court, the YOT has to convene Referral Order Panel meeting to be held within 10 working days. This Panel is led by community volunteers (recruited and trained by the YOT). The young person and parent(s) are required to attend and contribute to the Panel meeting.

- The Panel draws up a ‘contract’ which the young person has to sign up to which must include some type of restorative justice between the young person and victim or, where this is not possible or appropriate, ‘reparation’ or community payback for a specified number of hours to make amends for the offence.

- Following the Panel meeting, the young person has to meet a YOT worker as frequently as required to meet YJB National Standards (which vary depending on the length of their Order).

- The young person must undertake the ‘reparation’ or ‘community payback’ for the number of hours specified in the Panel meeting.

- The young person must keep any appointments arranged with ‘specialist’ YOT workers (such as a YOT substance misuse worker, Connexions worker etc) if a specific need is identified.

- The young person and their parent (s)/carer must attend a Panel review meeting.


The ‘restorative’ justice element of the Referral Order has largely translated into young people undertaking ‘reparation’, which as highlighted previously, is based largely on the adult community service model and which is traditionally very male-oriented, having been developed for male offenders (McIvor 1998).

The range of reparation projects available for young people to take part in and the relevance of the projects to the offence committed by the young person, vary significantly between YOTS. Examples of reparation activities...
include: - cleaning off graffiti, decorating and gardening projects in local community venues and schools, growing vegetables on an allotment, activities in day centres for older people. Reparation can also be individually tailored to the young person, whereupon they make amends directly to the victim (fix a broken window etc).

Amongst the girls in this study reparation was a key area where girls failed to comply. Some of the girls received formal warnings or were taken back to court for failing to comply with the reparation element of their Order. Reparation was unpopular with the girls because the type of reparation projects available were not seen as interesting or relevant to the offence they had committed. Some of the older girls had done their reparation on their own rather than in a group and they said that they preferred this.

A further complication noted was amongst girls returning to court for a further offence, or where they had breached their Referral Order, was of girls being given a Reparation Order or an Attendance Centre Order for the new offence as an alternative 1st tier court disposal. However similar to Reparation, Attendance Centres are male oriented disposals which were originally set up for boys (there were few female attendance centres). Although recently mixed sex Attendance Centres have been developed (HMIP 2007) provision still varies across YOT areas and even where there is mixed provision, it remains geared to, and dominated by boys.

Thus whilst the new range of Court Orders brought about by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 could be considered gender neutral (i.e. suitable for both males and females), their implementation and delivery in practice can have unintended outcomes which can place girls at a disadvantage, and make the risk of them breaching their Order more likely. Indeed insufficient options available to the court can also ultimately result in girls being sent to custody for minor offending or for breach of a Court Order. Amongst the girls in the present study who were sent to custody, most of
them were given a short Detention and Training Order (DTO) of between three and six months, indicating that custody was not imposed due to the seriousness of the offences or to the risk to the public.

The new Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) due to be implemented in 2009 (Appendix H) looks to be equally lacking in gender sensitive options and will similarly have the capacity to build up a range of restrictive elements from a ‘menu’ of possible options which will potentially be equally demanding and have the same cumulative effects, which can prove challenging for some young people to meet.

*Highly prescribed and regulated YOT responses*

Further, YOT responses in the last decade have been governed by national structures and processes (targets, national standards, data returns, monitoring systems etc) which determine the frequency and type of contact with young people in the Youth Justice System, based on the type of Youth Court Order the young person is subject to and their perceived level of risk.

Despite girls consistently making up a sizeable minority (20%-26%) of the youth offending population in the last 16 years, the invisibility of girls in the system still remains. Girls in the Youth Justice System have attracted neither policy guidance nor targets, despite the plethora of targets required of the Youth Offending Teams since their inception. The needs of girls in the Youth Justice System continue to be overlooked, and practice understanding about what constitutes effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System is still patchy and limited. Official statistics are still not fully disaggregated by age gender and ethnicity combined, leaving the picture in relation to BME girls’ offending incomplete (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006).
Assessing girls needs or risk

The Asset assessment tool used by the YOT to assess every young person appearing before the court (YJB 2006) is designed to predict further offending, but as discussed earlier, the relevance of an assessment tool which is based on predictions derived from aggregated data about offending amongst adult males to assess female offenders, has been questioned (Carlen 1989, Hedderman 2004). Certainly Asset fails to take account of girls offending patterns and risk factors identified are scored based on risk of re-offending and risk to the public, both areas where girls will generally score low despite scoring high on levels of need in many of the categories (education, family, lifestyle etc).

Many of the girls in the present study demonstrated high levels of need with almost all of them having at least four risk factors and some having as many as ten risk factors present in their lives. However there was no simple correlation between levels of need or risk and the frequency or seriousness of the girls offending, rather it seems that multiple problems and needs make girls vulnerable to involvement in offending and other types of risk taking behaviours and social exclusion.

Within the YOT the tendency amongst practitioners to score girls on the basis of their needs rather than their risk of re-offending serves to inflate their ‘risk’ scores and, thereby, the seriousness and intrusiveness of YOT interventions (Baker et al 2005). This highlights the tension for YOT practitioners in using an assessment tool based on predictions of male offending patterns rather than a child-centred and holistic assessment, which research indicates is likely to be more effective with girls in trouble (Bateman 2008).

Once they enter the Youth Justice System and are subject to the demands of a Youth Court Order, girls’ experiences and needs come to the fore and can influence their compliance with a demanding Court Order (having to...
remember appointments with YOT staff, needing bus fare, needing to be home to look after siblings/parent etc), when they may already be struggling to cope with normal everyday life.

One of the girls interviewed in the present study for example, did not attend her YOT appointments and gave no explanation to her YOT worker at the time:

*I didn’t want to come out of the house with my bruised face so I didn’t go to my meetings*

Girls Interview 10

Indeed whilst YOTS as multi disciplinary teams are well equipped to deal with the often complex range of needs that girls present, its highly regulated and target driven processes can be a source of conflict. These formal System requirements were apparent in the Case Files Study undertaken in the present research. Thus letters outlining Referral Order panel meetings within required timescales, arrangements about the reparation programme and risk assessments for this, home visits to draw up contracts which set out standards of behaviour and explanations of the breach procedures, all reinforced the formal requirements and processes governing the YOT. These formal processes, particularly at the start of an Order, can undermine the establishment of trusting and effective relationships with young people and their families and jeopardise the opportunity to intervene effectively with young people.

Gray et al (2002) in a study of young people supervised by YOTS argue that:

*YOT practitioners take on the roles of prosecutor, enforcer, monitor and correctional mentor, often to the exclusion of adviser, mediator, advocate and counsellor*

(Cited in Pitts 2003::8)
The highly regulated breach process implemented as part of the CDA1998 is undoubtedly the biggest threat to worker-young person relationships which is acknowledged as of significant importance in effective practice with girls (Worrall 2001, Patton and Morgan 2002). Increases in the numbers of girls breaching their statutory Court Order demonstrate how the system is failing girls. Figures since 2002 show a consistent rise in the number of girls being convicted of breaching their Court Order, and in 2007 Breach of Statutory Order was the fifth most common offence committed by girls. Whilst breach rates were also high for boys, the proportional increase was higher for girls than it was for boys (YJB Annual Workload Data 2006/7:15).

The breach process is generated by the YOT electronic case management system after two recorded ‘unacceptable failures’ although discretion about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable reasons for non compliance can vary according to the YOT area.

Given the demands with which young people must comply as part of their Court Orders, the opportunities to fail are striking and it is unsurprising that girls who breach their Order, are most often those with the most complex needs.

In the current study breach was sometimes used as a last resort by YOT practitioners to try to get girls to comply. The reasons for girls’ non compliance are varied but are likely to include the suitability and relevance of disposals, programmes and interventions, the highly prescribed and often inflexible YOT responses to the management and delivery of Youth Court Orders, as well as girls with troubled histories and complex needs feeling they have nothing to lose if they have to go back to court.

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30 Where the young person fails to attend an arranged appointment without an ‘acceptable’ reason this is recorded as an ‘unacceptable failure’ on the YOT electronic case management system (YOIS).
Some commentators have argued that failure should be ‘designed out’ in effective work with young people. Thus Pitts (2003) reviewing responses to young people in the ‘new’ (post 1998) Youth Justice System persuasively argues:

…for our most vulnerable and volatile young people we have to set up situations where, in as much as it is possible, such failure is designed out. This means that negotiation, elastic time frames, a willingness to deal with conflict, and violence too if necessary, and a commitment to stick with it for as long as it takes, are built in.

Pitts 2003:7)

**Girls harder to work with than boys?**

Some YOT practitioners interviewed felt that girls in the Youth Justice System were challenging and demanding to work with, often requiring them to spend longer with girls in their regular supervision meetings and having to adjust what they had planned to do in these meetings because of a new problem or crisis. Some suggested that girls were often more suspicious and challenging about the activities being offered to them by the YOT than the boys they worked with. They found that the girls often questioned them as workers, whereas boys just accepted what they were told. Some practitioners talked about girls being moody, emotional, up and down, and going from one crisis to another.

Research also points to girls being seen as ‘harder to work with’ than boys and that girls are challenging and questioning, and emotionally demanding (Chesney- Lind and Pasko 2004, Batchelor and Burman 2004, Alder and Baines 1996). This may be a reflection of the smaller numbers of girls compared to boys which means that practitioners may have less experience of working with girls. Alder and Baines (1996) note that
services are mostly constructed around the needs of males, and workers often have minimal contact with girls, which together with the lack of any specific focus on girls’ needs and adolescent development in Youth Justice training or policy, can contribute to workers feeling less confident in working with them. Further they suggest that workers conceptualise girls and boys behaviours differently, thus girls are negatively labelled emotional, dramatic and manipulative whilst boys are described as ‘honest’, ‘open’ and ‘less complex’ (Alder and Baines 1996:28) Indeed workers often feel inadequate to deal with emotional issues that girls bring, and verbal abuse towards workers which often has personal overtones is also a factor in workers finding girls ‘complex and draining’ (ibid: 30).

