

Preventing youth violence: Lessons from three European countries

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Note of thanks

I was delighted to be awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship for travel to Sweden, the Netherlands and France in September 2013 and I am grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and to the Prison Reform Trust for making this trip possible.

As policy makers in England and Wales we have often looked to the United States for good practice in the area of youth offending and gang involvement. I was keen to look to Europe to see what we could learn about preventative and therapeutic approaches. I was interested in the whole spectrum from early intervention through to work with violent young offenders in custody.

I am very grateful for the support of colleagues in the three countries I visited, and all those who gave their time to meet me and tell me about their work. In particular, I would like to thank Jenny Söderqvist from the British Embassy in Stockholm, Malin Errickson from the Stockholm police, Maaïke Zwijnenburg from the Ministry of Security and Justice and Drs. Ninette van Hasselt from the Trimbos Institute in the Netherlands, and Mme. Anne Molina and M. Steevens Tetu-Dumas from the Ministry of Justice in France.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to the Home Office for supporting this Fellowship and to colleagues at the Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board for their constructive input.

[The views expressed throughout this report are my own and should not be taken as a statement of Government policy.]

Context

Policy makers in the UK have tended to look to the United States for good practice in relation to youth violence and particularly street gangs. My sense was that there may be more shared experience within Europe in terms of the drivers of youth violence and the social and political context around this, and that there would be a wealth of relatively untapped good and promising practice in these countries.

I visited Sweden, the Netherlands and then France and was struck first and foremost by the differences in the way young offenders were viewed and treated in each country, and the different balance between punishment, education, care and treatment.

Whilst the prevalence and severity of youth violence was different in each country, there were commonalities in the way this violence manifested, and in the drivers behind it. Drugs markets, robbery and the impact of organised criminality were concerns for all three countries. I also found parallels within strategies for dealing with youth violence. There was a general recognition that enforcement and suppression were only part of the solution and that prevention and early intervention was essential. The links between poor childhood experiences and later involvement in violence were understood by almost all of those I spoke to, and there was an acceptance of the part that deprivation and inequality played in violence.

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Executive summary

Intervening at the right time, in the right way, with the right young people

Policy makers and those who commissioned services in the three countries I visited were keen to ensure value for money and to maximise the impact of stretched resources by targeting interventions on the people who needed them most. There was an increasing recognition that early intervention with the most vulnerable was critical, but decisions about interventions with adolescents tended to be based on the severity or prevalence of their offending rather than on the underlying drivers of their behaviour. This meant that interventions were not sufficiently targeted at the people most likely to respond to them.

During the course of my trip I visited the Trimbos Institute in The Netherlands where I had a fascinating discussion with Drs. Ninette van Hasselt. She talked about the potential applicability of research into the trajectories of risk-taking behaviour in adolescence. This research shows that risk-taking or antisocial behaviour most often manifests in early adolescence and is the result of an interaction between neuropsychological risk factors and environmental factors such as peer influence. Antisocial behaviour in this group will reduce quite quickly in early adulthood, with minimal intervention. These young people are likely to respond well to effective policing, relatively low cost group interventions or diversionary approaches.

Conversely, for a smaller proportion of young people, problematic behaviour will begin in early childhood and will be the result of an interaction between neuropsychological risk factors and stressful childhood experiences. These children are at high risk of later involvement in antisocial behaviour and violence and need intensive, health-led intervention at the earliest possible stage. Whilst the behaviour of these young people may not look widely different in adolescence, it is likely to be more entrenched and persist into adulthood. This group is unlikely to respond to group or environmental interventions.

A better understanding of these different trajectories, and further research into the implications for youth violence, may help policy makers and commissioners to assess young people's needs and target interventions more effectively.

Intervening early with those with complex needs

Intervening early with young people with complex needs relies on the right tools to identify vulnerabilities. The PIT project in Amsterdam, developed in partnership with academia, seemed to have real potential as a way to identify and assess children at primary school, and then provide them with the right support to increase their resilience and improve their behaviour.

Once these children are identified and properly assessed, they need to be supported through the right interventions, delivered in the right way. These interventions need to be firmly rooted in the available evidence base and integrity of the delivery model is essential.

Environmental or group interventions

Most young people involved in violence or other criminality will not need or respond to intensive health-led support. However, prevention is still important, as is support to young people to change their lifestyle and to avoid entering the youth justice system. An enforcement response alone will only have a limited impact on this group who will not have the level of cognitive development needed to think through the consequences of their actions and respond to a deterrent.

I found many effective or promising interventions aimed at young people at risk of involvement in violence, or already involved in criminality or violence. These ranged from preventative programmes delivered in schools or youth clubs in deprived, high crime areas, to policing approaches based on intelligence about youth violence 'hotspots'. I was particularly interested in the potential of 'last chance' interventions aimed at diverting young people away from the youth justice system, such as the Halt penalty in the Netherlands, which appeared to have an impact for young people whose offending was primarily group-related and peer influenced.

Working with violent young people in the youth justice system

With youth custody used as a "last resort" in all three countries, the youth custody population was made up of the most serious offenders, most of whom had committed a violent or sexual offence. I suggest that a distinction could still be made between those whose offending was group-related and influenced by peers or environmental factors, and those whose offending was deep rooted and whose needs were very complex. The former group may be receptive to a regime centred on education and group activity, but working with the latter group in custody would be hugely difficult. This group need intervention and support at a far earlier stage and are likely to have highly complex needs by the time they arrive in custody. They need intensive, therapeutic support if they are to have any chance of fundamentally changing their lives. The Scandinavian MultifunC model appeared very promising for this group.

Conclusion

There are dozens of examples of good and promising practice within the main body of my report. Alongside these, there are some key principles that I think have the potential to improve our Europe-wide response to this problem. Firstly, we need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the drivers of violence in young people, and the different trajectories of violent behaviour. This needs to include an understanding of particular family, societal and environmental vulnerabilities for some young people within immigrant communities. Secondly, we need the right tools to identify and assess the most vulnerable at the earliest opportunity. The support we give to these children needs to be psychologically-led, suitably intensive, and rooted in the available evidence base. Thirdly, we should not underestimate the value of preventative and diversionary interventions aimed at the larger group of young people for whom violent behaviour is less entrenched and, finally, youth custody provision needs to be responsive to different levels of need and have the capacity to deliver professional, therapeutic support to those who need it.

Programme of meetings and visits

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 10 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action Group NOVA, Stockholm County Police |
| 11 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Robbery Commission, Stockholm City Police |
| 12 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Victim/Offender Mediation Service, Stockholm City Youth Unit• Youth Unit field police team |
| 13 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stockholm City Youth Unit Investigations team• The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs |
| 16 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stockholm City Youth Unit Social Services team• Project leads: supportive work with young victims |
| 17 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Red Cross Youth Unit, Stockholm |
| 18 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swedish Ministry of Justice and National Board for Crime Prevention (Brå)• Community Intervention Team, Rinkeby-Kista |
| 19 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swedish National Board of Institutional Care• Social Interventions Project, Stockholm City Police |
| 20 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth Prosecutor, Stockholm |
| 23 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, The Hague |
| 24 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth project co-ordinator, Amsterdam East |
| 25 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teylingereind secure facility and forensic observation unit |
| 26 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Halt bureau, Groningen |
| 30 September | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amsterdam City Council Top 600 Project team• PIT Family Intervention Project |
| 2 October | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amsterdam City Police |
| 3 October | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trimbos Institute, Utrecht |
| 7 October | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direction de la protection judiciaire de la jeunesse, Paris |
| 8 October | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chef de la section du parquet des mineurs et Président du Tribunal pour enfants, Tribunal de grande instance de Paris |
| 9 October | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centre Educatif Fermé d'Epina-sur-Seine |

- 10 October
 - Centre Educatif Renforcé, Saint-Denis
- 15 October
 - Directeur territorial, Direction de la protection judiciaire de la jeunesse, Marseille
- 16 October
 - Directeur de Service territorial éducatif de milieu ouvert, Marseille
- 17 October
 - Etablissement pénitentiaire pour mineurs, Marseille la Valentine

Context: Youth justice approaches in the three countries

The philosophy underpinning the youth justice system is markedly different in each of the countries I visited. This shapes the strategic and operational response to youth violence and criminality and is important context for this report.

Sweden

There is no concept of punishment for young people who commit crimes in Sweden and this philosophical position was reinforced by almost all the professionals I spoke to. The notion of care and treatment is at the heart of the Swedish approach to working with young offenders and social services are pivotal to any discussion and resultant action plan for a young person. Although the age of criminal responsibility is 15, anybody under the age of 18 (or often 21) in Sweden is treated as a child in need of guidance and support.

Under 18s in Sweden rarely receive custodial sentences (under 18s make up just 0.2 per cent of the prison population)¹, and young offenders are usually handled in accordance with legislation around compulsory care for under 21 year olds (the Care of Young Persons Act). Where it is mandated by the courts, either under the Care of Young Persons Act or following a prosecution for a serious crime, under the Secure Youth Care Act, closed institutional care is for a fixed term and is focused on care and treatment.

That said, youth criminality is taken seriously and the response, whilst care-focused, is swift, comprehensive and, at times, restrictive. Use of alcohol or soft drugs, for example, is taken extremely seriously and viewed as a precursor to criminality or more serious substance misuse.

The Netherlands

The Dutch approach is about finding the right balance between punishment and care for each individual young person. Specialist youth prosecutors are responsible for all investigations and for recommending an appropriate penalty for each young offender. The youth prosecutor can impose community penalties for less serious offences, but only a judge can sentence a juvenile to custody.

The age of criminal responsibility in the Netherlands is 12. Under new legislation to be commenced in 2014, young people aged 16 to 23 may be tried either as adults or as juveniles depending on their level of maturity. Court judgments will take more account of the individual's development, but courts and public prosecutors will no longer be allowed to use community service as a sanction in cases involving serious sexual or violent offences. Juveniles currently make up around 1.7 per cent of the prison population and custodial sentences are usually followed by lengthy periods of community supervision.²

¹ International Centre for Prison Studies, as at 1/10/2012

² International Centre for Prison Studies, as at 30/9/2012

France

The youth justice system in France is founded on a set of core principles set out in the legislation of 2 February 1945. The most important of these is the principle of education alongside punishment. The legislation also sets out a requirement for specialist child judges and for consideration of the personality and circumstances of any minor (under the age of 18) before deciding on an appropriate punishment or intervention. There is no age of criminal responsibility as such in French law, but a child under the age of 13 cannot be sentenced to custody. Juveniles currently make up around 1.1 per cent of the prison population.³

The French youth justice system combines criminal and child protection processes, and the youth judge is responsible for decisions about both. Like in the Netherlands, the youth prosecutor can make decisions about punishment in more minor cases.

The principle of education (in its widest sense, incorporating care and treatment) within the youth justice system was held dear by all the professionals I spoke to in France, but it is fair to say that there was some professional and political disquiet about how effectively this was applied in practice.

My meetings and visits in France focused on work with young people who were already in the youth justice system rather than early intervention or preventative work.

³ International Centre for Prison Studies, as at 1/11/2013

Youth violence in Sweden, the Netherlands and France

Swedish riots: if instability can happen here, what might unfold elsewhere?

