'Risky Youth': Realities and Responses in Young People’s Lives

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| Total no. of cases | 4 | 7 | 5 | 6 |
Concept

• Respondent group constructed as problematic and labelled (by authorities) as offenders, ex-offenders or ‘at risk’ of offending due to socio-economic factors/deprivation: key source of conflict/tension.

• Increasing and varied interventions shaped by the political rhetoric of punitiveness resulting in a climate of regulation, criminalisation, stigma and reduced life chances.

• Young people’s responses? What form does response/reaction take? - resistance, apathy, ambivalence
Data collection and analysis

• Fieldwork conducted in bursts between Jan 2017 and April 2018
• 21 individual interviews with young people aged 13-30.
• 3 group sessions with 12 young people aged 14-29 taking part in photo-workshops.
• Participant observation at 35 events producing field diary entries.
• Young people accessed via
  • drop-in voluntary support groups ‘youth clubs’ for young people ‘at risk’ in ‘troubled’ neighbourhoods
  • a mandatory arts programme for young offenders serving sentences (run by a 3rd sector arts-in-criminal-justice-group employed by the Youth offending Service)

Analysis: data transcribed, anonymised and coded using NVivo 11
Interview Respondents

- Wide scope of experience within the group; range of engagement with authority; complex biographies.
- All respondents have experiences of deprivation, varied individual and social problems.
- 21 interviewees:
  - 10 female, 11 male
  - 12 white British, 6 Black or Black British, 3 shared heritage
  - 5 employed, 9 in education (full or part-time), 7 unemployed
  - 9 ‘looked-after’ children (current or at some time previously)
  - 6 currently subject to a criminal order – YRO, some with HDC
Creative outputs

- Documentary artist’s drawings
- Art-based activities and video

• Photo Elicitation:
  1. Identity, place
  2. Resilience, control
     • things that make you feel safe/secure, things that make you happy
     • things that control you, things you’d like to change.
Emerging themes

• Complex biographies including significant trauma – closely tied with identity
• Multi-layered relationships with authority (and others)
• Stigma, injustice and the ‘label of fail’
• Resistance, acceptance and apathy – responses to control and perceived injustice (including opportunities for, and barriers to, agency)
Biography

• Common experiences around poverty of opportunity, deprivation, multi-layered often negative relationships with authority, poor self-image.

• Varying degrees of challenges experienced by the respondents:
  • poor schooling and exclusion;
  • disengagement with school/training/work - NEET;
  • lack of family/lack of support from family;
  • criminal record;
  • Currently subject YRO - HDC tag;
  • history of trauma:
    • emotional, sexual & physical abuse;
    • bereavement;
    • living in care & moving between homes;
  • early motherhood - children taken into care;
  • addictions.
Realities: Stigmatisation and the disgust agenda

- Theorising stigma: from Goffman to new conceptualisations of stigma as power (Tyler, 2018; Link and Phelan, 2001).
- The disgust agenda
- Narratives of stigma and disgust
  - How it was experienced? – examples of active stigmatisation, discrimination, shaming- the label of fail
  - How was it felt?– wider sense of discrimination, shame, awareness and unease
  - What were young people’s responses?
Stigma

• Experienced in some relationships with authority, older generations. Impacts on sense of self.

• Visible and hidden stigmas (perceived stigma, possible stigma)

• Treated as problematic – examples of police treatment, poor relationships with teachers, social workers – prejudicial, negative and normative discourse- young offender/young mother/young disengaged person. (Not just excluded but despised)

• Impact on capacity for resilience
Identity and self-image

• Identity: criminal; troublemaker; problem (*social abjection; challenges to social order*)

• Gaining confidence through friendships, partners, positive relationships with voluntary workers
Relationship with authority- a sense of disgust

- Mostly problematic relationships with authority: police, social workers. More positive depiction of relationships with voluntary organisation support staff.

- Police: descriptions of excessive control—heavily policed, heavily regulated— an exercise in youth social control. Clear sense of a ‘them’ and ‘us’, descriptions of police heavy-handedness, police over-surveillance. Frustration with police, hostility, problematic relationships. They don’t listen before they act. Lack of trust in police, and lack of trust from police.

- Social workers (described by young care leavers) - again, they don’t listen, are in control of major decisions that affect the YP - serious consequences eg removal of child. No respect for YP opinions, judgemental, YP feel they are not trusted.
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On the police:

• I just can't be bothered with them. They hurt my ears…. They won't listen to me anyway, they'll think that I'm lying or something. And they chase us for no reason; follow us for no reason. When we’re just riding our bikes they actually ride behind…. They're grown men – don't they have nothing better to do?

• (Troy, aged 13)
Responses: to stigma and disgust

- Shame (and concealment)
- Resistance
- Ambivalence and apathy
- Anger

- Action, inaction - agency
Agency: Action and inaction

• patterns of resilience (and survival): huge range of responses:
  • refusing to participate;
  • withdrawal from what’s expected;
  • avoiding contact with authorities;
  • planning for the future - jobs, careers;
  • creativity, descriptions of activities - dancing, music, art;
  • anti-authority/anti-society action - criminal and anti-social behaviour;
  • marginalisation as an enabler – fighting back
  • generative activity – giving back
• Most were individual, not organised,
• Actions were often a response to situated injustice
Lack of engagement with organised activities.
Non-participation, apathy
Engaging with the rules, and with authority. Self-regulation, engaging with the activity
Fighting back and giving back

- (Talking about YOT) “Some of them are all right, but they don’t fucking listen. So, I don’t... It’s like, when I say, when I say to someone, “I cannot be arsed,” trust me, do not tell me to do something 'cause I’ve just told you I cannot be arsed.” (Liam)

- So right now, I’m pushing as many people as I can to get off their arses, to motivate themselves and do something with their lives. If you’re sat at home, you’ve got a talent, I’ll find as many things as I can do. I’ll even let you join my entrepreneur group. If you’re good at drawing you can come join me. I’m trying to motivate as many young people as possible to do something. Because I don’t want us to get pushed into a box or formed into a place that you don’t have to be in, you don’t have to be there” (Becki)
Song and video created by young people attending Salford's Summer Arts College in 2017. With thanks to Salford Youth Offending Team and all the staff at TiPP.

https://youtu.be/CY1BvwmQo04
Change

• Some evidence of motivations for change, desire for change (desistance from crime, regain custody of child, become a good mother, get a job) innovative potential and some personal success BUT ...

• For some (esp those with a criminal record), low transformational capacity: individual and group

• structural barriers to change: housing, schooling, job market, lack of pastoral support, lack of earnings, lack of opportunities, stigma, lack of trust from/in authorities,

• challenging circumstances, struggle for recognition, struggle to manage self, struggle to meet the requirements of adult (authority) expectation
Where does this lead us?

• Key barriers to change:
  • Poverty of opportunity
  • Social abjection
  • Labelling by authorities - stigma
• Young People are cognitive of inequality, poverty of opportunity, and the discourses of abjection that marginalise them.

• Catalysts for change:
  • Positive relationships
    • Authority
    • Friendships
  • Opportunities to be creative
  • Recognition of alternative engagement
  • REDUCING STIGMA