Double standards of acceptable behaviour for girls and boys may also operate which influence professional responses to girls in trouble - thus Worrall (2004) highlighted the alternative discourse emerging in dealing with ‘bad girls’: - the move away from welfare responses to straightforward criminalisation and ‘just deserts’ for girls who offend; or alternatively, the portrayal of girls as victims in the appeal for the ‘lost’ innocence of childhood, for example in defining girls sexual exploitation as child abuse (Worrall 2004:44). Such debates are largely absent from Youth Justice practice although these types of discourse operate subtly both within and without the Youth Justice System in relation to girls behaviours and experiences.

5. Developing effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System

As highlighted in the earlier literature review, some key principles for effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System have been identified which can form the basis for effective approaches and interventions with girls. These include:-
- The provision of gender specific programmes
- Interventions which are relevant to girls lives
- Holistic approaches that address girls multiple needs
- Interventions which recognise the importance of relationships
- Understanding and recognition of girls’ experiences of victimisation and violence
- The use of strengths based approaches

(Bateman 2008: 47, Patton and Morgan 2002, Batchelor and Burman 2004). These principles are explored below incorporating findings from the present study and from the wider literature review.

**The provision of gender specific programmes**

Gender specific programmes in a Youth Justice context remain limited in the UK and as highlighted previously, evidence of effectiveness of programmes aimed at girls and young women in the Youth Justice System is even more limited. Whilst provision in America is more commonplace, evaluations that demonstrate effectiveness still remain limited. An American review by the Girls study Group (Zahn 2008) for example identified 68 programmes for girls who offend, although only 18 of these had been independently evaluated (Bateman 2008). Most YOTS still adapt programmes that were designed with boys offending in mind or adult programmes for use with girls who offended (Owers 2004, Bateman 2008). Further in the absence of any national policy guidance or emphasis within the Youth Justice System in relation to working effectively with girls who have offended, gender specific programmes can develop on an ad hoc basis, and can be dependent on individual workers interest and enthusiasm, rather than based on evidence of effective practice.
Group programmes

Gender specific group programmes can provide girls with opportunities to develop interpersonal skills, to build positive relationships: be able to deal with conflict more effectively, to listen to others, negotiation and decision making skills, develop greater self awareness of how they feel and behave and consider how their behaviour affects others.

Increasingly arts based projects (dance, drama etc) are also being used by YOTS as a medium to engage with young people. Some of these programmes have been evaluated and/or accredited and have been shown promising outcomes including improved confidence, self awareness and self control, enhanced coping skills and re engagement with education (Bateman 2008).

The YOT Girls Group Programme (Appendix A) developed in the YOT area in which this study took place is based on many of the principles recognised in the contemporary literature as being likely to be effective with girls in the Youth Justice System.

The programme draws on the Oregon principles (Patton and Morgan 2002) and includes themes identified by practitioners based on their experience of working with girls. It focuses on: - relationships (friendships/family), sexual health, emotional health and wellbeing; positive self image; and alcohol and drugs awareness.

Group work techniques (a group contract, warm up games, ending games etc) (Button 1981), drama techniques/role play, and arts and media are utilised by practitioners facilitating group programmes to encourage active participation and to help girls develop interpersonal skills (Bond 1981). An evaluation exercise at the end of the group enables the girls share their views.
Any initial nervousness of mixing with other girls, and apprehension about what to expect in the group programme is quickly replaced by enthusiasm and good attendance. Indeed practitioners commented on the almost 100% attendance of girls participating in the girls group, even amongst girls who were prone to missing appointments with their case workers or reparation sessions. Practitioners cited examples of girls arriving early from college to wait for the group to start, and of girls phoning the YOT worker if the taxi was late collecting them for the group.

*Individual support and advocacy*

Despite the male oriented and rigid systems in which the Youth Offending teams operate, the multi agency YOT structures also mean that girls can benefit from the expertise and knowledge of a range of practitioners, and have access to specialist services (mental health, education, Connexions, drug and alcohol services etc) where these are needed. The complex and multiple needs of many of the girls in the Youth Justice System demonstrate the importance of this range of provision and support being available to them in the YOT.

YOT practitioners interviewed often took on an advocacy role for the girls, for example in meetings with social workers where they were ‘looked after’ children, with schools where girls were at risk of exclusion, and with housing departments where the girls’ families were being evicted or where the girls themselves were homeless.

Girls interviewed spoke about receiving support and help with family problems, sorting out their education and help with accommodation when they were homeless. Some of them talked about intensive regular support they received, family work and their workers accessing specialist counselling for them:
Case files chronicled high levels of regular, and often intensive support as YOT practitioners responded to ‘crisis’ situations experienced by the girls; mediating when family rows erupted, liaising with relevant agencies over safeguarding issues such as relationship violence, abuse, homelessness etc, as well as using problem solving approaches and offering practical support such as helping girls to access welfare benefits or accompanying them to medical appointments.

**Interventions which are relevant and holistic**

Interventions with girls that are gender, age, and culturally specific and that are based on girls’ everyday experiences and that are relevant to them, are widely acknowledged in research as being important for girls in the Youth Justice System (Patton and Morgan 2002, Bateman 2008, Worrall 2001, Batchelor and Burman 2004, Bloom et al 2005).

Thus interventions should also be holistic and seek to address the multiple factors that contribute to girls’ delinquency: including physical, sexual, and emotional health and wellbeing, drug and alcohol awareness, education achievement and employment opportunities, self image and esteem and take account of culture and identity and the impact of wider societal structures including the media and sexual stereotyping (Bateman 2008).

Common themes that emerged in the current study as being important both to girls themselves and from a practice perspective and which largely form the basis of individual and group programmes are:
- Relationships (family, friends, personal relationships)
- Family conflict
- Alcohol
- School problems (not attending, excluded, attending part time education programmes)
- Boredom and lack of money
- Self image and pressure to look good and be popular
- Sexual health
- Depression and self harm

The Oregon guidelines on the implementation of effective gender responsive programming (Patton & Morgan 2002) argue that programmes for girls need to reflect the significance of health related matters to girls growing up that are related to their sexuality and socialisation (physical, sexual, emotional and mental health).

Likewise the guidelines (ibid) identifies the need for programmes to be age appropriate, therefore adult based programmes are not considered suitable for use with children and young people. Equally even within the YOT age range (10-17) different approaches and responses may be needed. The current study found that girls in the younger age range (14 and 15 years olds) preferred activity based interventions rather than one to one meetings talking with a worker, and some felt it that it was important to learn something. By contrast girls in the older age range (16 and 17 year olds) recognised and valued the importance of emotional support and the one to one relationship with their YOT worker:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nice to talk to someone who understands, who listens</th>
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<td>Girls Interview 13</td>
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Girls in the older age range also made use of practical support from the YOT both from their worker and from specialist workers in the YOT, when
they were homeless, support in meetings with the housing department for example, or the YOT helping them to access specialist counselling or advising about college courses.

**The importance of relationships**

The importance of relationships in working with girls has been highlighted in a range of literature (Batchelor and Burman 2004, Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2006, Chesney – Lind and Pasko 2004). This includes both the worker young person relationship and more widely the importance of relationships in girls’ lives.

**The worker – young person relationship**

This study also found that girls placed great emphasis on the relationship with the worker. The girls valued being listened to, non judgemental staff, being able to trust the worker, and the worker being ‘understanding’.

Indeed the girls identified these attributes over and above concern about the content of programmes offered by the YOT.

| **Good to have workers that don’t judge you or talk down to you** | Girls Interview 4 |
| **Trust is important; they really helped me [the YOT workers]** | Girls Interview 8 |

These attributes have been identified as important in effective work with young people more generally.
Thus Batchelor and McNeill (2007) note:

Young people respect workers who show real interest in them, listen to what they have to say demonstrate a genuine willingness to understand their point of view and who are non judgemental (Batchelor and McNeill 2007:169)

Further, relationships were still seen by the girls in the present study as positive even where the worker challenged them about their behaviour, as long as a mutually respectful relationship existed. Indeed YOT interventions with girls can also provide an opportunity for them to participate in a positive relationship with an adult based on respect in a supportive and positive environment.

<table>
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<th>[YOT worker] tells me when I am out of order</th>
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<td>Girls Interview 10</td>
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These perspectives indicate the qualities and professional values needed by practitioners who work with young people if they are to be effective which includes showing respect, empathy, listening to young people and being non judgemental, all of which are identified in Social Work and Youth Work values and principles (British Association of Social Work 2002, National Youth Agency 2004)

Relationships with family/ friends/ intimate relationships

However the theme of ‘relationships’ extends further than the worker - young person relationship. Girls’ offending, as shown earlier can be related to relationship breakdown and conflict with friends and family. Practitioners interviewed in the present study for example highlighted girls being severely distressed when they fallen out with a best friend, or split up with a boyfriend. The potential impact on girls when conflicts arise in
their relationships is important for practitioners to understand and take account of in interventions with girls.

**Girls’ experiences of violence and abuse**

An understanding and recognition of girls’ experiences of victimisation and violence has been cited as important for those working with girls in the Youth Justice System. Thus practitioners need to have an awareness of girls’ experiences of abuse and violence, and need to ensure a safe (physically and emotionally) and welcoming environment is provided, as well as be able to establish trust and emotional safety in interventions offered. This is important in both group and individual interventions with girls.

In group programmes facilitators need to be proactive in setting the boundaries, providing a structured programme and dealing with any aggressive behaviour from the girls towards each other, particularly in the early stages of the group. Using group work skills such as agreeing a ‘contract’ setting out the ‘ground rules’ (confidentiality, being late, listen to each other, ‘etc) and by techniques such as warm up games to help the girls get to know each other will also be important(Button 1981, Bond 1981) as noted by one of the girls interviewed:

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Workers made it safe – we knew where we stood and what we were meant to do. They helped us to talk and know how to act- how to treat each other
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Girls Interview 1
Practitioner understanding of girls’ adolescent development

Equally, effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System relies on practitioners having an awareness and understanding of girls’ distinct needs as females growing up in society. Girls’ adolescent development (emotional, physical, sexual and cultural) is crucially influenced by poverty, negative experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation, family dysfunction and discrimination, whilst the mixed messages girls receive about the role of women in society and the value society places on girls and women can lead to low self esteem and lack of self confidence in the adolescent years (Greene et al 1998). Thus practitioners need to understand these aspects of female development and ensure that they are reflected in interventions with girls.

The use of strengths based approaches

Interventions that value female achievement and which build on girls’ strengths and resourcefulness are highlighted as important in working effectively with girls, rather than interventions which emphasise their deficits and what is wrong with them, to change their behaviours (Bateman 2008).