A stark rise in inequality has brought about unprecedented rioting in Stockholm. The omens for Britain are worrying. (The Guardian, 27 May 2013)

Marseille: Europe's most dangerous place to be young

Away from its glamorous tourist centre, 15 men have died this year as the city's drug war spirals out of control. (The Independent 24 September 2013)

Police attacked as unrest flares in Paris suburbs

Four people have been arrested after vehicles were torched and weapons fired at police during a second night of violence in the Paris suburbs on Saturday. The unrest follows an incident involving France's controversial ban on Islamic face veils. (france24.com, July 2013)

This was not a comparative study and I did not attempt to establish the relative rates of violent youth crime in the three countries I visited. Of greater interest to me was the media interest and public and political concern about youth violence in each country. I was also keen to get a sense of the drivers of violence, and whether these varied between the countries.

Sweden

I visited Sweden in the aftermath of a week of rioting in Stockholm's deprived suburbs. The duration and ferocity of the riots was unprecedented and the implications of the violence and the roles that immigration and segregation had played were still being debated in the press when I arrived.

The riots had started after the police killing of a man wielding a machete. Perceived inconsistencies in the official police account of the events leading to the man's death prompted the community activist group Megafonen to call for a demonstration against police brutality. Four days later, riots broke out in the north-west suburb of Husby. Over the next seven days, they spread to other suburbs as well as other towns. Total damages, mostly sustained by local residents and businesses were estimated at around £6.2 million.

More broadly, street robbery, binge-drinking and alcohol-related violence, violence related to drugs markets, and weapon-enabled violence were seen as problems. A 2013 report published by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) included results of a survey in which 8 per cent of young people in year 9 reported carrying a knife (down from

16 per cent in 1995 and 10 per cent in 2008) and four out of ten young people reported having been drunk to the point of feeling intoxicated.⁴

In addition, a recent report by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs had highlighted the problem of internet-based harassment and abuse: 30 per cent of young people surveyed reported that somebody had tried to get them to talk about sex, send pictures or do something they didn't want to in front of a web-camera.⁵

Lastly, there was a long-standing concern about the impact of organised criminal gangs (often biker gangs) on Sweden's major cities and about the 'recruitment' of vulnerable young people by these organised gangs.

The Netherlands

By contrast, there was a greater sense in the Netherlands that youth violence was under control. Professionals were clear that there was not a street gang or territorial violence problem in Dutch cities, and that the use of knives or firearms by juveniles was rare.

This is not to say that there was complacency. Whilst crime was decreasing in the Netherlands, fear of crime amongst the public was increasing. In common with the other countries, those I spoke to described problems with robbery and drug dealing in the major cities, concern over nuisance youth groups, and exploitation of young people by organised criminals. In 2011, the Minister of Security and Justice announced a crackdown against criminal youth groups, and this continued to be a political priority.

Dutch colleagues were aware and concerned by the so-called 'Loveboys' phenomenon of sexual exploitation and abuse of girls by teenage boys or older men, in a group context. They were also aware of an increasing problem of harassment and abuse over the Internet.

France

Violent crime in France had increased by around 27 per cent over the last ten years and was a high political priority when I visited. Violent robberies were a particular concern, and rose by 8.9 per cent in 2012.⁶ Youth justice colleagues in Paris painted a picture of street gang activity in the northern suburbs, based around a strong geographical identity, and involvement in drug dealing and territorial violence, which was often weapon enabled. However, they told me that the number of gangs in Paris had reduced over the last three years following a police clamp down.

Of the places I visited, Marseille was under the most intense scrutiny and facing the most entrenched problems. Concern centred around the division between the north and south of the city, with the north experiencing poverty, poor housing, a drugs trade, availability of

⁴ English summary of Brå report *Crime and problem behaviours among year-nine youth in Sweden: Results from the Swedish School Survey on Crime 199502911* (2013:3)

⁵ www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/sites/default/files/publikationer_uploads/see-me.pdf

⁶ <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/ZSP/Presse/Politique-de-securite-2012-2013-bilan-et-perspectives>

firearms (particularly AK-47 assault rifles), violent and armed robbery, and a murder rate of over five times the national average. Young people in deprived areas in the north of the city had low aspirations, poor education and limited employment prospects, and were highly susceptible to involvement in the drugs trade.

Overall impressions

Above all else, youth violence in all three countries manifested itself where there was relative poverty, poor life chances, and a sense of being "outside" of mainstream society in some way. There was a strong correlation in each country between deprivation and the risk of being a victim of violence or of being a violent offender, and young people from immigrant communities were disproportionately represented within the offender population.

Youth violence, inequality and immigration

The Swedish riots: What really happened?

Inequality, not immigration, was what sparked the unrest.
(New Statesman, June 2013).

Young people from immigrant backgrounds were significantly over-represented in the youth justice systems of each of the countries I visited, and this was a sensitive topic. In broad terms, professionals agreed that youth violence was prevalent in areas of high relative deprivation and unemployment, and that these areas were often home to high proportions of immigrants. However, in all three countries there was some reluctance to talk about immigration and violence in terms other than the socio-economic. In France, where ethnicity statistics are not officially collected, this was almost always where the discussion ended. There was a strong sentiment amongst many of those I spoke to in France that ethnicity was irrelevant and that the real issues were deprivation, poor parenting and restricted life chances.

Unemployment and relative poverty amongst immigrant populations were frequently cited as drivers of violent behaviour. Swedish professionals in particular talked about the impact of the growing inequality between rich and poor and between those from Swedish and non-Swedish backgrounds.

- In recent decades, Sweden has seen the fastest growing gap between rich and poor of all the OECD countries, and poor immigrant communities have been hardest hit.⁷
- Around 46 per cent of non-European immigrants to Sweden are unemployed.⁸
- Median household income for non-European immigrants is 36 per cent lower than for native Swedes.⁹
- In the Rinkeby suburb of Stockholm, around 89 per cent of residents are from a non-Swedish background.¹⁰
- Around 40 per cent of those in youth custody in Sweden are from a foreign background.¹¹

⁷ *The Swedish riots: what really happened?* The Economist, 14 June 2013

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Statistics Sweden 2008

¹¹ SiS

I encountered a politically sensitive debate around these issues in Sweden, prompted at least in part by the riots in May 2013 in the relatively poor, largely immigrant areas to the west of Stockholm. There was dismay that this level of anger could exist in spite of the relatively generous welfare state provision in Sweden and the country's history of tolerance and liberal immigration policy. Whilst many professionals I spoke to felt that the riots had been overblown by media reporting, others expressed considerable disquiet and spoke of their lack of understanding of the levels of violence and apparent anger directed at the police and the amount of destruction wrought on local people and businesses.

"I don't understand it. We're a nice police force! We chat to people, we're not aggressive."
(Police officer, Stockholm Police).

Professionals in the Netherlands were open about overrepresentation within the criminal justice system and the problems within particular communities, and comfortable talking about the need for tailored, culturally-specific responses within an overall framework. There was a reluctance to be seen to be singling out particular communities (in contrast to strategies in previous years for working with the Moroccan community for example), and a sharp consciousness of the tensions played out in the media between Muslim and non-Muslim populations. However, there was a desire for an overall strategy that recognised cultural difference in a meaningful way.

Whilst those working at a strategic or national level in all three countries were, in general, highly cognisant of the political sensitivities surrounding these issues, and very reluctant to 'single out' or 'label' particular communities, I found that people working directly with immigrant families were quick to tell me about the particular challenges these families faced, beyond the socio-economic. Many of the frontline professionals I spoke to used similar words to describe a sense of people 'feeling outside' of mainstream society in some way, or 'caught between two cultures'.

Some of those I spoke to also talked about the need to help newly arrived communities adapt to new societal norms and values, especially where these challenged traditional family and gender roles. Projects like the *Fryshuset Elektra Project* in Stockholm aimed to meet this need. This particular project started in 2001, working intensively with girls who faced specific threats from honour-based violence. It then expanded to work with boys from these communities to help them look at their own values, and created a network of 'Sharif Heroes' – boys who felt able to stand up for girls' rights within their own communities. This was followed by work with girls who were not at acute risk themselves, and further work with the boys to look more closely about how traditional beliefs within their community about the roles of men and women were affecting them as young people within Swedish society.

Other professionals I spoke to talked about high levels of unmet, undiagnosed mental health need within these communities. They described problems with anxiety and depression, particularly amongst mothers, and the impact of trauma on parents and children. In all three countries, they expressed frustration at the limited specialist provision

for working with people who had experienced trauma and/or who showed signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

*"Often they're only my age but they look so much older because of what they've been through."
(38 year old social worker, talking about mothers in the suburb of Kista, Stockholm).*

These frontline practitioners also told of a deeply held mistrust of authority and of a culture of shame and unwillingness to accept help within these communities.

*"They've been soldiers. They're used to fending for themselves."
(Social worker, Stockholm, talking about unaccompanied asylum seeking children).*

One of the most positive, if unintended, consequences of multi-agency projects like the Community Intervention Teams in Stockholm (see "Working with Group B: Diversionary approaches"), was that this local presence of statutory services, getting to know individuals and communities, seemed to change local people's perception of 'the authorities'. It was clear to me that once individual police, social workers and youth workers started to build relationships within communities, tensions eased.

Professionals also recognised the need to help communities to rebuild some of the protective factors that would have existed in home countries, including community organisation and support. Voluntary sector projects such as the humanitarian migration project delivered by the [Swedish Red Cross Youth](#) in Stockholm, in which young volunteers visited asylum seekers and encouraged them to set up their own activities and support networks, were doing valuable work, but with limited reach.

Some of those I spoke to in the Netherlands described a particular problem with young people's free time within immigrant communities. A combination of traditional parenting approaches and the lack of space in overcrowded housing meant that teenagers and younger children were out on the streets for long periods of time without adult supervision. This made them highly susceptible to negative peer influences, and even to recruitment by more organised criminals. Youth services worked with these young people to varying degrees, but I encountered few projects which proactively sought to engage young people from immigrant backgrounds.

Implications for policy and practice development

Overall, I found the greatest understanding of the needs of particular immigrant populations came from those working directly with these communities. For these frontline

workers, it was not sufficient to focus solely on deprivation. The need for culturally specific responses was self evident to them, and yet, in all three countries, they found that services were lacking in this respect.

It was clear to me that any strategy for reducing youth violence should address the issues of over-representation of young people from immigrant backgrounds within the youth justice system with confidence. This should be based on a thorough understanding of some of the particular challenges faced by young people within these communities, including the impact of trauma, isolation and a breakdown of community and family structures.

Intervening at the right time, in the right way, with the right young people

In a climate of stretched resources, those I spoke to recognised the importance of some sort of prioritisation process to enable them to focus their efforts on the young people at highest risk or causing the most harm.

Broadly speaking, and in line with thinking in England and Wales, the accepted wisdom was that there were four levels of intervention: early intervention with individuals at risk; full population, preventative intervention; intervention with young people engaged in minor antisocial or criminal behaviour; and intervention for those who could be classified as serious or persistent criminals.

There was general agreement that early intervention with those at risk was the holy grail of violence prevention. However, the reality was that this was difficult to implement, especially in current economic conditions. Impact was hard to measure and was not seen quickly enough to satisfy funders and political decision makers.

In practice, most effort was directed at the fourth level of intervention, with serious or persistent criminals. The Top 600 initiative in Amsterdam was an example of this. Six hundred young people between the ages of 12 and 25 had been prioritised for multi-agency attention and intervention based on the level of harm they caused to the community through their violence and general criminality. The Ministry of Security and Justice believed that the approach, along with other similar local approaches, was having a positive impact on the number of recognised criminal youth groups in the country, which had reduced from 89 in 2010 to 17 in 2013.¹² The project was a high political priority, with strong leadership from the Mayor of Amsterdam and significant public and media profile.

When I spoke to the Top 600 project co-ordinators, they told me that they could identify three sub-groups within the Top 600 list:

- Those with psychological problems or low IQ and complex needs, in need of long-term guidance and expected to be on the list for a long time. Only 5 per cent of this group had a qualification, and 67 per cent had no legal income. This group was the most challenging. (Estimated to make up 40 per cent of the total).
- “Hardcore criminals” who were mostly in custody but who remained on the list to enable resettlement planning. The sense was that there was an opportunity with this group to change their behaviour. (Estimated to make up 25 per cent of the total).

¹² See <http://www.government.nl/news/2013/04/16/national-picture-youth-groups-decreasing-numbers-continue.html>

- A “lighter” group who may already have been making changes without the support of the Top 600 project, and who were more likely to achieve successful outcomes.

This presented some interesting questions for me. Did the overall results of multi-agency projects like this one mask the variable impact of the approach on individuals with different levels of need and different drivers behind their offending behaviour? Was prioritisation based on an individual’s current level of offending really the best use of limited resources?

Trajectories of violent behaviour

A discussion with Drs. Ninette van Hasselt at the Trimbos Institute in the Netherlands led me to think differently about the ways in which we might identify and intervene with the right young people at the right time. Drs. van Hasselt’s emerging thinking draws on work by Lynne-Landsman et al on changes to sensation seeking (and its link to engagement in risky behaviour) over time (Lynne-Landsman et al, 2010), and on a report on the differences between adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behaviour (Moffitt, 1993).^{13 14}

In summary, this theory suggests that risky behaviour including antisocial behaviour, violence and substance misuse follow different trajectories for different groups within the population. A high percentage of adolescents participate in antisocial behaviour of some sort, but only 5-10 per cent of these continue with serious antisocial behaviour in adulthood (Moffitt, 1993). The antisocial behaviour of many adolescents is temporary and situational. In contrast, the antisocial behaviour of some is early, persistent and relatively stable. These groups are very different in terms of their needs and likely response to interventions. In short, antisocial behaviour that is limited to the adolescent years may be likely to be driven by situational factors including peer pressure, whereas chronic and early manifesting antisocial behaviour is more likely to be more complex and rooted in a combination of genetic risk factors and problems in early childhood.

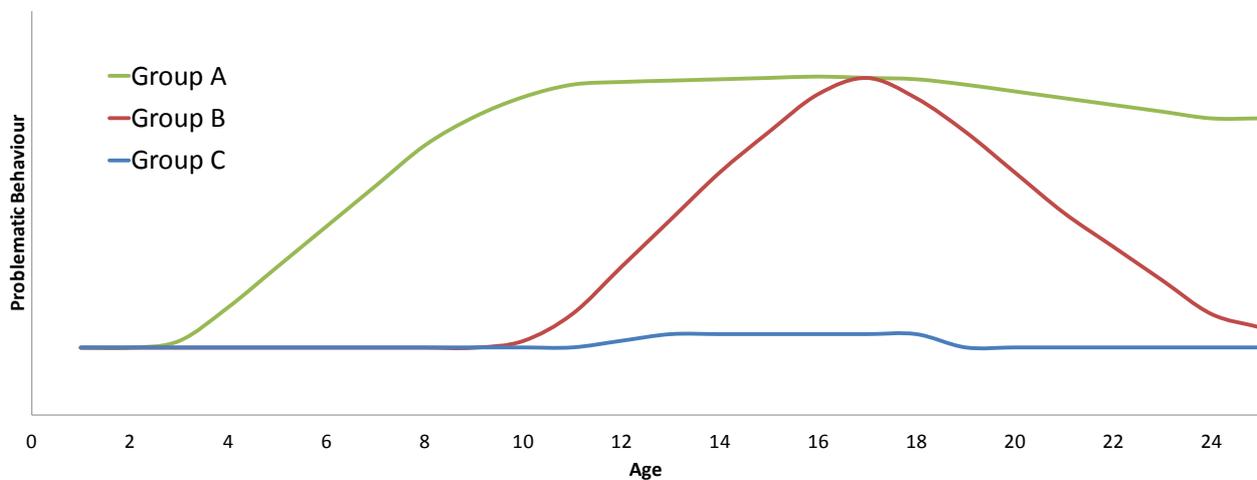
The graph below is purely illustrative, but broadly encapsulates the model. It shows a group of individuals who do not engage in problematic behaviour at any point during their lives, a group who engage in high levels of problematic risk behaviour throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood, and a group for whom problematic risk taking behaviour increases through adolescence but declines sharply in early adulthood.

Taking the work of Lynne-Landsman et al. on sensation seeking amongst middle school students as a guide we would expect males to be more likely to follow trajectories of higher levels of problematic behaviour and females more likely to follow trajectories of low levels of problematic behaviour. The moderate group (group B) is likely to comprise of equal proportions of males and females. The study by Lynne-Landsman et al. suggests that we might expect around 60 per cent of adolescents to follow the trajectory of group B, 20 per cent to follow the trajectory of group A and 20 per cent the trajectory of group C in terms of

¹³ Lynne-Landsman S.D, Graber J.A, Nichols T.R & Botvin G.J. (2010). Is Sensation Seeking a Stable Trait or Does it Change Over Time? In *J Youth Adolescence* (2011) 40:48-58

¹⁴ Moffitt T.E. (1993). Adolescence-Limited and Life-Course Persistent Antisocial Behavior: A Developmental Taxonomy reprinted in *Psychological Review* (1993) 100, 674-701

sensation seeking. This does not necessarily manifest in problematic risk taking behaviour, which may be seen as the unhealthy expression of sensation seeking in response to other risk factors.



Implications for policy and practice development

This research and developing thinking has significant implications for policy and practice development around youth violence and gang culture. Early identification and intensive health-led intervention with Group A is critical, but there is scope for tailoring interventions with adolescents involved in violent lifestyles in line with a more nuanced understanding of the different levels of need and the different drivers of violence within this group.

This model potentially enables local agencies to target support in a more tailored and cost-effective way. Whilst Group A will need intensive intervention at the earliest opportunity, Group B are likely to be driven by environmental risk factors and to respond to group-based or environmental interventions. Intensive therapeutic intervention will have little or no impact with this group (unless, of course, vulnerability and risk increases; for example through trauma in adolescence). Evaluations which fail to draw a distinction between the two groups potentially mask this variable impact.

Group C do not display any problematic risk taking behaviour and are likely to maintain this stable course through their adolescence and into adulthood. They probably have secure, positive family and social environments and relationships, and are unlikely to have any genetic risk factors for behavioural disorders. For policy makers and commissioners, there is no value in directing preventative resource at this group.

Approaches based around the notion of co-ordinated, multi-agency support for high risk or high harm young people aim to provide a relatively high level of tailored support to a young person and, as necessary, his or her family. However, they do not necessarily discriminate between young people in group B and those in group A.

This is interesting in terms of attributing results to a particular element of a multi-agency response. For argument's sake, it may be that a young person is committing a great deal of crime as part of a group, but he is driven by peer influence and his problems are not

hugely complex. He makes the priority list for a local multi-agency team and an action plan is drawn up which includes an element of mentoring and an element of family therapy. His being on the priority list also means that the police and local authority staff regularly stop him for a chat, to see how he is getting along and to let him know that they are keeping a close eye on him. It becomes harder and less attractive for him to commit crime as part of his group, and the oversight of the multi-agency team gives him an excuse to disengage. The costly mentoring and family therapy may have little or no impact on such a young person, and yet the success will likely be claimed by the multi-agency team and attributed to the action plan as a whole.

This is not to say that the multi-agency approach to working with high impact young people is the wrong one. Indeed, a multi-agency approach which is cognisant of the different trajectories of problematic, risk taking behaviour, and tailors its response accordingly may well offer good results and excellent value for money.

Identifying and intervening early with those with complex needs

Early intervention with group A, whose later involvement in violence is driven by a complex set of drivers and needs, is vital. Professionals need to be able to identify this group at the earliest opportunity so that they can target the necessary intensive support.

Identification tools

In Amsterdam, I heard about an interesting family intervention project – PIT. The project had started two years ago alongside the Top 600 project, as a way of offering support to siblings of offenders on the Top 600 list. Any time a Top 600 nominal was arrested and the police knew that he or she had siblings, the police alerted the multi-agency PIT team, who would send workers to the house within 48 hours.

The PIT project was established by an enthusiastic social worker within the council who was concerned that interventions did not generally start before the age of 12. Social workers intervened with younger children at risk, but there were problems with consistency, high staff turnover and sickness absence, and there was a lack of focus on crime and violence prevention outcomes. The social worker recognised that antisocial behaviour could manifest from the age of 7, or even younger, and identified a need for earlier intervention.

The PIT project was informed by neuroscientific research and was designed with the University of Leiden, who were also evaluating the project. The principle of the project was that problematic behaviour was purely the starting point for looking at, and addressing, underlying causes. An assessment tool had been developed for use in primary schools, through a partnership of academic theory and daily, frontline practice. The tool sought to answer three key questions: is the child capable of empathy and can he recognise emotions in somebody else? Can he regulate his emotions? What are the social scripts that he has read from his environment about what constitutes normal behaviour?

The project had now expanded from the siblings of Top 600 young people to a number of primary schools (schools participating in a quality improvement programme and so facing particular challenges, including pupil behaviour). The PIT team asked teachers to identify children between the ages of 8 and 12 who they thought were at risk of involvement in crime or other negative outcomes. The emphasis was on the individual teacher's intuition rather than particular pieces of evidence. The PIT team then sought the agreement of the child's parents to apply the first stage of the assessment: a questionnaire for the parents and for the teacher. If the child scored highly on this initial assessment, the second test was carried out. This second test used computer simulation to test the three questions outlined above. The results were analysed by researchers at the University of Leiden, who produced a report highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the child. This enabled an action plan to be developed, in discussion with the teacher and the child's parents. Parents and teachers were supported to understand the relevance of this tool and the

report. The action plan could range from practical actions such as buying an alarm clock to help the child get to school on time to small interventions such as a teacher working regularly with a child to help him recognise emotions in others, and through to intensive psychological support.

Of course there were challenges with this approach. Parents were often unwilling to agree to the initial assessment, for fear of their child or they themselves being stigmatised or for fear of attracting the attention of social services. Attempts to persuade parents of the value of the approach were resource intensive for the team and were not always successful. More broadly, future funding for the project was uncertain, and the team was finding it difficult to prove the benefit to budget holders. The project was seen as a preventative intervention and not a crime reduction intervention.

In spite of these challenges, initial findings from the assessment of the project were promising, showing improvements for a sample group of 22 across 8 domains: anxiety, signs of withdrawal or depression, physical complaints, social problems, thinking problems, attention problems, unacceptable behaviour and aggressive behaviour. The project was, tentatively, seen as a way of avoiding the need for later, high cost intervention.

Amsterdam PIT project case study

A school in Amsterdam referred two boys to the PIT team, who were turning up for school looking unkempt, tired and underfed. Two PIT workers went to the home. The boys' mother was struggling to cope with her eldest child – a fifteen year old girl who was involved with inappropriate older men and was generally disruptive at home. The PIT team persuaded the mother to let them run the screening tool on all three children, and this revealed significant challenges for all of them.