Indeed research highlights that young people coping with adversity often have significant strengths and develop coping strategies to help them deal with adverse experiences and circumstances (Bancroft et al 2004).

Girls in the current study were able to reflect on their own circumstances and empathise with others. Girls whose parents were alcohol or drug users for example acknowledged that they had tried not to get use alcohol themselves as they knew the consequences; others were able to reflect that the combination of circumstances at the time had led to their offending, and that they had to ‘grow out of it’ or ‘go through it.’
The girls often had strong opinions and enjoyed sharing these; they valued being listened to and were keen for programmes to be educational and offer learning opportunities.

Interventions therefore should build on these strengths and offer opportunities for personal development, and provide positive activities for girls that help them learn new skills. Methods should be utilised which involve girls in decision making and which take account of their views, thereby helping to increase their self esteem and self awareness. These approaches can also help contribute to girls’ resilience beyond their involvement with the YOT.
CHAPTER 5: KEY FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH JUSTICE AND RELATED PRACTICE

Incorporating the findings from the Case Files Study and interviews with girls and YOT practitioners, this chapter makes links to emerging themes from the literature review and highlights the implications of this research for professionals working in Youth Justice and related fields.

1. Risk and need amongst girls in the Youth Justice System

This study confirms the key areas of need and risk amongst girls in the Youth Justice System which should be reflected in Youth Justice responses and interventions with girls as:

- Disengagement from education either through non attendance or exclusion from school
- Family conflict and violence
- Heavy alcohol and drug use
- Mixing with delinquent /older peers
- Absconding /staying away from home
- Experience of poverty and disadvantage
- Experience of abuse and care histories
- Emotional ill health and self harm.

Supporting girls in school

Whilst low levels of literacy and educational attainment have been identified as a risk factor for offending (Graham and Bowling 1995, 31

See Fig 6 Chapter 3 for the ranked list of characteristics of girls in the study
Farrington 2000, Stephenson et al 2007) findings from this research study suggests that it is girls’ exclusion and non attendance that places them most at risk of offending, rather than low intelligence or lack of academic ability (although non attendance at school either through girls opting out themselves, or through their exclusion will of course contribute to low educational attainment ). Girls are therefore not realising their potential in terms of academic achievement and subsequent future life chances.

The problems relating to school exclusion and non attendance which characterised the lives of the vast majority of the girls in this study highlights the importance of early identification and monitoring of girls experiencing problems, and the adoption of strategies which take account of girls strengths as well as their needs with the aim of improving their engagement in education.

Equally it is important that girls’ educational needs are not overlooked in schools and that their non attendance and/ or challenging behaviour is identified and monitored by education welfare and school pastoral support systems at an early stage, and a range of support made available, to help address the difficulties and concerns.

A further consideration which has been highlighted in wider research is that girls’ emotional and behavioural needs may be marginalised within the education system, which is more geared to identifying and dealing with boys’ emotional and behavioural needs.

Where girls are involved with the YOT, caseworkers can play an important role in supporting girls who are experiencing difficulties in school. They can liaise with school staff to ensure they have an understanding of the circumstances which may affect the girls’ attendance or behaviour in school.
YOT practitioners can also take on an advocacy role in school with parents or on their behalf, to help girls to voice their concerns and difficulties, as well as working with schools and the girls themselves, to address the reasons for attendance problems, or behaviours likely to lead to exclusion.

Equally YOT staff can contribute to reintegration programmes by offering additional interventions, enhanced YOT programmes and activities to girls who are excluded/ at risk of exclusion or not attending school, to prevent their disengagement with education.

**Targeting family conflict and violence**

The family related factors amongst the girls in this study were associated with violence in the home, poor step parent relationships, as well as all forms of abuse, and parents’ drug/alcohol abuse or mental ill health. These factors also contributed to girls being taken into local authority care. YOT interventions need to acknowledge these issues in girls’ lives and contribute to multi agency responses on individual cases. More widely YOTS should also contribute to strategies aimed at improving outcomes for girls.

Amongst the girls in the current study who had no experience of serious family conflict, violence or abuse, most had short offending careers, suggesting that an absence of family violence and abuse can be a protective factor for girls in relation to offending.

Indeed protective factors are widely under acknowledged in Youth Justice practice and greater emphasis needs to be placed on identifying these within the assessment process and to ensuring that they are promoted in intervention plans with girls.
Support to parents

Interventions aimed at preventing and resolving parental conflict are also important in preventing girls’ involvement in offending and other risk-taking behaviours. Thus programmes and interventions for parents of adolescents which help them to set realistic boundaries and supervision of their children; promote positive parent-child relationships; address issues relating to step-parenting and newly formed families; increase their understanding of adolescence; and which offer intensive support to families under pressure (financial, alcohol, drugs, health, accommodation needs, family violence etc), are all likely to have a positive impact and has been recognised in contemporary research and recent national family strategies (DCSF 2007, 2008).

Supporting girls whose parents are involved in drug or alcohol abuse

Many of the girls in the present study whose parents were identified as having heavy or serious alcohol/drug use were also serious alcohol/drug users themselves. Whilst research does not directly link parental substance abuse with their children’s’ subsequent alcohol or drug problems, it does indicate that exposure to drugs and alcohol abuse within their family, may make children vulnerable. Therefore the identification of children experiencing alcohol and drug abuse at home and ensuring their needs are met is important (Bancroft et al 2004, Turning Point 2006, Dept for Education and Science 2005, Substance 2007).

Youth Offending Teams needs to engage with, and contribute to drug and alcohol strategies at both strategic and practice levels. YOT substance misuse workers can provide interventions to girls affected by parental substance misuse and to those with their own alcohol or drug problems, as well raising YOT practitioners’ awareness of substance misuse issues and helping to ensure these are fully incorporated into assessments.
Improving responses to girls in care

Where girls are in the care system, strategies and approaches need to be put in place to prevent any unnecessary criminalisation. Not least by ensuring staff in residential care homes have an understanding of the needs of adolescent girls and are trained to deal with girls challenging behaviour, rather than having to resort to calling the police. Equally, amending health and safety policies to enable acceptable alternatives to notification of the Police when girls go missing will also be important. Foster placements and supported lodgings could be made more widely available as alternatives to residential care homes. Further, prevention strategies need to be more inclusive of the needs of children who are placed in residential and foster care. YOT prevention strategies need to link more closely with residential establishments and foster carers to ensure girls in care are able to participate in prevention programmes and opportunities.

Supporting girls who have been abused

Girls who have experienced abuse and other types of adversity need to be able to access support including counselling, advice, and information to help them deal with this, as well as being offered opportunities which can help build their resilience and promote their self esteem. Research suggests that children are often reluctant to confide in teachers at school about their family circumstances and don’t want to be seen as different or singled out in school, but that they appreciate indirect forms of support.

The importance of informal support such as ‘drop in’ facilities, school based activities and other forms of youth provision, where there is no pressure to talk about home if children don’t want to, but where there are interested and supportive adults, and where information and advice is available to them (Bancroft et al 2004:.23) have all been cited as important to children experiencing adversity.
Likewise where children are living with parental alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence, informal support arrangements with other family members and friends’ families (where children stay overnight/ have meals etc) as well as formal respite care, are all recognised as helping children cope and build their resilience. These needs and support networks must be acknowledged within the YOT assessment process and taken into account in YOT supervision arrangements.

More widely a greater range of interventions need to be available to girls who have experienced different types of abuse (specialist counselling and therapies etc) which are child and young person centred and easily accessible to girls. YOTS need to ensure counselling provision is available and receive training to recognise and understand girls’ experiences of abuse, including the complex nature of the disclosure of sexual abuse (not wanting to break up the family, not being believed etc) and its implications.

*Recognising girls’ accommodation needs*

Research also indicates that children whose parents are involved in alcohol and substance misuse are likely to leave home at an early age (Bancroft et al 2004). This was the case amongst girls in the present study, whereby all of the sixteen and seventeen year olds interviewed lived independently of their parents. Children who live independently at this early age are likely to need support with developing independence skills such as budgeting, healthy eating, cooking and other practical skills as well as needing emotional support.

Thus YOT interventions which help equip these young people with the skills needed for them to live independently, and which offer the necessary emotional support that goes with this, need to be available. Additionally, there is a need for children who are likely to have accommodation needs at an early age due to the reasons highlighted (family alcohol / substance
misuse etc) to be identified and taken account of in care plans and included in accommodation strategies for young people.

Similarly, accommodation and resettlement needs will also be important in respect of girls coming out of custody. Girls are likely to face stigma from family, friends and their community, as well as employers as a result of going to custody and may experience feelings of isolation and a loss of confidence which can add to any existing problems. YOT resettlement strategies should include provision of emotional support to young people by offering additional/ longer term interventions. For example mentors who can help girls develop independence skills if they are living independently from their families, and activities such as helping them to access education and leisure facilities, to promote community reintegration and to reduce isolation.

Responding to girls’ experiences of poverty and disadvantage
Disadvantaged neighbourhoods, inadequate housing and accommodation issues, as well as their families experiencing financial hardship were a feature in many of the girls’ lives. Socio – economic factors have been identified in other research as important risk factors in girls offending (Graham and Bowling 1995, Farrington and Painter 2004). These factors are part of wider social policy and require long term regeneration, anti poverty, youth and family strategies. These strategies are now emerging as a result of the ‘Every Child Matters’ (ECM) agenda and the role of the YOT is highlighted in these agendas (Dept for Education and Science 2004, DCSF 2008).

Research indicates that individual risk factors have less effect in more affluent neighbourhoods, thus improving housing and community provision, facilities and opportunities are likely to enhance children’s life chances and positive outcomes. The role of positive activities and opportunities and ‘compensatory experiences’ (Pitts 2003:7) for girls who
experience poverty and disadvantage and violence and abuse, is an important element and should underpin both prevention, youth services and diversion activity, in order to build on girls strengths and resilience. Within the YOT itself, poverty and disadvantage and its effects on children and young people’s lives need wider recognition. The YOT can influence the wider community agenda through its involvement in local Crime and Disorder forums. Indeed it is important that girls’ needs are identified and targeted within the emerging strategies and initiatives aimed at young people and families, and that YOTS engage locally with partner agencies, including the third sector, to ensure that they are part of, and contribute to, these types of local and national schemes wherever possible.