Soon afterwards, the PIT worker had a call from the mother. She had seen her daughter on the Dutch equivalent of Crimewatch and was in a state of panic. She asked the worker to go to the house. He arrived and tried to calm the situation, but told the family that he was under an obligation to inform the police. The mother asked him to continue to work with the family to help them through the process. He did this, working with their lawyer to explain the screening results and challenges facing the family, and advise him about how best to interact with the girl. The PIT worker played an important role during the police interrogation, during which the girl admitted involvement in several other crimes with the men she had been associating with. The police were able to solve five crimes. While she awaits sentence, the girl has been instructed to continue to work with the PIT team.

The PIT project was working on a relatively small scale to try to identify young children who were already displaying concerning behaviour and who may be at risk of later criminality. By contrast, the Prokid system used by police in the Netherlands was an interesting attempt to spot problems as early as possible and in a more systematic way.

The Prokid tool was developed by the Gelderland-Midden police force to identify young people at risk. It was a simple tool which used existing police data to identify children (under 12) who may be at risk of involvement in crime or other poor outcomes, based on

academic research around risk factors. Children who came into contact with the police were flagged automatically by the system and sorted according to the data held on the system into four risk categories: 'red' (indicates critical danger); 'orange' (indicates a child displaying concerning behaviour or an address where there are known to be problems; 'yellow' (indicates that a risk is developing); and 'white' (no indication of any risk).

Use of this tool had been incorporated into the police Early Identification and Referral Procedure concerning referrals to the Youth Care Agency. It had been agreed that the police would take follow-up action with respect to children in the red, orange and yellow categories.

Intensive interventions

Of course, even if the right children are identified at the earliest opportunity, their chances of avoiding involvement in crime, violence or other risk-taking behaviour rest on the availability of suitably targeted, evidence-based interventions.

In all three countries, the strong sense was that there was insufficient evidence as to what works with these complex and vulnerable young people. Where the evidence base was strong (several of the people I spoke to mentioned Multi-Systemic Therapy), these interventions were costly and their availability was not sufficient to meet the level of need.

In the Netherlands, research into the Top 600 approach carried out by the University of Amsterdam included an assessment of the more intensive interventions available in the country, and especially those which targeted very young offenders (under 12).¹⁵ The research considered a range of interventions, including Functional Family Therapy; Intensive Orthopedagogical Family Treatment: Preventing Worse Outcomes; Less Angry and Defiant; New Perspectives; and Oppositional Kids. It looked at the core elements of these interventions, including parenting skills training; behavioural modelling; behavioural contracting; and a focus on positive leisure-time activities.

The research recognised that the effectiveness of any of these interventions depended on several factors such as the quality of implementation, treatment integrity, and the degree to which treatment was matched to the risk of recidivism, targets the dynamic risk factors most strongly related to recidivism and was responsible to young peoples' individual characteristics and motivation. However, it concluded that interventions that contained several effective treatment components could be regarded as promising, and that these interventions should be made more available and widespread.

Implications for policy and practice development

It is clear to me that early intervention is critical for those who display concerning behaviour at an early age, but that identification of these children is difficult. During my trip

¹⁵ Put, C. van der; Assink, M; Bindels, A; Stams, G.J.; Vries, S.de (2013) *Effectief vroegtijdig ingrijpen* tcm: 44-418932-64 University of Amsterdam. English summary at: http://wodc.nl/images/2289-summary_tcm44-503753.pdf

I heard about various projects that were aimed at families of concern, or at siblings of those already involved in crime or violence. These projects may well capture some of these young people at the right stage. Tools such as the Prokid system, and indeed anything that promotes information sharing between agencies, make it more likely that the right children are identified. However, the Amsterdam PIT project was the most exciting for me. It combined the professional judgment of primary school teachers with the latest academic research in the form of the assessment tool, and, although small scale, appeared very promising.

Of course identification is only part of the picture, and having the right interventions available to work with these children is critical. My sense is that there is still a need to strengthen the evidence base around these interventions, and to share this evidence base with those holding the budgets at national and local level. These intensive interventions are expensive, of course, and so targeting the right intervention on the right child is critical to ensuring value for money. The potential of a project like the PIT project, along with a richer evidence base about the impact of different interventions, make this a real possibility.

Working with group B: prevention

The majority of young people who get involved in crime and violence will be influenced by their peers and other environmental risk factors. It is worth stressing that this group may behave very differently and offend with greater or less severity in accordance with their environmental context. A young person who becomes involved with a criminal drug trafficking group in a northern suburb of Marseille may be engaged in far more serious violence and criminality than a Stockholm teenager who drinks in a group in the city centre and is involved in relatively minor nuisance. The level of the response will be different. However, the responses may all be based upon an understanding that the majority of young people involved in group criminality are likely to respond to interventions which aim to change their environment and make it more difficult or less attractive for them to continue to behave in that way.

In the course of my trip, I heard about several promising preventative approaches that recognised this dynamic and aimed to improve personal resilience or increase young people's aspirations. These interventions were generally aimed at teenagers between 13 and 18, and mostly delivered in schools and youth clubs in areas where young people faced greater risk factors (deprivation, unemployment or local organised crime activity for example).

Many of those I spoke to in the three countries were supportive of a solution-focused, strengths-based approach to interventions of this nature. A number of practitioners described the importance of recognising and responding to the ambition of each young person. They felt strongly that preventative interventions should be about helping young people realise their individual potential. Avoiding involvement in crime should not be seen as a good enough outcome.

During my trip I heard about several projects working to challenge unhelpful notions of femininity and masculinity and to support young people to develop a healthy sense of identity. The *United Sisters* project for girls and young women between the ages 12 and 20, delivered by the Fryshuset youth centre in Stockholm, was one such example. The project was founded on the concept of challenging stereotypes and assumptions to develop a healthy female identity. The focus was on the strengths, aspirations and potential of each individual young woman rather than the problems she may be experiencing. Small group sessions were facilitated over the course of a year, for girls from different backgrounds and facing different challenges. The facilitator nurtured an environment where girls felt able to leave their social 'identities' outside the room. Individual coaching on the same principles was provided to girls displaying more challenging behaviour. The project appeared successful insofar as it was popular with the girls and had begun to inform the development of similar projects for boys.

"We talk about watering the plants rather than weeding the garden!"

(Project leader, Fryshuset, describing the importance of a strengths-based approach).

In a similar vein, the *Macho Factory* (Machofabriken) was a project developed in collaboration between the Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres, the National Organisation for Women's and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden and Men for Gender Equality, and was described to me as 'promising' by Brå. This project provided educational materials around gender equality and violence prevention for teachers and others who work with young people. The project focused on young people's ability to change oppressive social norms and ideas of masculinity. In the process of working with the Macho Factory, young people reflected on how ideas about gender and sexuality affected their lives and relationships. The interactive exercises encouraged them to find new ways of thinking and acting in relation to others, themselves and society in general.

I also heard about projects aiming to increase young people's participation in society and simple projects helping young people and their families to feel a part of society in spite of the challenges of poverty or unemployment.

The *Red Cross Youth* in Stockholm ran an interesting social entrepreneurship project in five schools across the city, working with children between 15 and 18 to help them develop a business plan for an activity which would contribute to society in some way. This project was linked to the national curriculum, within which every student is required to complete an "entrepreneurial" project. The project was in its early stages when I visited, but the Red Cross Youth intended to monitor whether the young peoples' projects came to fruition, alongside broader outcomes including sense of achievement, confidence, and ongoing volunteering activity.

Another Fryshuset project was aimed at the children of single mothers who faced challenges due to poverty and the lack of social support networks. It was founded on the recognition that poverty prevents children's involvement in activities with their peer group and inhibits their engagement in society. Quite simply, the project offered mothers and their children experiences that were outside of their daily lives: a trip to the zoo or the cinema, or a group activity with others in similar circumstances. The aim of the project was no more ambitious than to provide relaxation, enjoyment and positive memories for mothers and their children. Without any proactive outreach, the project had expanded from work with six mothers to 1700 mothers and their children across three cities.

During my trip I learnt about several other, more targeted preventative interventions. The Fryshuset Exit Programme for example, included training and awareness sessions for professionals including teachers, and preventative sessions with young people aimed at reducing the risk of involvement in extremist groups or organised crime. These sessions included a play exploring the life story of a young man involved in an extremist group. I was also particularly interested to hear about projects aimed at increasing the safety of young people on the internet, and preventing web-based bullying or harassment. The Fryshuset Web Wanderers project aimed to increase the presence of positive adult role models on key websites and used volunteers to provide this support, using 'youth worker' avatars on some sites. Stockholm Social Services teams provided a similar support service as part of their fieldwork and outreach work, in response to what they saw as an increasing amount of internet bullying. The Red Cross Youth in Stockholm ran a web-based chat line staffed by young volunteers trained in counselling skills, where young people could talk about anything that was concerning them. The Amsterdam Police had

developed a *booklet and presentation* for frontline police officers, schools and parents about risks to children's safety online.

Implications for policy and practice development

The preventative projects I heard about were generally delivered by the voluntary and community sector. This was interesting given the fact that the voluntary and community sector did not have the same status in any of the three countries I visited as it does in England and Wales in terms of the provision of commissioned services in the criminal justice arena. In these three countries, family support or criminal justice interventions were delivered primarily by the statutory sector or the private sector.

In common with our experience in England and Wales, there appeared to be a lack of robust evaluation of the impact of these preventative interventions. Given their potential impact on the resilience of children and young people who face social and environmental risk factors which might lead them into criminality, it would be sensible to seek to strengthen the evidence base around them. This would help commissioners to understand the value of these relatively cheap but potentially high impact interventions, as well as to understand the key components of a successful preventative intervention of this nature.

Working with Group B: Policing

During my trip I heard a lot about the success of proactive, targeted policing responses. Again, seen in the context of different trajectories in terms of involvement in violence or antisocial behaviour, this is interesting. If the majority of those involved in youth violence, gang activity or other group criminality are driven by environmental risk factors, then enforcement and suppression responses will have an impact, which we see within the positive evaluations of these approaches. Those with more entrenched problems are unlikely to respond to these measures, but this group will be limited in number and impact on the streets.

Large scale policing responses in areas of high violence and disorder

In July 2012, 15 Zones de Sécurité Prioritaire (ZSPs) were designated in France as a way of improving the quality of life for people in local areas particularly affected by crime and violence. This was subsequently extended to 64 areas. ZSPs provided extra security and police resources and aimed to concentrate the efforts of the police and their partners on a small number of locally agreed priorities and to combine tough enforcement and suppression responses with multi-agency prevention work and work to 'reclaim' communities. Fifteen areas of Paris and the Ile de France, as well as areas of north and south Marseille (covering around half of the city's residents) had been allocated as ZSPs and the French government had said that this approach was working. Initial results from the original 15 ZSPs showed an increase in prosecutions for drug trafficking of 38 per cent, an 11 per cent reduction in nuisance and antisocial behaviour, and a 27 per cent drop in public space violence.¹⁶

'Hot spot' or 'problem-oriented' policing

Targeted, hotspot or problem-oriented policing was viewed very positively in Sweden and the Netherlands in particular. The impact of hotspot policing on street violence in Sweden had not yet been formally evaluated but the researchers I spoke to from Brå described the results as "promising". A 2010 Brå report on hotspot policing internationally concluded that there was a strong body of evidence in support of the effectiveness of place-based policing.¹⁷

The Swedish K-Model was designed to reduce youth violence in public places by restricting young people's access to alcohol and intervening swiftly with young people in possession of alcohol. The tactics included confiscating alcohol and following up on where the young people obtained the alcohol, contacting parents and asking them to come and

¹⁶ Ministère de l'intérieur

¹⁷ *The Importance of Place in Policing, Empirical Evidence and Policy Recommendations* (Weisburd, Telep, Braga: 2010) ISBN 978-91-86027-54-4
www.bra.se/download/18.cba82f7130f475a2f1800022104/1312440785947/2010_importance_of_place.pdf

collect their children (and contacting social services if the parents did not come), holding large scale meetings with parents about the project, and about young people and alcohol more broadly, and improving investigations of alcohol offences.

The K-Model was evaluated by Brå in 2009.¹⁸ The impact of the model was measured by comparing the number of assaults by young people against young people in the trial areas against other areas in Sweden. In the three out of the four districts which had implemented the model most fully, it had a positive impact on youth violence. The evaluation concluded that, if properly implemented, the K-Model seemed to be effective in lowering levels of youth violence.

Whilst in Stockholm I also met Action Group NOVA, a specialist organised crime team within the Stockholm County Police. The team had been set up in response to the need to work to prevent the recruitment of young people into organised crime gangs. The team carried out visible, high profile policing within neighbourhoods affected by organised crime, and worked alongside local police teams to do this. They aimed to make it as difficult as possible for organised criminals to operate, and to send a message to young people that involvement in organised crime was likely to lead to arrest and conviction.

The use of problem profiling and analysis to develop effective policing responses to gangs

In their book, *The Stockholm Gang Model PANTHER*, Patrick Leinfelt and Amir Rostami make a clear argument for policing based on a thorough analysis of the problem when dealing with gang activity.¹⁹ Thorough mapping and analysis should inform the tactical approach and should include an individual enforcement plan against each gang member, recognising the need for different levels of intervention with different individuals. Leinfelt and Rostami also talk about the importance of social network analysis, spotting 'weak links' within gang structures (who may be receptive to intervention efforts) and exploiting weaknesses amongst gang leaders.

¹⁸ Utvärdering av Kronobergsmodellen, Brå, report no 2009:5. English summary at: www.bra.se/bra/bra-in-english/home/publications/archive/publications/2009-12-29-evaluation-of-the-k-model.html

¹⁹ *The Stockholm Gang Model PANTHER, Stockholm Gang Intervention and Prevention Project, 2009-2012*, Leinfelt & Rostami (Eds.), 2012. ISBN: 978-91-637-0777-3

Gang Leader Typologies

Research conducted as part of the Stockholm Gangs Intervention and Prevention Project identified several characteristics of street gang leaders based on in depth interviews with 12 Swedish gang leaders and 12 associates, as well as fieldwork observations. It showed the importance of careful profiling and analysis when targeting particular individuals.

1. *The Entrepreneur*: a pragmatic leader driven by the spirit of business and profit. Concerned with money and status, and sees crime as a suitable solution. Selfish and ego-centred with little use for political ideals.
2. *The Prophet*: Rhetorical ability, charisma, determination and leadership ability. Devoted to the notion of a gang and of leading a select few outside of mainstream society. Less motivated by material success as by other rewards such as being held in high esteem and loved, or deemed irreplaceable by the gang.
3. *The Realist*: Flexible, depending on the situation at hand. Does not have ambitions to lead a gang unless as part of his personal strategy to achieve his own goals. Crime usually represents the shortest path to achieving his desires. Lack of empathy and prone to using violence to achieve his goals.
4. *Society's victim*: accepts society's values and goals, but believes he cannot achieve them because he will be prevented from doing so by society. He blames society for what he has become. He has the ambition to change but not the motivation. He is pessimistic, sees risk everywhere and is constantly worried. Yet he portrays himself as a secure person, often overestimating his own abilities.

Policing tactics and techniques for working with young people

I was particularly struck by the tools and techniques used by the Amsterdam police to intervene effectively with young people. Training and awareness-raising for frontline officers working with young people seemed to be comprehensive, although not available to all officers. The central message of the training was the need to treat the young person as an individual and to think creatively about the best way to deal with him or her:

"...they need to think outside the box about the kid, not just hand out fines."
(Inspector, Amsterdam police).

The training package included basic elements on juvenile cognitive development, protective and risk factors, and psychological theory. It gave police officers an overview of common psychological disorders including conduct disorder and ADHD, and gave practical and simple advice on communicating with young people who presented in a way that

suggested one of these problems, recognising that violence towards the police may often result from police officers taking the wrong communication approach with a vulnerable young person.

The Amsterdam police had also developed toolkits for frontline officers to raise their awareness about particular issues affecting young people. For example, a short, simple 'Loveboys' toolkit helped the police to recognise signs of sexual exploitation and abuse, and a booklet about risks to young people on the internet had been produced for police officers as well as schools and parents.

A series of creative tools supported the police in their efforts to engage young people and increase the chances of nipping problems in the bud and diverting young people away from more serious crime. "Yellow Cards", for example had been introduced by the police as warnings for young people causing nuisance for the first time. These cards were distinctive and written in child-friendly language: "*Chill out, okay? No nuisance!*" If the police gave a young person a Yellow Card, they also called or informed the child's parents. The Yellow Card was logged on the police national computer and the next time the child caused nuisance or committed a crime, he or she was given a fine.

Community Policing

Poor relationships between the police and some communities were a concern for many I spoke to, particularly in Sweden, where the riots earlier in the year shone a light on the level of anger directed at the police from some people within the poorer suburbs of Stockholm, and in France, where hostility towards the police in certain suburbs made it very difficult for them to operate there.

All those I spoke to in the Netherlands were strong advocates of local, community policing, and frequently mentioned this as one of the reasons why they had not seen riots similar to those in England, France and now Sweden. They described examples of highly effective local police officers who understood community dynamics, including amongst particular immigrant communities, and who could explain the thinking behind a particular police operation or policy to the local community in a way in which it was understood and trust was maintained. I heard about one police officer in East Amsterdam who would 'mediate' between his colleagues and young people from the neighbourhood who were complaining about their treatment by the police.

Rostami and Leinfelt also make a strong argument for proactive, community-oriented policing and point to the research base suggesting that random police patrol is of limited or no impact: "...*random patrol is a waste of time if your outcome is crime rate, citizen satisfaction and fear, or response time.*"²⁰ They are strong advocates of police interaction with communities and the need for a custom-designed police response.

I encountered several examples of the police working alongside local people to reduce community tension and to help build bridges through community patrols. These varied significantly in their level of professionalisation. It is fair to say that all were somewhat controversial, with police colleagues in particular expressing some doubt about their

²⁰ Ibid. p.59

effectiveness or outright concern about the approach. Others were strong advocates of this approach as a way of engaging communities and developing positive community role models.

The Calm Streets initiative in Stockholm was developed and delivered by the Fryshuset youth centre. The project started in 1995 within the public transport system, with the primary objective of providing a bridge to the labour market for people from deprived communities. Around 30 people were employed and trained as wardens to offer reassurance and prevent crime and antisocial behaviour in metro stations. When I visited, there were 120 wardens around Stockholm, funded by schools, the Stockholm public transport provider (SL), landlords and local councils (for wardens to patrol high-crime suburbs).

Calm Streets wardens were trained in skills including youth leadership, group dynamics, managing conflict and anger management, as well as in law and order. They were often ex-offenders, and the risk around this was managed through the strength of the Calm Streets network and through support offered by Fryshuset.

More recently, Fryshuset had sought to engage young people in the Calm Streets initiative. Their efforts were particularly directed at young people at risk of gang involvement or involved in gangs, as a way of offering them an alternative lifestyle. A trainee programme had been developed for 18-20 year olds, which resulted in a diploma, graduation ceremony and award of the wardens' jacket. Although trainees were not paid, the investors in the project provided some funding for activities to reward them for their work.

Although the project leaders told me that the relationship with the Stockholm police was very good overall and that senior leaders had been supportive of the project, relationships with the police at an operational level were still challenging at times. Some of the police officers I spoke to expressed scepticism and some concern about the Calm Streets wardens being "too close" to the communities they worked in. Elaborating on this, they felt that there was an inherent risk of dishonesty or simply of knowing the person or the family and being unwilling to pass information to the police or take appropriate action.

Others I spoke to were very supportive of the initiative. They felt that there was real value in the relationships that the wardens had to the communities they patrolled. The combination of this and the training in communication skills and thinking preventatively meant that they could spot problems and use their networks to calm situations. The teams patrolling Stockholm city centre were seen as particularly valuable by some of the police officers I spoke to, not least in terms of gathering information and intelligence.

In Amsterdam, I heard about Youth Prevention Teams. These teams had started very organically from within communities in the west of the city, and were now funded by the local authority. Young people from within communities were recruited to patrol the area on bikes, picking up signs of trouble and intervening to keep things calm. They were paid a small amount of money to do this. The council official I spoke to was very positive about these teams and their impact within neighbourhoods. She felt that tension had generally reduced, and relationships with the police had improved. The local police were very supportive, even though this project was not yet mature enough to enable the passing of intelligence from the teams to the police.

Finding the right people to lead the Youth Prevention Teams was seen as critical to the success of this initiative. These people needed to be well known in the area and have the respect of the community. The local authority tried to let this emerge naturally in the spirit of the original projects in the west of the city. For example, they had approached a local football coach working well with young people to offer him extra funding to work with them within a Youth Prevention Team. There was no difficulty in recruiting the young people, due to relatively high levels of unemployment: In fact, there was a waiting list. Young people wanting to be part of a Youth Prevention Team were screened by the local authority and the police, but offending was not a problem so long as the young person could demonstrate his or her intention to leave that lifestyle.

Alongside these Youth Prevention Teams, Street Coaches also worked within deprived communities in Amsterdam. These were funded by the local authority and provided by a local security company. They did not have any police powers, but were trained professionals and were expected to pass intelligence and information to the police. The relationship between Youth Prevention Teams and Street Coaches was difficult at times, but the local authority was confident that this would improve as the Youth Prevention Team project developed.

Implications for policy and practice development

When I embarked on my study I was somewhat sceptical about the impact of enforcement-led approaches to reducing youth violence. However, my visits and meetings made me realise that there was a place for hotspot policing and intelligence-led enforcement strategies. Of course the disadvantage of these approaches on their own can be that they further alienate communities which are already mistrustful of the police and other statutory services. Projects which sought to involve the community in policing, such as Calm Streets, were still relatively new and opinion on their overall effectiveness was mixed. However, I did not find many people who argued against the importance of a visible, local policing presence within communities to help break down barriers and increase trust.

Working with Group B: Diversionary approaches

If we accept the argument that there are a group of young offenders who have less entrenched problems and are influenced by environmental factors including peer pressure, then this starts to shed light on why some young people respond well to attempts to divert them from the youth justice system or from custody, whilst others do not. Diversion means different things to different people, but during my trip I heard about projects aimed at working with young people to help them avoid entering the youth justice system or, once they had come to the attention of the courts, to avoid more serious offending and custody.