YOT practitioners need to take on an advocacy role to help girls to access services, provision and support including education and training opportunities and other activities, all of which can contribute to their wellbeing, and to improving their life chances.

**Responding to girls risk taking behaviours**

Girls’ adolescent risk taking behaviours such as heavy alcohol use, mixing with older friends or having friends in trouble with the police, and absconding/staying away from home all featured in the lives of many of the girls in this study. For some girls heavy alcohol use or staying away from home was used to block out adverse experiences, or to avoid difficult home lives, including parental substance misuse and violence in the home. These behaviours, particularly where they are combined with violent home lives, experience of abuse, or disaffection from school, can make girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation, relationship violence and abuse, drug abuse, and homelessness as well as offending.

Although YOT practitioners work closely with children services in individual cases where there are these types of concerns about girls, more creative approaches to the formal YOT responses undertaken in the
context of ensuring girls comply with their court order, are likely to be needed to engage with girls in a meaningful way. The role of trusted adults or ‘key workers’, safe places, outreach and detached work for example have all been identified as the most effective ways of engaging with girls at risk of sexual exploitation and young runaways (Pearce 2002, Melrose 2004, Barrett and Melrose 2003). YOTS need to work in partnership with other children and youth services to develop responsive creative and innovative strategies to engage with these often hard to reach groups of girls.

Promoting girls’ emotional health and wellbeing
The prevalence of emotional distress, low mood, depression as well as deliberate self harm and risk of suicide amongst girls in the Youth Justice System indicates the importance of mental health support being available in the YOT, both in terms of girls’ access to specialist mental health provision, and consultancy arrangements for practitioners who are working with girls where it is needed. Creative and flexible YOT responses will be needed and close liaison with other Children Services, to ensure girls can take up support in these circumstances. Equally girls’ emotional ill health can also impact on their compliance (for example not attending appointments when depressed/where they have self harmed). This highlights the need for flexibility within the Youth Justice System and for practitioners to be able to exercise their professional discretion on a day to day basis in their work with girls.

2. Girls pathways into offending

Recognising girls’ complex and multiple needs
The current study found that education and family factors, poverty and heavy alcohol use, were the most common risk factors for girls although a key theme highlighted in this and other studies is that a high proportion of girls in the Youth Justice System have multiple needs which are
interlinked. Thus girls are likely to experience problems in more than one, and sometimes many areas. Indeed where these needs are combined, it appears that there is a greater risk of girls’ involvement in offending and other types of risk taking behaviours. Whilst these needs cannot be directly linked to girls’ involvement in offending, it is clear that they play some part in girls’ pathways into offending and other behaviours (substance abuse, sexual exploitation etc) which can lead to social exclusion and poor future outcomes.

The need for holistic and multi agency responses
The range and often interrelated needs girls experience also means that these needs cannot be dealt with in singularly or in isolation. Nor can they be dealt with by any one agency; rather, they call for holistic approaches and multi agency responses and interventions based on a comprehensive assessment, if they are to address the multiplicity of problems and negative experiences girls in the Youth Justice System have often experienced.

Equally adult and children’ services need to work together particularly where parents are receiving adult services (adult mental health etc) or are involved with other services (because of substance misuse, domestic violence etc) which may impact on their children’s’ lives. These features have been widely recognised in contemporary research, and underpin the more recent children and family strategies (Dept for Education and Science 2004, Dept of Children Schools and Families 2007, Melrose 2004).

YOTS are already well equipped within their current structure to respond to the range of needs of girls. Their multi disciplinary make up with Social Work, Probation, Education and Connexions and Health practitioners enables girls to access relevant services and professional support within a young person centred framework. Indeed Pitts (2003) questions the
purpose of the multi agency youth offending teams, if not to take the opportunity to intervene and actively support young people in trouble and in need when they enter the Youth Justice System.

Support beyond the YOT
Whilst the offending behaviour of girls is most often adolescent related, girls with troubled backgrounds and complex needs are likely to need support beyond the YOT and they are also likely to come to the attention of other social and health care systems (mental health, housing, social care, and substance misuse services) (Melrose 2004a, Carlen 2002).

Thus information sharing and joint agency planning and cooperation is critical to effective practice. The current study suggests that the majority of girls within the Youth Justice System have complex needs,

It is important that the YOT work liaise closely with partner agencies to ensure that girls needs continue to be met and that support extends beyond the duration of a Court Order where this is needed (mentoring for example).

Prevention interventions which target girls
The range of needs identified amongst girls in this and other studies, highlight the need for responses outside of a statutory youth offending framework. Indeed as highlighted earlier, contact with the Youth Justice System can be detrimental to young people and serve to stigmatise and exacerbate social exclusion.

Prevention interventions will be important for girls before the ages 13 to take account of the age at which they most commonly come into contact with the police and prior to the peak age of their offending (approximately 15 years). Prevention strategies aimed at young people need to specifically target girls whose needs are often overlooked, and reflect their
distinct needs in their adolescent years, as well as be responsive to girls’ experiences of adversity and disadvantage.

Different levels of prevention need to be available to girls based on their level of need. Current children and family national strategies for example highlight ‘universal prevention’ which encompasses all families/children, and ‘targeted prevention’ which is aimed at families/children/young people identified as being in need of additional support (Home Office 2004, Department of Children Schools and Families 2007, Social Exclusion Unit 2008, Department of education and skills 2004).

The preventative role of the YOT and its engagement with the wider children services agenda has been identified in the governments Ten Year Youth Strategy (DCSF 2007). In this capacity YOTS need to work closely with youth and children services to ensure that girls’ needs are highlighted in prevention strategies aimed at young people at risk of offending, and that it contributes to developing responses to meet these needs.

Interventions which are likely to meet girls needs include alcohol awareness and education, relationships, helping girls to keep safe, offer activities that build self esteem, decision making and negotiation opportunities, activities to increase education and employment opportunities and independence skills, support with their accommodation needs, and access to counselling and mentoring.

3. Responding to girls offending patterns

Girls minor offending in adolescence
In common with the national picture, girls in the current study commonly committed minor offences and serious offences rarely. For most of the girls their offending was adolescent limited, occurring mainly between ages 13 and 15 and reducing significantly after this. Where the girls’ were
involved in more persistent offending, it rarely escalates in seriousness which is different to boys whose more persistent offending often also becomes more serious.

A minority of girls commit serious offences and although this was not explored in this study, this is an area that needs further consideration in order to inform effective practice with girls in these circumstances.

However girls’ involvement in minor offending and delinquency is as much a part of their adolescence as it is for boys, and gender differences in offending patterns relate to girls lesser involvement in both serious offending and in offending beyond adolescence, and interventions with them need to take account of these different offending patterns.

Understanding girls’ adolescent behaviour
Changes in girls’ adolescent behaviour in recent years have also been highlighted earlier, whereby girls increasingly socialise in mixed peer groups and make greater use of public space. Young people from less affluent neighbourhoods are often excluded from the expanding commercial leisure industry, and at the same time there has been a shift in youth services towards more formal youth provision such as Youth Connexions, away from informal provision such as outreach and detached youth work which previously engaged with hard to reach young people on the streets.

Using the streets as a meeting place to socialise with friends and drink alcohol has become a distinct feature of female youth culture and girls often use alcohol to make them feel more confident around boys, to be accepted by their peers, as well as finding its effects exciting. As highlighted earlier, alcohol can also be used as a form of escapism for some girls.
Equally girls aspire to be part of the exciting, glamorous and alcohol driven leisure sector which is marketed at the young and which appeals to a new generation of young drinkers in the pursuit of pleasure (Measham 2004:321). Indeed whilst as girls reach young adulthood their delinquency is likely to subside, risks relating to their alcohol related behaviour in the night time economy commence.

Thus YOTS need to be part of strategies aimed at raising awareness amongst young people of the risks involved in their heavy alcohol or drug use both to their health and their personal safety, whilst helping to regulate the risks of alcohol based leisure with Police, District Councils and business sectors within Community Safety strategies.

Responding to girls’ violence
The context of girls’ violence has been explored earlier. As discussed it commonly has a relational element, whereby it emanates from a breakdown in the girls’ relationship with the victim (who is often a friend or peer that is known to them or a family member) leading to more minor types of assault.

Girls’ violence against young people they don’t know, when they are in mixed peer groups in public space is also highlighted in this research. In this context peer influence and alcohol are related factors and minor altercations with young people they come across lead to (mostly) minor assaults. Violence is also directed at Police where girls resist arrest, particularly if they are under the influence of alcohol.

Interventions to address girls minor offending and anti social behaviour whilst in mixed peer groups could include positive activities and opportunities for them to access youth and leisure services. Detached and outreach youth work could also help to channel girls’ energies into
alternative activities which are also seen as fun and exciting and provide opportunities for them to socialise in mixed peer groups.

Police responses to girls can increase conflict rather than diffuse it, particularly where the girls are under the influence of alcohol and the physical responses adopted by Police may mirror violence girls have already experienced and can elicit further confrontation.

Alternative strategies need to be developed which promote non-confrontational techniques. Indeed the Youth Restorative Disposal (YRD) is currently being piloted (YJB 2009b) which involves Police undertaking a restorative approach rather than administering a Reprimand or Final Warning for minor offences. Police are thus receiving training in restorative justice approaches which may prove of benefit to girls both in terms of improved Police responses, and in them being given a further opportunity to avoid a formal Court Order for more minor types of offending.

Interventions to address girls’ alcohol related violence
Girls’ heavy alcohol use was a significant feature in the present study and is also a feature in the lives of adult female offenders as well as drug abuse. Alcohol awareness and education amongst girls including is an important area that should be addressed in YOT interventions with girls. Although drug offences are more common over the age of 17 and the majority of the girls in this study cohort were below this, as noted earlier troubled girls have more problematic patterns of drug use than their male

32 The Youth Restorative Disposal (YRD) is a pilot measure that offers a quick and proportionate response to a young person’s low-level offending. Only young people between the ages of 10-17 who have not previously received a Reprimand, Final Warning Caution or other disposal are eligible and it may only be given once. The victim and offender both need to agree to participate in the YRD. It does not give the young person a criminal record. (www.YJB.gov.uk, 2009)
counterparts (Melrose 2000, Melrose et al 2007) and the prevalence of drug abuse amongst adult females in custody indicates that interventions aimed at girls should address drug abuse, as well as their heavy alcohol use. Likewise prevention activities in schools and other youth provision could also target these issues.