Multi-agency, community based projects

In Amsterdam, I heard about a council-led Youth Project working with communities in the East of the city to tackle nuisance youth groups. The project was seen as responding to local concerns and was designed around the need to build relationships between statutory services and the local community. Local authority staff, youth workers and police met fortnightly to discuss concerns raised by members of the public or statutory services about particular young people. These concerns could be as simple as a child having been seen out and about with older children or those known to be involved in crime. The team decided on a plan in response to each concern, which could include environmental changes, group interventions (activities, youth work or sport for example), and more specific interventions around particular individuals. It could also include home visits, and robust conversations with parents about the activity the young person was involved in. The project team acted slightly outside of mainstream youth services: “*We inform them, but we do it anyway*” (Project co-coordinator), but was council-led and so able to refer into mainstream services, including further family support, as appropriate.

The project was relatively new and so had not been evaluated, but the project coordinator pointed to successes with ‘first-timers’ or younger children in particular. The relationship with the community was seen to be particularly important. The project team could input into the multi-agency discussion (the “Safety House”) that took place after a young person had been charged with a crime and before he or she was sentenced, allowing the local impact of the child’s behaviour or other local dynamics to be taken into account. By the same token, the project co-coordinator told me that post-custody monitoring was greatly helped by the existence of the local team, who could “*keep an eye out*” for the young person in the community.

In Stockholm, there was a multi agency Community Intervention Team in every local area which aimed to prevent the recruitment of vulnerable young people into gangs or organised crime groups. This was part of a national programme, led by the Ministry of Justice and informed by the Youth Offending Team model in England and Wales.

If a professional (for example a teacher or a police officer) was concerned about the behaviour of a young person then the team would work with them. This may be before the young person had committed a crime: a teacher may refer a child who was truanting from

school, or a police officer may refer a child who was seen hanging around with a group of known offenders for example. Engagement was voluntary, and those I spoke to felt strongly that this was key to its success. The offer of support was made to the young person and his or her parents by a social worker. If both the young person and his or her parents accepted the offer, they signed a consent form which allowed information to be shared between the agencies (social services, the police, voluntary organisations, the school, health agencies and employment agencies).

During my trip, I met the co-ordinator of the Community Intervention Team in Kista, a deprived suburb of Stockholm. She described the situation in the suburb: around 90 per cent of residents of foreign origin, high unemployment, high levels of trauma and poor mental and physical health, and a sense of isolation, especially amongst women who did not have the chance to learn Swedish. Criminality and drug use was very high amongst local young people, as were levels of robbery, assault and gang rape. Gang activity in the suburb centred on organised crime, with gangs using children as young as 12 to run errands for them connected to drugs markets. The co-ordinator also described 'wars' between young people, over territory, drugs or revenge, which all too often resulted in shootings or stabbings. Forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honour-based violence were also problems within the area.

The project co-ordinator was very positive about the approach, both in terms of individual outcomes for the young people and in terms of broader, unexpected impact. She had found that organised criminals or gang members would leave the young people alone if they knew that they were being worked with by the team. Young people were open about the fact they were involved with the team, and everybody within the community knew who the social workers were. The police were also very positive about the impact on their relationship with the young person and with the wider community.

The Community Intervention Team approach certainly seemed to be achieving results, but the response was driven by the need to improve statutory service engagement with deprived communities and my sense was that the most striking results were around improved community relations. The team in Kista was clearly working with young people with very complex problems and appeared to have succeeded in terms of engaging these young people but was, of course, reliant on further specialist support to really turn their lives around.

The Dutch Halt penalty

The *Halt* ("the alternative") programme in the Netherlands was an interesting example of offering young people a 'last chance' before entering the youth justice system. This programme was a part of the Dutch Penal Code and had been in existence for over 25 years. Juveniles aged between 12 and 18 who had been apprehended by the police for minor crimes such as theft or nuisance behaviour could be referred directly by the police, or by the public prosecutor. Those who accepted a Halt penalty avoided a criminal record. Each year, some 22,000 juveniles were referred to Halt. Young people could only go through the Halt programme twice. Halt was a private sector organisation, and the punishment element of its work was paid for by the Ministry of Security and Justice.

The Halt penalty involved a mixture of unpaid work (between 6 and 20 hours), support to help the young person change his or her behaviour, and restorative justice. Parental involvement was seen as key. Parents were involved in the process from the very moment the juvenile was referred to Halt. In turn, Halt helped parents develop skills to prevent their child from criminal behaviour in the future. Parents were asked to stay closely involved when their child needed to offer apologies for his or her crime, and repay the damage done.

The Halt programme was renewed in 2010 and now had a greater emphasis on parental involvement, closer contact with the young people and an obligation on the young person to offer apologies to the victim of his or her crime (if deemed appropriate by Halt workers).

Halt had also been commissioned by local authorities to work with schools to combat truancing or lateness, in recognition of the relationship between this and more serious criminality (it is a crime not to attend school if you are under 18 in the Netherlands). The Halt punishment for truancing was the same as a regular Halt punishment (up to 20 hours community work), but did not involve the police.

Halt had been reviewed several times since it was established, and a recent study showed that there was no difference in reoffending rates between those who had undergone a Halt penalty and a control group.²¹ The study concluded that the Halt penalty did not appear to reduce criminality or behavioural problems in juveniles. However, the study did show that over two-thirds of juveniles indicated that they had learnt a lot from the Halt experience. Crucially, and interestingly in the context of this report, a closer look at the juveniles who participated in the Halt programme revealed that:

"...it appears that the Halt programme is a more appropriate intervention for group offenders who are susceptible to group pressure than for offenders who act on their own. Juveniles who committed a criminal offence following the example of others less often and/or less seriously reoffended."

(English summary of Bureau Beke study).

The results of a new study into the Halt programme are expected later in 2014.

Residential alternatives to custody

At the other end of the spectrum of diversionary approaches, Centres Educatifs Renforcés (CERs) in France offered an alternative to custody in a non-secure residential setting for teenagers who had come before the judge for a relatively minor offence, or who were

²¹ *Halt: The Alternative? The effects of the Halt arrangement revisited.* (Ferwerda, van Leiden, Arts, Hauber: 2006) ISBN 90-5454-758-8. English summary at: http://www.beke.nl/publicaties/halt__het_alternatief

awaiting sentencing. The typical length of stay was 6 months. CERs aimed to give the young people a sense of order, discipline and routine in their daily lives, whilst providing vocational activity and training.

I was pleased to be able to visit the CER at Aubervilliers to the north of Paris. When I visited, there were 8 boys at the CER which was essentially a house with a kitchen, dining room, television room, small gym, classroom and three bedrooms. The overall atmosphere was homely and relaxed rather than institutional. The staff comprised a director, a manager, eight 'educateurs', a psychologist, a cook and a housekeeper, and a teacher brought in to teach the boys basic skills. The boys spent most of the day involved in activities outside the house, including circus skills, boxing, equestrianism and car mechanic training.

The facility at Aubervilliers was fine, but I did struggle somewhat to understand the reasons behind residential provision that was aimed at education and activities for this group. The argument was that these boys needed a break with their home lives and routine, but I was not entirely convinced that this level of intervention needed to be delivered in a residential setting, or that this provided value for money.

Implications for policy and practice development

Diversification approaches are very much a part of the approach to youth crime in England and Wales. However, although civil penalties and injunctions provide a means by which to work with young people as a 'last chance' before entering the youth justice system, most other approaches (including the Youth Offending Team model) are about diverting young people from prison and reducing reoffending once they have committed an offence. There may well be merit in an approach like the Dutch Halt programme, which offers a more structured way to deliver a series of court-ordered interventions whilst giving the young person a chance to avoid a criminal record and a tougher penalty.

Working with Group B: Restorative justice and mediation

There is a strong evidence base behind restorative justice and its impact on re-offending. An independent evaluation commissioned by the Ministry of Justice in the UK, drawing evidence from randomised control trials, showed that restorative justice led to £9 savings in relation to the costs of reoffending for every £1 spent.²² In 2010, the UK Government published further analysis which quantified the size of the reduction in frequency of reoffending following restorative justice as 14 per cent.²³

In Sweden and the Netherlands, there was strong support for the principles of restorative justice and mediation and this was a core element of preventative and diversionary approaches. In France, I encountered mixed views and some scepticism about the workability of mediation in particular.

Schools-based mediation

At the preventative end, I heard several examples of schools-based mediation, including projects run by social services in Stockholm and by the Amsterdam police.

In the north Netherlands, HALT had been running peer mediation in schools, as part of its preventative package, for about 15 years. Schools paid for this intervention, and it was particularly popular with schools facing problems with behaviour or bullying. The HALT team trained between 8 and 10 students in each school aged between 14 and 16 in conflict management and negotiation as well as listening and communication skills. The projects were over-subscribed in terms of volunteers to be trained as mediators, and teachers selected students for the scheme based on their ability to role model positive behaviour, and the level of respect that they had from other students.

HALT saw schools-based mediation as an important part of their preventative work because of the strong message it sent about young people taking responsibility for their own actions. In common with the projects I heard about in Stockholm and Amsterdam, the north Netherlands HALT team told me that it was sometimes difficult to convince schools of the value of mediation. However, once they had been through the process, teachers and pupils were generally very positive.

Victim/offender mediation

Victim/offender mediation was enshrined in statute in Sweden and organised by the state across the country. If a young person (up to the age of 21) admitted a crime during initial

²² Shapland, J., Robinson, G., and Sorsby, A. (2011) *Restorative justice in practice*. London: Routledge.

²³ Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders*

questioning by police, he or she was asked if he or she wanted to participate in mediation. No crime was considered too serious. If the offender and the victim agreed, the mediation was arranged. The prosecutor was then told how well the offender had responded to mediation and this could affect the sentence that the young person received.

In Stockholm city, I met two social workers who were trained mediators based at the police station, within the Youth Unit. They estimated that around 300 offenders and victims each year agreed to participate, but felt that this figure should be higher. They were very positive about the benefits of mediation and felt that it and the principles of restorative justice, needed a higher profile, more active support from the police, and more funding.

"We need the police to think it [restorative justice] is possible."
(Social worker, Stockholm).

The police I spoke to were positive about mediation in theory. However, there was a suggestion that the good work could be undone at the trial, and it may be better for the victim if mediation was conducted at the post-trial stage.

Interestingly, the social workers I spoke to in Stockholm felt that mediation tended to be less effective with non-Swedish offenders and victims. Their sense was that some immigrant communities were used to the principles of mediation, but applied in a different way and within communities. They were less likely to feel comfortable and open up in a mediation session organised by social services.

In the Netherlands, the HALT penalty could include mediation and restorative justice where there was a clear victim, but this was limited to an apology and, sometimes, reparation. Nonetheless, the restorative justice element was seen by many I spoke to as the most effective part of the HALT penalty. The recent Bureau Beke study into the impact of the HALT programme showed that there was a relationship between the young person apologising for his or her behaviour and his or her future offending. Juveniles who apologised to the victim tended to commit fewer or less serious offences in the future.²⁴ The other elements of the HALT punishment did not affect recidivism.

Implications for policy and practice development

It is clear from the international evidence base that restorative justice can have a beneficial impact for both the victim and offender and can be an important part of preventative or diversionary (as well as rehabilitative) work with young offenders. It would be interesting to look at the evidence base in respect of its impact with those with more complex needs, whose offending is more entrenched. I suspect that, as with the Halt penalty, the impact is greater with those whose criminality has emerged in adolescence and is group or environmentally driven.

²⁴ Ibid.

Parental involvement is worth mentioning as a theme that emerged from my visits and discussions. Many of the interventions working with young people involved in low level violence or other criminality included an element of engaging the parents – letting them know what their child had been up to and/or involving them in the penalty. This was seen by many of the practitioners I spoke to as very effective, particularly with those who had been led by peer pressure and had not been involved in crime before, and research on school interventions confirms that, in general, school programmes for both parents and children are more likely to be effective.

Working with young people in custody

"Je ne sais pas ce qu'il se passe dans la tête des gens qui m'entourent. (I don't know what goes on in the heads of those around me.)"
(Young offender, Marseille la Valentine).

If we accept that young people can be violent for different reasons and may present with different levels of need, we might suppose that a disproportionate number of those young people with very complex needs, who have not had the right intervention at an early stage, will end up in the youth justice system. This is borne out by the everyday experience of all those I spoke to who worked directly with these young people, particularly in a secure setting. As any practitioner knows, young people in custody tend to be very challenging young people with a complex set of needs and a difficult history.

However, it may be overly simplistic to suppose that every young person in the youth justice system or in custody has highly complex needs. In a gang context, for example, we know that there are young people who, without the right support and protective factors, have committed very serious violent offences. These young people may be highly susceptible to the influence of antisocial peers (some of whom may have complex needs and/or mental disorders) yet may not have complex needs themselves and may still be receptive to education, group activities, the routine and discipline imposed by life in a secure environment, and the promise of privileges or release if they behave well. Learning to identify these different groups and to respond appropriately and in an informed way to their needs could lead to improved outcomes for young people in the youth justice system.

The nature of the youth justice system and custodial provision varies considerably between the three countries:

Sweden

Most young offenders in Sweden are worked with through social welfare programmes in the community, delivered by social services. These programmes vary in design according to the needs of the young person but may include an element of unpaid work alongside counselling or other therapeutic support.

Under 21 year olds in Sweden are very rarely sentenced to prison, and serious offenders under the age of 18 are almost exclusively sentenced to closed institutional care under the Care of Young Persons Act and are placed in secure facilities offering care and treatment. Sentences range from 14 days to 4 years, with no release on parole.

Closed institutional care in Sweden is provided in the form of small houses (of between 4 and 12 young people) offering specialist care. Social services are involved in the

treatment plan for the young person, and decide the nature of ongoing support to the young person on release.

The Netherlands

The key principle in the Netherlands is that youth justice should be swift and consistent, to help reduce reoffending and provide assurance to victims and the wider public. The legislative framework is based on the principle that every young person is different and deserving of support that is specifically tailored to them.

Under new legislation which will commence in 2014, young people aged 16 to 23 may be tried either as adults or as minors. Court judgments will take more account of the individual's development:

"Some young people respond well to a tough approach, while others may benefit more from guidance, even if they are older."
(Ministry of Justice and Security).

Use of youth custody in the Netherlands is diminishing rapidly, which I was told may be due to increased confidence in alternatives to custody for serious offenders. In 2010, there were 2,500 youth custody places (1,200 for punishment and 1,300 compulsory care), but at the time of writing, there were only 500 places overall. Under the new legislation, however, courts will not be able to give a community penalty alone to a young person convicted of a serious violent or sexual offence. Juvenile custodial establishments in the Netherlands try to deliver a balance of punishment and protection.

France

The French youth justice system is based on the principles of education and punishment set out in the legislation of 2 February 1945. This legislation also sets out the requirement to consider the personality and circumstances of the young person before sentencing, and states that no child under the age of 13 can be sentenced to custody. Young people can be given community sentences, placed within semi secure educational facilities, or be sentenced to custody and placed within a youth custodial establishment or within a special unit for minors within an adult prison.

The education element of any community or custodial sentence is delivered by 'educateurs', trained by the Direction de la protection judiciaire de la jeunesse. This role is distinct from the prison officer role, which is focused on security and maintaining discipline and order.

Working with young people with varying needs in custody

Working with young people in custody demands a flexible, responsive and individually tailored approach and it is fair to say that all three countries found this challenging. This

was in spite of the fact that secure residential units were considerably smaller than in England and Wales, and the staff to young people ratio was high.

In France, I visited the Centre Educatif Fermé (CEF) at Epinay-sur-Seine. CEFs are semi-open facilities. They were created in 2002 as the 'last resort' for young offenders before prison, when community sanctions had not worked or when the crime was serious. Young people can be sent to a CEF for between 3 and 6 months, extended to up to 12 months in exceptional circumstances. When I visited, there was a national review ongoing into the cost-effectiveness of the CEF model.

At Epinay-sur-Seine, there were 8 young people in the house when I visited: 7 boys and one girl, all from minority ethnic backgrounds. All were there for violent or sexual offences and all had difficult family backgrounds. Behaviour in the establishment was challenging. The girl in particular was finding it difficult and was displaying concerning, sexualised behaviour with the boys and with the staff. Aside from that, gang violence and territorial conflict required constant management, and cannabis use and apparent addiction was prevalent.

I joined the weekly staff briefing, where each child was discussed in turn and in depth. The 24 staff included two psychologists, who were able to share their insights and knowledge with the rest of the team. I was impressed with the staff team and particularly with the Director of the CEF. She had commissioned various interventions and made partnerships with businesses in the local community who were offering work experience and apprenticeships for the young people. The Director was aware of the psychological needs of the young people and clear about the vital role of the two psychologists, not least in developing the capacity and knowledge of the other staff. However, I was left with a sense that the team were trying to act in the best interests of the young people without much guidance in terms of the most effective interventions or the best way to work with these highly troubled young people.

In Marseille, I visited the Etablissement Penitentiaire pour Mineurs (EPM). The establishment had a capacity of 52, but was holding 60 young people when I visited (mostly on remand), and the staff: prisoner ratio was about 1:1. There were six psychologists on site, and the rest of the staff complement was split between prison officers and educateurs (rather than the dual role held by prison officers in Youth Offender Institutions in England and Wales). The establishment was organised into six small units, of which one was the reception unit and one was a unit for vulnerable young people. There were good healthcare facilities on site, but the general environment was austere, and prison-like.

The young people had complex problems and had committed serious crimes including murder and rape. One staff member told me that he was sure all the young people in the establishment had held or used a firearm. This was very much the tough end of the youth justice system. The focus on education and vocational activities remained, but almost all the young people were significantly behind in their education and had left school at 13 or 14 years old. Many had problems with reading, writing and numeracy.

The EPM was struggling with high levels of serious violence. Whilst gangs were not seen as a particular problem, there was territorial violence, violence against those seen to be 'snitches', and violence without apparent reason. Young people arriving from outside

Marseille were deemed to be so at risk that they were often put straight onto the vulnerable prisoners unit. Weapons were not found very often, but young people fashioned weapons themselves with anything they could get their hands on. Cannabis was apparently readily available within the establishment. In spite of this, I was told that relationships with the police were poor and that the police were rarely seen in the establishment. Information sharing between the EPM and external agencies appeared very limited.

I was concerned to see the levels of aggression, violence and vulnerability at the EPM. I met staff, particularly the teachers and educateurs, who were determined to do their best for the young people, but this was in the face of serious challenge. Several of those I spoke to described an environment in which the vast majority of young people were awaiting their sentence and so were living in a state of constant anxiety over this, as well as the risk of violence. The average stay at the establishment was 60 days, making it impossible to do any in depth work with the young people. On top of this, boys were transferred to an adult prison as soon as they reached 18. The adult prison in Marseille was known within the EPM and amongst the wider population for its tough conditions, and this, it was argued, fuelled the boys' anxiety and aggression.

The challenges faced by youth secure estate staff in France were certainly not unique, and there were parallels with England and Wales. High staff to young people ratios, smaller units, and violence management strategies did not seem to provide the solution. I started my study with a firmly held view that better needs assessment, tailored responses and high quality, in depth therapeutic support for those who needed it was the key to better youth custody provision, and my visits in France convinced me of this.

In the Netherlands, I visited the Teylingereind Young Offenders Institution and Forensic Observation Unit. Teylingereind had a capacity of 92, but only 50 boys were placed there when I visited, reflecting the significant reduction in the use of custody for young people. Most of the boys were between 16 and 18 years of age, with complex needs. The Director of the institution estimated that at least 70 per cent had a mental health problem and that there was a high prevalence of problematic cannabis and alcohol use. Sixty per cent of those at Teylingereind were there for a violent offence: most commonly weapon-enabled robbery.

All boys at Teylingereind could access interventions to help with their behaviour and thinking skills, and there was an underlying assumption that every young person there would benefit from treatment. There was a good diagnostic assessment for all boys. At a minimum, they were assessed by a psychologist and psychiatrist. An initial treatment plan was devised within three weeks, based on information from external agencies and input from the psychologist, psychiatrist, teacher, group leader and personal officer. Then, the treatment plan was reviewed with the young person, his parents and probation. The psychologist co-ordinated this process, and the goals of the plan remained constant.

The national forensic observation unit was also housed at Teylingereind and took the most difficult boys from across the country: those who had committed a very violent or serious offence, who were suspected of having serious mental health problems, and/or notorious cases which had caused public and media outrage. These boys were observed for seven weeks by a team made up of psychologists, a psychiatrist, and group workers, before being sentenced by the courts.

Psychological diagnoses included psychopathy or narcissistic personality disorder at the most extreme end. I was told that 80-90 per cent of those who came through the Observation Unit had suffered trauma in very early childhood. Around 70 per cent of those who came through were from non-Dutch backgrounds, and many were refugees from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. The staff I spoke to talked in particular about the impact of asylum centres, where children were held together with adults who had suffered traumatic events and could often be in a terrible physical and emotional state.

Understanding the particular problem of the individual young person and assessing his capabilities and limitations was seen as essential. The team went outside the establishment to look at the environment around the young person, including his parents and friends. At the end of the seven weeks, a report was prepared by the team for the psychiatrist and psychologist. The psychiatrist and psychologist spent between 5 and 10 hours in one to one conversation with the child themselves, and then made their assessment. The final Observation Unit report was a key factor in sentencing.

Teylingereind did not have all the answers. Reoffending rates were still high, and the facility was under pressure when I visited as a result of some recent, negative media attention accusing it of being a 'soft option'. Some of the staff I spoke to expressed frustration at the focus on reoffending rates, and I had sympathy with this. They felt strongly that this failed to recognise the complexity of the young people's needs, the failure of other services to offer the right intervention at the right time and to prevent them ending up in custody, and the realistic chances of them turning their lives around.

In Sweden, I was pointed towards a review of the research into residential treatment of antisocial behaviour in juveniles, commissioned in 2003 by the Ministry of Family Affairs in Norway, the National Board for Institutional Care in Sweden and the Centre for Evaluation of Social Services in Sweden.²⁵ This review led to the development of a treatment programme called MultifunC (Multifunctional Treatment in Residential and Community Settings), which was being delivered in nine small units across Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

The review of available research which informed the development of the treatment programme highlighted the fact that not all residential treatment programmes were effective and that some may have a negative impact. It identified three principles of effective treatment:

- **RISK:** intensive treatment has most impact on medium to high risk young people and little or no impact on low risk young people.
- **NEED:** intervention should be targeted at the known risk factors for offending behaviour: the criminogenic needs of the individual young person. These encompass family, peers, school and neighbourhood, as well as antisocial or pro-

²⁵ *Residential treatment of antisocial behaviour* Andreassen: 2003, retrieved from: www.multifunc.org/html/english_.html

criminal attitudes and values and personality factors such as risk taking and impulsiveness.