**Greater use of restorative and mediation approaches**

Girls' violence commonly occurs in friendship groups and can emanate from girls talking negatively about each other to other people (about the way they look or behave). It is often related to girls’ self-image and esteem in adolescence. Girls’ family-related violence includes assaults against a family member often their mothers and commonly involves conflict over step-parent relationships, boundaries, family violence, and parental alcohol or drug abuse.

Mediation and restorative approaches could be adopted in these circumstances. Family support interventions such as holding family meetings, and offering parenting programmes, could help relationships at home. In some cases girls may also need individual support such as counselling, mentoring, or access to specialist support where the family conflict is part of wider complex family dysfunction. Child protection referrals and links with support networks for domestic violence, and accommodation needs may also be relevant.

**Diversion responses to girls offending**

Girls’ offending patterns lend themselves to diversion from court and are a positive option for many of the girls, avoiding the potentially stigmatising effects formal system contact can have, as well as helping to avoid girls escalating through the system for more minor delinquent acts.

The complex needs and backgrounds of many girls passing through the Youth Justice System indicates the need for multi-agency diversion...
processes which enable girls access to a range of support and interventions where this is needed. Indeed diversion can act as an early warning system to invoke appropriate support and intervention outside of the Youth Justice System (for example where there is heavy alcohol use, child protection concerns, non school attendance etc).

The YOT, with its multi agency make up, the specialist resources available to it, and its focus on young people, is uniquely placed to play a lead role with the Police in this. At the heart of diversion is the need for a move away from formal Police action, and from agency and public expectation of formal Police responses to minor incidents which in many cases can and ought to be, dealt with outside of the Court System.

Thus diversion approaches suitable for girls could include:–
- Greater opportunities for Police Warnings
- Support to parents (one to one/family interventions/parenting programmes)
- Restorative/ mediation approaches for offending involving family, peers and Police/authority figures
- Positive opportunities, prevention initiatives and youth services for girls
- Access to specialist support and counselling for abuse and victimisation
- Alcohol awareness and education programmes
- Outreach youth provision
- Information and advice

4. The need for a more gender responsive Youth Justice System

_Police and courts_
As highlighted earlier, more formal responses at the front end of the Youth Justice System have drawn more girls into the system. Attitudes to girls,
both public and professional, have shifted towards more ‘equitable’
treatment of girls’ and boys’ offending, although girls are still
disadvantaged throughout the system which is designed in response to
male offenders and their offending patterns. In addition gender
expectations continue to shape attitudes and responses to girls who
transgress these. Indeed gender differences in offending necessitate a
gendered, rather than same or ‘equal’ response to girls and boys, to take
account of their distinct offending patterns, and their gendered life
experiences and responses to these.

There are indications of a sea change in policing in response to the target
driven policy of recent years. Thus the recent Policing Green Paper (Home Office 2008) acknowledges:

…..under previous national target regimes - in some places a
‘perverse incentive’ had been created where incidents that may
easily be picked up were being used to meet targets and dealt
with by arrest and charge or by a fixed penalty notice when words
of advice could alternatively have been employed.

(Home Office 2008: 38:2.8)

Thus a focus on common sense approaches, greater Police discretion in
relation to minor offending, and an emphasis on bringing more serious
offences to justice, has been highlighted as priorities in current Police and
Community Safety strategies as well in the new Public Service
Agreements (PSAs). Police are also expected to contribute to early
intervention and prevention indicators in relation to children and young

These shifts are likely to impact on the numbers of children, including girls,
entering the formal Youth Justice System and lead to a greater range of
options being made available to deal with young people involved in / at
risk of involvement in, minor offending.
Whilst prevention and diversion responses to girls offending are desirable, where this is not possible and girls enter the formal Youth Justice System, their offending patterns and distinct needs should be reflected in programmes and interventions available in Court and within the YOT.

The highly prescribed processes and systems within which the YOT operate limits its ability to take a child centred approach to girls individual circumstances and needs. The level of breach nationally indicates that the system is failing girls and action is needed to address this.

**Sentencing options more geared to girls offending**

A greater range of sentencing options and community sentences which are more geared towards girls offending patterns and need, particularly gender specific alternatives to Reparation and Attendance Centre Orders could reduce the likelihood of girls receiving additional court disposals for non compliance. Changes to the youth sentencing structure brought about by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (Appendix H) indicates no specific options in the new Youth Rehabilitation Order itself which are more relevant to girls in the Youth Justice System, although the new sentencing structure itself offers a number of additional options which may impact positively on girls entering the Youth Justice System when they are fully implemented.

The Youth Restorative Disposal (YRD) is a promising new option, although this would need to be more widely available and not limited to being offered as solely a Police response as it is in the current pilots. The Youth Conditional caution\(^{33}\) (YCC) which is being piloted for use with 16 and 17 year olds offers a further pre court option which could benefit girls, particularly if it is extended to the whole 10-17 year old age range in 2010.

\(^{33}\) The Youth Conditional Caution (YCC) will be an additional, higher-tariff pre-court disposal which aims to reduce the number of young people being taken to court for a low-level offence. See [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk)
At the custody end of the Youth Justice System, there is an urgent need for robust alternatives to prevent girls being incarcerated for minor offences and non compliance. Indeed the complex needs and backgrounds of girls in the Youth Justice System have been highlighted in the current research and in the literature on girls in custody (HMIP 2003, Howard League 1997, Douglas and Plugge 2006 etc) as has the negative impact of custody on young people more generally (Goldson et al 2000 for example). These factors, which together with girls’ more minor, adolescent related offending patterns, indicate that custody should only be used in rare cases where girls present a serious risk to others.

The need for cross cutting agency monitoring and strategies for girls at risk
Nationally there are still gaps in knowledge about girls’ offending, and girls offending patterns are not routinely monitored. Girls continue to be marginalised in the Youth Justice System, despite the sizeable minority they make up. Trends in girls offending are more often relayed by media headlines which quote statistics that are not fully contextualised, than by close monitoring and analysis by those agencies with statutory responsibility for youth crime. Data on BME girls still remains incomplete which prevent the specific needs and offending patterns of these girls being fully explored.

If positive outcomes for girls are to be achieved, data from Youth Justice, Education, Health, and Social Care agencies need to be brought together and monitored to inform broader strategies which can address girls’ needs and risks. Indeed as highlighted earlier, girls’ pathways into offending are often similar to their pathways into other forms of social exclusion such as drug abuse, homelessness and sexual exploitation, therefore comprehensive strategies are needed to encompass girls’ needs and risk in relation to these areas, rather than treating their offending in isolation and for the duration of a short Court Order.
The need for more flexible YOT approaches

However the highly prescribed processes which govern YOTS can be a barrier to their success, particularly to establishing a trusting relationship with girls and to employing the more informal responses considered to be successful with ‘hard to reach’ young people (Bancroft et al 2004, Melrose 2004, 2004a).

Thus there is a need for greater flexibility within the formal Youth Justice processes to enable YOTS to utilise their professional judgement in dealing with children and young people, and for practitioners to employ child centred approaches and methods based on respect and empathy and an understanding of adolescent development and needs, to enable them to engage effectively with girls’ in the Youth Justice System.

More emphasis and opportunity for Youth Justice practitioners to use their professional judgement to help girls complete their Court Orders, and take up any help and support they need to prevent further involvement in offending is needed, rather than a strict adherence to inflexible procedures and a tick box approach to assessment.

Indeed Canton and Eadie (2005) emphasise the importance of practitioners ‘enabling compliance’ rather than breaching young people for failing to comply with their Court Order. They highlight approaches which can help support young people to successfully complete their Court Orders which include:-

- Respecting the young persons circumstances and difficulties
- Ensuring programmes are relevant
- Reminders (phone calls on the day of appointment, appointment cards, text messages)
- Set regular appointments agreed with young person
- Develop the relationship, pro social modelling, positive reinforcement
- Revoke the Order early for good progress

(Canton and Eadie 2005:159)

The need for holistic assessments
The importance of holistic and comprehensive assessments has been highlighted in literature on principles for effective practice with girls (Patton and Morgan 2002, Worrall 2000, Bateman 2008) and is confirmed in the present study by the range of needs identified amongst the girls which are clearly interrelated.

The YJB Asset assessment tool currently used by YOTS which is based on predictive tool for re-offending (based on male offending patterns), remains of limited relevance to girls and their offending, and contributes to confusion amongst YOT practitioners in identifying and responding to girls often complex needs which may not play a direct part in their offending.

Girls are likely to fare no better under the new ‘Scaled Approach’\(^3\), due to be implemented in the autumn of 2009. Within this YOT assessments will be based on the level of risk the young person presents, which will determine the intensity and frequency of YOT interventions as part of their Court Order. The danger is that girls will be scored as higher risk than they actually are, because of their high levels of need, or equally that they will warrant little YOT intervention if they score too low a risk, despite possible high levels of need which are as indicated earlier, often overlooked at both policy and practice level (in schools, prevention strategies etc). This is an

\[^3\] The Scaled Approach aims to ensure that interventions are tailored to the individual, based on an assessment of their risks and needs. Interventions are more effective when their intensity is matched to an assessment of the likelihood of the person re-offending, and are focused on the risk factors most closely associated with their offending. Interventions can be better targeted and offending and risk of serious harm can be reduced. This new way of working will also have the benefit of allowing Youth Justice services to direct time and resources to young people appropriately, in accordance with their risk assessment’. (YJB Feb 2009)
example of the need for a more gender sensitive system and a holistic assessment process which can take account of and respond to the range and multiplicity of needs of many of the girls in the Youth Justice System.

Programmes and interventions aimed at girls offending patterns and needs

YOT offending behaviour programmes do not generally reflect girls offending patterns. For example programmes available often focus on car crime, burglary, or violence where weapons are used (knife crime initiatives etc). Resources and programmes designed for boys are generally adapted by the YOTS for use with girls. Similarly, as discussed previously, reparation activities are largely intended for boys.

There is a clear need for a greater range of programmes to be available which are designed with girls and their offending in mind. The merits of gender specific interventions with girls in the Youth Justice System have been highlighted earlier. However programmes are still not consistently available in the Youth Justice System and there are gaps in practice knowledge about what constitutes effective practice with girls which has been highlighted both in the UK and in the United States (Bateman 2008). Consequently programmes for girls involved in offending are unregulated and for the most part not evaluated, and good practice that does exist is not widely disseminated.

Consistency and sustainability

Thus there is a need for a more consistent approach to the provision of gender specific programmes and interventions based on practice guidance which outlines effective practice models and approaches with girls, whilst action is also needed to improve the evaluation of the effectiveness of existing provision.

The dissemination of good practice with girls in the Youth Justice System and relevant research, and a directory of provision would enhance practice understanding and knowledge and could be readily be established as part
of the YJB Girl’s and Young Women’s Practitioner Meeting (highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 1). Indeed it is important that the knowledge base for effective practice with girls continues to be developed and that girls own views and perceptions are sought and incorporated more fully into programmes and interventions.

Further, the resource implications of providing gender specific programmes need to be recognised if programmes are to be sustained. Gender specific responses need to become part of YOTS core work rather than seen as an ‘add on’, or as optional when resources are scarce, or when workload increases.

Restorative justice and meaningful ‘reparation’

Girls offending patterns also lend themselves to the greater use of restorative justice approaches and mediation (offences occurring in school/ family or within friendship groups) as mentioned previously, which can be used as an alternative to Reparation. Indeed the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed an emphasis on the young person making amends to the victim or community and this has largely been interpreted as indirect ‘reparation’ undertaken in the community, rather than enabling more direct victim – offender mediation As the YJB itself notes:

> Although restorative processes typically result in practical Reparation, the communication between victim and offender can also produce powerful emotional responses leading to mutual satisfaction and socially inclusive outcomes.

(YJB 2009b)

Where girls undertake indirect reparation, YOTS need to ensure that as much consideration goes into providing projects which are suitable to girls needs to enable them to comply, as they do when arranging gender specific groups. Thus recognising transport or child care needs, providing
a safe environment including ensuring single girls are not placed in groups with boys, providing reparation projects or activities which are relevant to girls’ offences wherever possible, or projects that can be used as learning opportunities to pay back to the community in a meaningful way rather than using reparation solely as a punitive intervention, are all important features likely to help girls to successfully complete this element of their Court Orders.

Skilled practitioners who can engage positively with young people
YOT practitioners can still find girls behaviour challenging. They are described as more vocal than boys and challenging to staff members about the quality or relevance of their programmes, and requirements of their Orders. This can be exacerbated by the lesser experience of YOT practitioners in working with girls than boys, and the lack of policy or practice guidance about girls needs and the types of interventions which are effective with them.

Indeed whilst the current multi agency structure of YOTS means that girls’ family, health and education needs can all readily be addressed, practitioners abilities to engage and empathise with young people appears to be the key to success when working with these often ‘hard to reach’ groups of young people.

The range and complexity of needs amongst girls in the Youth Justice System identified in this and other research highlights the importance of practitioners having the skills and experience to be able to respond effectively to these needs. An understanding of girls’ adolescent development and the significance of girls experiences of violence and abuse needs to be an integral part of professional training for those working with young people. Practitioners running group programmes need to have the skills to facilitate group programmes effectively.
Further there is a need for greater emphasis in YOT training agendas on developing the engagement skills needed to establish a positive worker - young person relationship, which has been widely acknowledged as important in work with girls. Indeed the importance of social work and youth work values and principles of empathy, being non judgemental, young people’s participation, offering choices and having appropriate communication skills have been acknowledged in the current children workforce development strategies (DCSF 2008a) and these qualities should underpin approaches with girls if they are to be successful.

Within this practitioners need to be able to understand the importance of gender sensitive responses, rather than assuming that they should treat boys and girls the same, thus recognising the gendered nature of girls and boys offending patterns, their different socialisation, adolescent development, role expectations, and girls different experiences of discrimination, abuse and violence.

5. Developing effective programmes and interventions with girls in the Youth Justice System

Key themes which have emerged from this study as important to effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System are highlighted here incorporating some of the key principles for effective practice with girls which have been acknowledged in the wider literature.

i. Offer a range of gender specific provision and approaches

A range of provision needs to be available in the YOT which is relevant to girls’ lives and which addresses their offending patterns. This includes: gender specific group and individual programmes which offer counselling, advocacy, access to advice and information, gender specific reparation
programmes, mentoring, restorative and mediation approaches and arts based programmes.

Group programmes for girls
Girls group programmes can provide the opportunity for girls to develop interpersonal skills:- to build positive relationships, be able to deal with conflict more effectively, to listen to others, develop greater self awareness of how they feel and behave, and how their behaviour affects others. They can also provide the opportunity for workers to model positive behaviours and for girls to develop negotiation and decision making skills. Within this girls are able to explore relevant issues and topics with other girls in a more informal and supportive environment. Group work enables practitioners to utilise young person friendly activities and methods such as arts, drama, music, and media to illustrate topics and promote discussion. Indeed informal approaches have been highlighted by girls as a preferred style of support.

The importance of a safe (physical and emotional) and welcoming environment to girls is widely recognised in the literature and as such groups should be conducted in small groups and utilise group work techniques and methods. Equally, practitioners facilitating girls' group programmes need to be aware of the girls' individual circumstances and experiences of abuse and violence (bereavement, parental alcohol abuse etc) either by carrying out / working closely with colleagues who have carried out, an assessment of the girls needs before they join a group programme. Practitioners should have the necessary group work skills and expertise to successfully manage a group, and deal with issues that may arise within it sensitively and appropriately (for example offer support outside of the group session, time out etc), and set the scene for girls to feel able to participate in the programme by being clear about its purpose, and by setting clear and safe boundaries. Methods should be used which enhance girls self awareness and interpersonal skills including problem
solving, listening, negotiation, involvement in decision making as well as offering choices and opportunities. These approaches also play to girls strengths.

**Individual programmes/one to one work**

The one to one relationship is equally important to girls and again offers the opportunity for them to build a trusting positive relationship with a supportive adult and for the practitioner to act as a positive role model. Girls can benefit from the expertise and knowledge in the multi agency YOT which the practitioner can draw upon, as well as access to specialist services where these are needed. The importance of YOT practitioners taking on an advocacy role (in meetings where girls are children ‘looked after’, with schools where girls are at risk of exclusion, etc) and offering intensive support and practical help based on individual circumstances and problems (counselling, take them to medical appointments, family meetings etc), as well as responding to ‘crisis’ situations (for example where girls are homeless), have all been highlighted in the present study.

**Multi modal programmes**

For girls with complex needs and those on intensive programmes which are alternative to custody, both group and individual elements will be important in programmes to enable the girls to benefit from the informal and supportive group environment, whilst ensuring they also have more intensive and individually tailored programmes. Indeed research suggests that multi modal approaches are most likely to be effective with young people in the Youth Justice System (Stephenson et al 2007). This model is highlighted in the ‘Oregon Guidelines’ discussed earlier whereby programmes include a range elements of both group and individual one to one meetings based on positive relationships, and incorporate a range of activities aimed at building girls strengths, self esteem and confidence, problem solving techniques and life skills (Patton & Morgan 2002, Bateman 2008). This modal was utilised by Birmingham YOT for girls at
risk of being sent to custody (girls subject to ISSP). Although not yet externally evaluated or widely disseminated, this model could be developed to be used more widely for girls who have complex needs or for girls facing custody.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring can offer an informal, voluntary one to one relationship with girls where this is needed. It may be appropriate where girls have complex needs and need greater levels of support (practical and emotional), or where they are likely to need support beyond the length of a Court Order, or for girls coming out of custody who need additional support. Mentoring can also be used in prevention initiatives for girls identified as being at risk (parental mental ill health, domestic violence etc). Girls mentoring schemes need to be developed which provide trained mentors and which are based on key principles identified as being important to effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System.

**Restorative approaches and mediation**

Restorative justice and mediation are not widely used in all of the YOTS, and although making amends to the victim or community is a key feature of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, as discussed earlier, the ‘responsibilisation of young people’ and more punitive ‘community payback’ elements of this have been pursued in YOTS, more so than developing restorative approaches which are problem solving in nature, and which aim to repair and restore the damage to relationships and self esteem of those involved (Gray 2005, Worrall 2000:156).

The nature of girls offending means that restorative approaches may be appropriate, particularly where this offending emanates from friendship groups and family conflict. However it has also been argued that the concept of guilt and shame in restorative approaches can reinforce girls’ feelings of failure and low self esteem, and lead to their internalising these
feelings. It is further noted that in the context of family mediation, restorative justice methods may serve to reinforce rather than challenge, attitudes about appropriate female behaviour (Worrall 2000). Thus it is important to recognise the tensions highlighted by commentators between the spirit of restorative justice and the more punitive and controlling Youth Justice responses to young people, and where restorative approaches are developed, that they are located in a set of principles which guard against and counter these reservations.

Arts based programmes
Programmes involving dance/ drama/ music and art have also been used to engage with girls in the Youth Justice System and with adult females in some areas of the country including in custodial settings (Bateman 2008). These are used to explore themes such as safe alcohol use, positive self image and relationships. These approaches were found to have high retention rates amongst participants and positive outcomes included increased confidence and improved relationships. These approaches can be incorporated more widely into YOT programmes. The YOT Girls Group Programme (Appendix A) in the current study for example used role play exercises to explore girls’ friendships, using characters from a film extract to re-enact scenarios and to explore alternative responses to conflicts and moral dilemmas. Arts based approaches need to be more widely developed and evaluated further and can also be incorporated into wider YOT programmes.

Flexible and informal approaches
Practitioners need to be able to exercise their professional judgement and be allowed the flexibility to take account of changing needs and circumstances in their work with girls. Informal approaches such as drop in facilities, and informal opportunities to girls to access to advice and information when they need it were all cited by girls in the current study as important to them. YOTS could consider offering ‘drop in’ facilities where
information and advice is available more informally, as well as their formal supervision meetings and could also look to contributing to informal non statutory youth provision within its prevention strategies, to enable young people identified as ‘at risk’, to benefit from the expertise available in the multi agency YOTS.

**ii. Ensure YOT programmes are relevant to girls’ lives**

*Based on girls needs and offending patterns*

The literature indicates that effective gender specific programmes need to be relevant to girls’ needs and offending patterns, and that they are based on an understanding of girls’ adolescent behaviour and development.