- **RESPONSIVITY:** treatment should be based on cognitive behavioural theory, but should also be matched to the learning style of the individual and take account of factors such as low motivation or feelings of anxiety or depression.

Alongside these key principles, the research review identified treatment integrity, staff training in the approach, effective management of violent behaviour and peer influence and aftercare as essential.

The MultifunC target group was juveniles with serious behavioural difficulties and high risk levels, who did not profit from home-based interventions such as Multi-Systemic Therapy. The programme consisted of a time-limited period in a residential setting followed by focused aftercare. The total intervention period was typically between 10 and 12 months, of which around 6 months was spent in a residential setting. Targets and milestones for the treatment were set with the young person and his or her family. During the residential stay there was a focus on behaviour and attitudes. During the whole intervention there was a focus on improving the young person's ability to function in school, decreasing his or her contact with criminal peers, increasing contact with pro-social peers (through attendance at a normal school wherever possible and attendance at youth facilities) and support to the parents based on the principles of Multi-Systemic Therapy. Methods employed included motivational interviewing, social learning theory, cognitive behavioural theory, Aggression Replacement Training and broader social skills training. Staff were trained in all these approaches.

Parents were seen as a critical part of the treatment plan and were supported by staff using principles from Parental Management Therapy and Multi-Systemic Therapy. Parents were trained to communicate and control the young people in a supportive way. They were also supported to establish routines around school and the young person's leisure time. MultifunC used a family apartment to work with parents before the young person returned home and used short periods of leave from the institution to ease reintegration into the family home. Support to the family continued once the young person had returned home.

The MultifunC team had a leader with overall responsibility for the unit. There was then an Assessment team, a Treatment team, a Pedagogical team (responsible for educational support and liaison with the school) and a Family and Aftercare team.

An evaluation in Norway found that, out of 220 juveniles treated up until 2012, 70 per cent had completed the whole programme, including aftercare. The evaluation indicated a success rate of between 60 and 70 per cent, measured by an absence of reoffending, a positive change in school, work and family function, and no further placements.

Implications for policy and practice development

The social and political context in each country I visited was very different. In France and to a lesser extent in the Netherlands, my personal view was that the concept of punishment and fear of public and media reaction to 'a soft option' hampered the debate around an evidence-based approach to providing the right environment and support to this

highly vulnerable group of young people. The Swedish model of diversion from custody wherever possible and intensive support for those for whom there is no alternative should be the aspiration. The conclusions of the Norwegian evaluation of the MultifunC model are encouraging in terms of the impact this can have on the behaviour of the most difficult young people.

The youth custody population in England and Wales has reduced dramatically over recent years, meaning that the current cohort is comprised of serious, often violent offenders. However, my sense is that levels of need and vulnerability will still vary considerably amongst this group. To over-simplify, young offenders in custody are likely to be a mix of group A and group B. They are in custody because of the severity of their offending, not because of the causes of their offending.

If this is right, then distinguishing between these two groups is as vital in custody as it is in the community in terms of targeting the right level and type of intervention at the right offenders, so achieving the best possible outcomes and value for money. If we learn the lessons from the group work and policing interventions described earlier in this report, then a regime based around education, group work and discipline may well have a positive impact on group B; and we know that some young people in custody respond well to this. Indeed, more intensive, psychological intervention may have little or no impact.

However, group A will need this level of intervention if they are to have any hope of changing their behaviour. This group would be better placed within secure therapeutic facilities, with an emphasis on intensive, psychologically-led interventions. With the right assessment tools to distinguish effectively between these two groups, it may be that more intensive, therapeutic facilities could be provided for those who needed them and would respond to them without any increase to the overall cost of youth custody provision, which currently seeks to be all things to all people.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is much we can learn from Europe, where policy makers and practitioners are facing very similar challenges to those we face in England and Wales. There were many examples of good practice in the three countries I visited, and some themes that seemed to me to be fundamental in terms of the way we should respond effectively to the problem of youth violence.

We need to continue to develop our understanding of the drivers of violence

The principles of early intervention are generally understood and accepted amongst policy makers and practitioners, and there is a significant amount of research around vulnerabilities that may increase the risk of later involvement in violence (or other negative outcomes). We now need to move towards a more sophisticated understanding of the drivers of violence, and the interplay between familial, health, social and environmental risk factors. Not all violent young people are violent for the same reasons, and not all will respond to the same interventions.

There would be merit in further research which builds on the work of Lynne-Landsman et al and Moffitt, as described to me by Dr van Hasselt in the Netherlands. This would improve our understanding of the different trajectories of violent behaviour, enabling further work to improve the way interventions are commissioned and targeted to ensure maximum impact and value for money.

We need to give professionals the right tools to identify problems early on

Again, there is now widespread acceptance of the fact that conduct disorder or other problematic behaviour in very young children may indicate a risk of later involvement in antisocial behaviour, including violence, as well as other negative outcomes. There is already work underway in England and Wales to develop tools to identify these warning signs at the earliest opportunity so that the right intervention can be provided. There would be real value in ensuring this work is informed by, and informs, emerging European practice such as that in the Netherlands, and that it is rooted in the latest academic research.

We need to provide effective early intervention for the most vulnerable

Identification is only the first piece of the jigsaw. Local commissioners of services need to understand the evidence base around interventions with vulnerable children and their families, and national policy makers need to ensure that this evidence base is accessible. Commissioning decisions need to be made on a thorough understanding of which interventions work best and with which young people. These costly and intensive interventions should be carefully targeted at the right children and young people, to ensure value for money.

Whilst using the right techniques to divert others from criminality

For the vast majority of young people involved in violence, violent behaviour will have manifested in adolescence and will be influenced by peer or environmental factors. Whilst intensive, early intervention is crucial for some, it is not necessary for most young people and will not deliver value for money for commissioners.

There is already a good evidence base for schools-based preventative work, policing and other interventions designed to divert young people away from criminality. Any national youth violence reduction strategy should give due attention to these interventions.

National policy makers should give further consideration to the value of a 'last chance' penalty with a restorative justice element, such as the Halt penalty in the Netherlands, given the evidence of its impact with young people who offend as part of a group. The impact of parental involvement and the opportunities for giving this more prominence approaches in England and Wales may also be worthy of further consideration. This was a cornerstone of many of the preventative interventions in Sweden and the Netherlands.

When it is needed as a last resort, youth custody should follow the same principles

Pre-sentence reports for young people who have committed a violent offence should be based on as much information from other statutory agencies as possible, and include an assessment of the child's history in terms of offending or other problematic behaviour. Information from the child's school is crucial here. This would enable the judge to make a decision on the right provision to meet that young person's needs.

For many young people who have committed a violent offence, a custodial environment which prioritises education, group work, and rewards and incentives for good behaviour for example, may well have an impact. This is notwithstanding, of course, the challenges presented in managing large numbers of violent or aggressive young people within a secure unit, or by short sentences or remand stays that mean the impact of custodial interventions is inevitably limited.

However, the key message of my report is that these kinds of interventions (whether in custody or in the community) will not work for those who have complex needs, who were displaying problematic behaviour at an early age.

Secure treatment centres should provide therapeutic support for violent young offenders with complex needs and vulnerabilities

If young people with complex vulnerabilities do not access the right interventions early enough, they may well end up in the youth justice system. Youth custody provision needs to be tailored to respond to the needs of this group, who should be identified through a comprehensive pre-sentence report, by an in depth assessment on reception into custody, or perhaps through professional observation on remand (as in the Observation Unit at Teylingereind). Custodial interventions for this group must be evidence-based, intensive, individual and therapeutic in nature, and delivered by fully trained staff (ideally by

psychologists). Ideally, this group should be held in secure treatment centres in small groups, with high ratios of staff to young people.

We should be confident in addressing over-representation of young people from immigrant backgrounds within the youth justice system

Policy makers and politicians at national and local level should not be afraid to address potential drivers of violence within immigrant communities. I believe there is a pressing need for a dispassionate look at drivers of violence within particular communities, with a view to identifying needs and vulnerabilities and designing or identifying tailored, culturally specific interventions. This should consider the impact of trauma sustained in home countries, the impact of the breakdown of traditional societal or familial roles, the impact of mental health needs exacerbated by a sense of exclusion or loneliness, and the impact of poverty and unemployment.

A final word on outcome-based commissioning

As I completed my visits and meetings, I started to think about the value of outcome-based commissioning approaches for work with young people involved in or at risk of involvement in violence, and I wanted to conclude with some reflections on this.

When I arrived in France I was immediately struck by the absence of any outcome monitoring of interventions with young offenders. The (mainly statutory) provision was simply quality checked in terms of its delivery of a prescribed service. I thought this to be a mistake, behind the times. How could commissioners possibly assess the impact of interventions without setting and monitoring outcomes?

On reflection, I can see that we constantly find ourselves caught up in the problems inherent in setting and monitoring outcomes, particularly for those with complex need. As many people I spoke to in all three countries were quick to tell me, any measure of recidivism is fraught with complexity in terms of determining the relative impact of interventions. How to know how likely an individual was to reoffend, or not, without the intervention? If the re-offending rate for a secure treatment centre is high, does this mean it is ineffective or does it mean that these young people are highly likely to reoffend whatever the intervention, due to their complex needs? What is a realistic outcome for these highly troubled young people?

The other challenge is that there is always the risk that services will 'cherry pick' by working with those young people who are more likely to change their behaviour anyway. One of the central messages I took from my Fellowship was that interventions were not, in general, sufficiently targeted at the people most likely to respond to them. This meant that evaluations often failed to distinguish between different groups. As such, it was difficult to determine the impact of an intervention rather than a range of other factors including natural desistance through maturity for example. Commissioners may find themselves spending money on an intensive therapeutic intervention that seems to result in positive outcomes and yet is insufficiently targeted on those who research suggests would benefit most from it (those with more complex, deep-rooted problems). In reality, such targeting would likely reduce the perceived impact of the project as measured by such outcomes.

Based on this, I can see an argument for placing a greater weight on process alongside a set of broad, meaningful outcomes. Commissioners should be able to commission an evidence-based intervention and to monitor its delivery in line with a set of quality standards. Away from the distraction of proving effectiveness through achieving a limited set of outcomes, providers may be freer to concentrate on delivering a service in line with evaluated practice.

Perhaps the argument against this is that it stifles innovation. Outcome-based commissioning is, after all, in part about allowing providers to innovate. So long as the outcomes are achieved, the mode of delivery is irrelevant. However, my Fellowship has made me question how far we should be encouraging innovation with some of the most vulnerable children in our society. I am more persuaded by the argument that we should limit interventions for those with complex needs to approaches that we know work. Meanwhile, as proved in the Netherlands in particular, true innovation can be found through cutting edge academic research or through dynamic partnerships between academia and frontline practice.

Biography

I am currently the Gangs and Youth Violence policy lead at the Home Office, where I am responsible for ensuring the commitments in the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* report are met and for new policy development in this area. I have worked in central and regional Government for over ten years, developing policy and strategy on crime prevention and reducing reoffending. Further information about my visits in each country can be found at: www.preventingyouthviolence.wordpress.com.

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