Key areas identified in the current study on which programmes should focus include:

- Alcohol and substance abuse awareness and education
- Female health issues
- Sexual health
- Keeping safe - vulnerability to abuse or sexual exploitation;
- Emotional health and well being
- Relationships, family, friends, partners
- Resolving conflict with parents and friends and promoting positive and non abusive relationships;
- Identity and self image relating to girls growing up and their adolescent development
- Life skills for independence
- Programmes that offer learning opportunities

It is also important that programmes are age appropriate and are able to reflect the stage of adolescent development girls are at. The present study indicates that girls in the younger age range (13-15 year olds) preferred activities within a group programme, to one to one meetings with a worker,
whilst the older girls indicated how much they benefited from the one to one relationship with a worker and the emotional support this offered them. This preference needs to be acknowledged in planning interventions for girls.

**Comprehensive and holistic approaches**

In order to ensure interventions are relevant to girls, they should be based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs. Indeed holistic approaches have been highlighted as essential when working with girls, rather than focusing on any one problem area in isolation. The range and interrelated needs girls often experience also demonstrates why this is important. Where programmes concentrate on specific issues (e.g. alcohol related violence) these need to avoid a narrow focus and the issue should be explored in the widest context if it is to be effective. The assessment will indicate the level of need as well as the type of needs and behaviours on which interventions should be based. Thus girls with multiple or complex needs will require more intensive programmes and interventions.

**Listen to girls views**

To remain relevant and to truly reflect the needs of girls in the Youth Justice System, girls' views need to be sought and incorporated into programmes. Girls need to be involved in planning programmes and routinely involved in evaluations of programmes and interventions. Similarly girls need to actively participate in drawing up their individual supervision plans. This inclusion also makes it more likely that interventions will be effective and demonstrates that the girls have choices, and that their views are valued which can both empower and raise self esteem.
iii. Recognise the importance of relationships

The importance of relationships has been highlighted in interventions with girls. This refers in part to the worker young person relationship, which is seen as critical to successful interventions with girls, as well as to relationships more generally.

In the current study the girls valued the qualities of their workers, citing trust, non-judgemental approaches, and willingness to listen and respect them, above the content of any programmes offered. Equally the girls indicated that they valued, and would feel more at ease with a female worker. Thus it seems appropriate to recommend that girls should be offered a female worker where possible and that girls’ group programmes should be primarily run by female workers.

The worker - young person relationship is a unique opportunity for workers to model a positive relationship (setting realistic boundaries, consistency, alternative ways of resolving conflict, listening, develop trust etc) and problem solving approaches which can strengthen girls coping skills and resilience.

More generally, practitioners need to understand the importance of relationships (friendships, family and personal relationships) in girls’ lives and this should be reflected in responses and interventions with them. Thus YOT interventions need to offer opportunities for girls to explore ways of dealing with relationship conflict, to promote healthy and positive relationships and help girls develop alternative strategies to aggression, frustration and the internalising of emotional distress and anger.
iv. Build on girls’ strengths and resilience

Programmes which build on girls’ strengths are highlighted as being more likely to be effective rather than those that focus on their deficits. Thus programmes need to recognise and value female perspectives and celebrate their achievements.

Girls in the Youth Justice System are often intelligent and articulate, keen to express their views and opinions and able to reflect on their circumstances. They are often able to empathise with others.

Interventions therefore should build on these strengths and provide positive opportunities and activities for girls that help them learn new skills, and that help to increase their self esteem and self awareness. Further, programmes should include methods which involve them in decision making. These approaches can also help contribute to girls’ resilience beyond their involvement with the YOT.
Conclusions

The implications of the findings from the current study and the insights gleaned from the wider literature have already been set out. Thus to conclude, the original research questions are briefly reflected upon here to confirm the main observations from the research and to identify any outstanding areas.

What is the nature and context of girl’s offending and is this changing?

Despite a reported rise in the numbers of girls entering the Youth Justice System this study found that girls offending remains of a minor nature, typically involving minor assault and shop theft.

Minor assault emerges as a distinct feature of girls offending in the present study and is the most common offence the girls commit. Girls are involved in verbal aggression and minor assaults both in schools, at home and on the streets. Assaults are often alcohol related, perpetrated against other young people, including peers that are known to them or family members, and arises from ‘falling out’ and arguments.

Whether girls’ adolescent behaviour is changing and they are now socialising and using alcohol more frequently in mixed peer groups on the streets, or whether they are now simply more susceptible to Police attention as a result of result of more formal police responses (to meet national targets to increase detected crime and high profile anti social behaviour initiatives) is not conclusive.

However this study highlights alcohol as a distinct feature in girls offending and as such needs to be a priority area in YOT intervention programmes as well as in wider children and young people’s prevention strategies.
What are the important risk factors for girls in the Youth Justice System?

This study wanted to discover the key risk factors for girls in relation to their pathways into offending, and to consider whether and how these were different to the commonly identified risk factors for youth offending.

Although broadly similar to commonly cited risk factors for youth offending, an important finding in the present is study is that heavy alcohol use is an important risk factor for girls' offending. Alongside this, absence from school through exclusion or non attendance, severe family conflict, violence at home and abuse, and poverty and disadvantage, are all specifically highlighted as important risk factors for girls' offending.

Further these risk factors were commonly combined and girls frequently experienced multiple and interrelated risk factors in girls lives. This confirms the importance of a holistic assessment, and comprehensive responses to girls to meet girls needs, rather than focusing on one area or problem in isolation. The need for cross cutting agency strategies which target girls' specific needs and the risks which can lead them into offending and other forms of social exclusion are critical to improving outcomes for girls. The tension remains for the YOT in balancing high levels of need girls frequently experience, with their relatively low level of risk of re-offending and low risk to the public. These tensions can be addressed in part by YOT prevention strategies which can link to the wider children and youth agendas and thereby accommodate girls' needs and risks.
How responsive is the Youth Justice System to girls? What approaches are currently used by the youth offending teams and can these be improved?

The multi agency YOT is well equipped to respond to the complex needs girls often present. YOT practitioners take on a range of support and advocacy roles with girls and often form positive and effective relationships which benefit girls and their families. Gender specific group programmes are viewed positively by both girls and practitioners in this study, although these programmes are sometimes at risk because of small numbers and practitioner workloads.

The range of gender specific provision in the Youth Justice System and approaches that are sensitive to girls’ needs and offending patterns needs to be extended to ensure that a range of options are available to girls to meet their diverse needs and reduce the likelihood of their re-offending. Notably, reparation projects which are relevant to the offences girls commit or which are learning experiences, greater use of restorative justice and mediation in cases where the offence is relational and involves a family member of friend and mentoring opportunities to support girls with high levels of need or risk beyond the length of their Court Order. Further evaluation of the gender specific programmes being used within the Youth Justice System is still needed to determine and increase their effectiveness.

The highly regulated Youth Justice System can hinder the establishment of effective and positive relationships, as practitioners balance girls’ needs with the requirements of inflexible Court Orders. This is most apparent in the numbers of girls breaching their Court Orders nationally. Indeed the emphasis on practitioners ‘enabling compliance’ rather than initiating breach procedures needs to be more prominent on the Youth Justice agenda to prevent girls escalating through the Youth Justice System for
breaching their Court Orders rather than for the seriousness or persistence of their offending.

Importantly Youth Justice needs to ensure it engages widely with the children agenda and contributes to the Every Child Matters outcomes rather than closely aligning itself with the adult offender risk based agendas.

*What are the principles of effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System?*

Interventions which take account of gender, age and culture, which are relevant to girls lives, recognise and value the importance of relationships, which understand girls experiences of abuse and violence, offer girls choices and value their strengths, and listen to and understand their needs, are all at the heart of effective practice with girls in the Youth Justice System. These principles rely on practitioners in the field, who have the skills to deliver on these principles, and systems which enable child centred, rather than punitive approaches to children in the Youth Justice System.

*Finally*

Despite the gaps highlighted about girls offending and effective responses, there exists a wealth of knowledge and professional expertise across the Youth Justice, Social Care, Education and Health agencies in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. What often fails to happen in the practice arena is for this knowledge to be widely disseminated. Mechanisms need to be developed to promote this practice sharing more systematically and for gaps in knowledge and understanding to be reduced by providing additional training to practitioners, and through further research where this is needed.
Indeed one of the aims of this doctoral thesis is to make a contribution to improving practice with girls in the Youth Justice System. The findings from this research have been presented to the YOT itself and to a variety of events and conferences. A practice guide to understanding and responding to girls offending is being produced based on this research which fulfils part of this aim and will be widely disseminated to YOT practitioners.
Appendix A

YOT Girls Group Programme

Aim and objectives

• The provide a specific programme for girls and young women whose offending is related to alcohol, drug and/or violence or where these issues are a concern in their lives.
• To raise girls’ awareness of the consequences of their offending
• To explore a range of topics which are relevant to girls
• To hear girls experiences and views and to incorporate these into developing more effective practice with girls in the Criminal Justice System
• To contribute to wider research into effective interventions and approaches with girls who offend.

Programme Content

The programme will focus on alcohol/drugs awareness; relationships; and consequences of offending. Personal safety is a theme that will run throughout across all subject areas. A KOOP visit to a female YOI has been negotiated as part of the programme.

Methods
Small group work
Role play
Art and drama techniques
Speakers

Programme details

• It is anticipated that the Girls Programme will run three times a year for up to 9 girls.

• Referrals will be taken and initial meetings carried out from (Date)

• The programme will commence (Date) and will run for eight weeks on (Date/time/Venue) (Transport to be arranged)

Staffing

The programme will be delivered by two YOT social workers and a YOT PA/Support worker / YOT Specialist worker. Other YOT staff may contribute to aspects of the programme to compliment the programme (e.g. substance misuse worker, health worker).
Staff facilitating the group programme should have completed group work training (Liaise with Line manager). Planning and debriefing time should be allocated and YOT practitioners will also have access to their line managers for support and guidance as required.

Programme evaluation will be overseen by the Policy Advisor Youth Justice as part of a research programme into this area of Youth Justice practice sponsored by the county council.

**Referral and Assessment**
The programme is aimed at girls at risk of or involved in violent, alcohol/drug related offending

YOT workers to complete referral form to practitioners running the YOT Girls Group Programme who will arrange a meeting with the young person to assess suitability prior to the start of the programme. It is the decision of the facilitators whether girls are suitable for the group programme, based on their assessment and discussion with case worker taking into account age, offence types, needs) In some cases an individual programme may better suit the young persons needs particularly if there are recent abuse/mental ill health etc. Girls should be given the opportunity for additional support in the individual supervision sessions with YOT caseworkers or in some circumstances with Girls Group Programme facilitators. Facilitators should provide regular verbal feedback to the YOT caseworker and ensure YOIS case records are updated.

The YOT Girls Programme worker will explain the purpose of the programme and any practical arrangements as well as completing additional information including consent from the young person’s parent/carer for participation in the programme.

**Girls voluntary participation in group programme**

Girls should agree to take part in the YOT Girls Group Programme and can choose not to take part rather than it being a statutory requirement of their Court Order. Where they do agree to participate in the Group, this can be counted as a contact for their Order

**Programme Content**

**Session One: Introductory session**

Introductions- warm up exercise
Ground Rules
Outline of the programme
Why we are here? Consequences of offending (video)
Collage – all about me
Feedback on session

Session Two: Alcohol & Substance misuse Awareness

(With input from substance misuse worker optional)
Warm up exercise
Alcohol awareness
Substance misuse
Feedback on session

Session Three: Healthy mind and body

(With input from YOT health worker optional)
Warm up exercise
Input from YOT health worker
Feedback on session

Arrangements for KOOP visit

Session 4: Consequences - Visit to female YOI / Inspirational speaker

Session 5: Relationships
Warm up exercise
Feedback on female YOI visit.
Relationships game (soap opera relationships/ Kidulthood DVD extract)
Problem pages
Feedback on session

Session 6: Personal safety – First Aid

(With input from First Aid trainer)
Warm up exercise
Dealing with emergencies – focus on alcohol/drug/violent incidents and how to deal with these safely.
Feedback on session

Session 7: Sexual Health

(With input from Guest speaker optional)
Warm up exercise
Input from health professional
Feedback on session
Session 8: Final session
Group Evaluation
Celebration activity

Funding

Funding is available via the YOT Practice Sharing Forum to cover transport to sessions for the girls, refreshments, resources and materials, end activity / celebration.

Written requests for funding should be provided outlining the programme details and a budget proposal. Evaluation reports must be provided.

The YOT Girls Group Programme is currently funded from the YJB Prevention grant. The Youth Justice Service also contribute: - venue, publicity and printing costs, YOT staff to facilitate the group and specialist input, management supervision and consultation and evaluation.

Evaluation Reports
All Girls Group Programmes should be evaluated by the facilitators with the girls and a written evaluation should be provided to the YOT Working with Girls Practice sharing Forum where it will be shared.

For further information about the funding / the programme / the YOT Working with Girls Practice Sharing Forum please contact:
Appendix B

YOT Working with Girls and Young Women Practice Sharing Forum

Aims and Terms of Reference

March 2008

Aims

- To develop and share good practice in relation to girls and young women.
- To consider current research
- To share resources and provide resources to practitioners running girls programme including consent form.
- To monitor effectiveness and ensure high quality work is undertaken with girls.
- To co ordinate the gender specific work across the county.
- To access funding and resources.

Terms of Reference

- Quarterly meetings
- To share and coordinate practice as per the aims
- Single Contact point for YOT Girls Group Programmes
- Access to funding
- Representation from each area of the County
- Quality assurance
Appendix C

Interview Schedules

Interviews with girls

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Interviews with YOT practitioners

|  | Gender          | Ethnicity | Role in YOT          |
|  | Practitioner Interview |          |                      |
| 1 | Male            | White    | ISSP                 |
| 2 | Female          | White    | ISSP                 |
| 3 | Female          | White    | YOT Manager          |
| 4 | Female          | Black    | Social worker        |
| 5 | Female          | Black    | Social worker        |
| 6 | Female          | Asian    | Social worker        |
| 7 | Female          | Black    | Social worker        |
| 8 | Female          | White    | Social worker        |
| 9 | Male            | White    | YOT Health Worker    |
|10 | Female          | White    | YOT Health Worker    |
|11 | Male            | White    | YOT Health Worker    |
|12 | Female          | Asian    | Substance Misuse worker |
|13 | Female          | White    | Probation Officer    |
Appendix D

Case File Research Template

1. Name (Numbers used - details listed separately)
2. Ethnicity:
3. Age at 1st Offence:
4. Looked After child / Care History  Y N
5. Violent Offence  Y  N
6. If Violent Offence committed at what age?
7. Context of violent offence (known victim /alcohol/ school related /police etc)
8. Alcohol related offences?
9. No. of offences:
10. Reprimand/ Final Warning
11. Court Disposals:
12. Breach: Y  N
13. Custody Y N
14. Asset areas scoring 2 or more
15. Risk of serious harm (ROSH)completed Y N
16. Mental health referral Y N
17. Risk areas identified:
   - Experience of Abuse – details of type
   - Domestic violence – family or in own relationship
   - Alcohol- own alcohol or drug use /parental
   - Poverty and disadvantage – case file records/ neighbourhood section on YOIS
   - Education – exclusion/ non attendance/ special education needs/bullying
   - Older boyfriends
   - Absconds / runs away
   - Mental health – self harm / depression/ parental mental ill health
   - Bereavement
   - Anti social behaviour
   - Peers in trouble with Police
   - Violence :
     Against family member/violence against a known peer/ friend
     /Violence against police/violence against care home staff/violence in public space

   Serious violence
   Circumstances of violence

Pregnancy

Number of risk factors
Appendix E

Researching the needs of girls/young women in the Youth Justice System

About the research
Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. We are doing this research to help us understand more about girls offending, as there are smaller numbers of girls compared to boys in the Youth Justice System and to help the YOT improve how it works with girls in the Youth Justice System.

Research interviews will be treated as confidential other than where information shared in them is illegal or harmful to the young person or others. The research findings will be published as a report which will be available from the YOT to all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality of all participants will be respected.

Interview no

1. Can you tell me a bit about your offending – offence(s)/ type of Order(s) where did the offences happen, time of day, was alcohol/drugs involved, did the offences involve violence, did you know the victim? Do you know other young people who get into trouble? Are these girls or boys? How old are they?

2. Card exercise:
These are some of the reasons research says can affect young people get involved in offending. Look at these cards and choose any cards which you think may affect girls’ risk of getting involved in offending

DRUGS * ALCOHOL* SELF HARM * BODY IMAGE *MONEY*
DEPRESSION *VIOLENCE *FAMILY PROBLEMS *DISCRIMINATION
* WHERE YOU LIVE* INFLUENCE FROM FRIENDS* BULLYING*
RELATIONSHIPS * BOREDOM
*SCHOOL PROBLEMS *OTHER REASONS

Would you say any of these related to your offending? If so how? Why do you think you got involved in offending when you did? Or would you say there are other reasons?
3. How has getting into trouble affected you? With your family? With friends? School? Other ways?

4. What do you think helps prevent girls from getting involved in offending/ stops them re-offending?

What sort of things have you done as part of your work with the YOT?

6. Do you think it has helped you? If so how

7. Do you think it’s important for girls to have a female YOT worker?

8. What should be included in YOT programmes for girls?

9. Do you think girls need any other support of consideration – transport/girls only groups/ reparation/counselling etc

8. How can the YOT improve how it works with girls and young women generally?

Thank you for taking part in the research – your views are appreciated and will help the YOT to improve the way it works with girls and young women in future programmes and YOT services meets the needs of girls and young women.
Appendix F

Participant details

Name:

Gender: Ethnicity:

YOT role:

Date of interview:

1. Why do you think girls get involved in offending? (triggers, risk factors, is this different to boys reasons for offending)

2. Do you think girls are treated differently to boys in the Youth Justice System (police, court, YOT)

3. What do you think are the main problems/ issues girls you work with have (do you think YOT staff need specific skills/resources to deal with these? What sort of skills)
4. Do you think girls should be allocated a female YOT worker as a matter of course?

5. What sorts of approaches/ types of activities are likely to be successful with girls – examples from your practice which you’ve found to work with girls?

6. Can you tell me about a case example that you think was a success. What do you think made it a success?

7. Is there anything particularly difficult about working with girls >Can you tell me about a practice example with a girls/young woman that you found a challenge?

8. How can the Youth JusticeService improve it's responses to girls who offend?
## Appendix G

**Youth sentence structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Court</th>
<th>First Tier</th>
<th>Community Order</th>
<th>Custody</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Reprimand</td>
<td>Absolute Discharge</td>
<td>Action Plan Order</td>
<td>Detention &amp; Training Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Warning</td>
<td>Conditional Discharge</td>
<td>Attendance Centre Order</td>
<td>s.91 - serious offence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compensation Order</td>
<td>Community Punishment &amp; Rehabilitation Order</td>
<td>s. 228 - extended sentence/public protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>Community Punishment Order</td>
<td>s. 228 - indeterminate/public protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Referral Order</td>
<td>Community Rehabilitation Order</td>
<td>s. 90 - mandatory life/Murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reparation Order</td>
<td>Community Rehabilitation Order &amp; conditions</td>
<td>ISSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sentence Deferred</td>
<td>Supervision Order</td>
<td>Intensive Fostering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk) Feb 2009
Appendix H:

Changes to the Youth Sentence structure*

following The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Court</th>
<th>Youth Rehabilitation Order</th>
<th>Custody</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Reprimand</td>
<td>Activity Requirement</td>
<td>Detention &amp; Training Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Warning</td>
<td>Supervision Requirement</td>
<td>s.91 - serious offence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Conditional Caution</td>
<td>Curfew Requirement</td>
<td>s. 228 - extended sentence/public protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programme Requirement</td>
<td>s. 228 - indeterminate/public protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residence Requirement (18/17 yr olds only)</td>
<td>s. 90 - mandatory life/Murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Tier</td>
<td>Mental Health Treatment Requirement</td>
<td>Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Discharge</td>
<td>Attendance Centre Requirement</td>
<td>Intensive Fostering Requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional Discharge</td>
<td>Unpaid Work Requirement (16/17 yr olds only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation Order</td>
<td>Intoxicating substance treatment requirement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral Order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reparation Order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Deferred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Youth Justice provisions of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 is due to be implemented from September 2009

Source: [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk) Feb 2009
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