MSc International Development

University of Edinburgh

The Role of Youth Work in Crime Prevention

In collaboration with YouthLink Scotland

August 2023

Abstract.

This study aims to contribute to the Youth work field by providing valuable insights into the impact of youth work on crime prevention. To achieve this goal, the study uses a qualitative approach to understand the role of youth work, focusing on narratives from seven youth workers. Chapter 1 critically compares the Risk Factor Paradigm and social and developmental approaches to understanding youth crime. Chapter 2 explores the complexities of youth crime and emphasises the importance of including the perspectives of young people. Here, Youth work emerges as a crucial approach to understanding youth crime and empowering young people with the tools to resist criminal involvement. Chapter 3 compares the factors influencing and surrounding youth crime found by The Edinburgh Study with the testimonies of youth workers. Chapter 4 highlights youth workers' role in preventing crime by offering universal services, positive experiences, support for identity discovery, and being reliable adults for young people. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the impact of youth work on crime prevention, highlighting the critical role of youth workers in supporting young people and preventing crime.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors, Emily and Gerhard, for their invaluable guidance and support throughout this journey. Their understanding and kindness have been pivotal in shaping my work. I also thank the youth workers who generously shared their experiences with me. Your dedication and passion for your work are truly inspiring.

Agradezco profundamente a Ricardo, cuyo apoyo incondicional ha sido mi roca durante este proceso.

Por último, pero no menos importante, con todo mi cariño dedico esta disertación a mi familia. Gracias Isaac, Esther, Brenda y Diana por apoyarme en mis sueños de manera incondicional. Cada uno de ustedes ha sido un pilar fundamental en este camino, sin su constante apoyo y amor, este logro no sería una realidad. Valoro cada llamada y cada buen deseo que me han enviado desde la distancia. Finalmente agradezco a Eugenia, por simplemente existir en mi vida.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.

Youth work is going through a challenging time in Scotland, with an increasing demand to demonstrate measurable outcomes while facing significant reductions in resources (Fyfe et al., 2018, p. 5). In this context, this research aims to contribute to the field of Youth work. Firstly, the dissertation aims to enhance the body of evidence related to Youth work outcomes, with a specific focus on its role in crime prevention. Furthermore, this contribution holds significance, considering the continued use of outdated theories in certain studies and programs aimed at young people.

Through a comprehensive review of academic literature, NGO reports, and UK policy, this dissertation explores the factors that contribute to young people's criminal involvement. Furthermore, it aims to understand the role of Youth work in mitigating these factors and keeping young people away from criminal involvement. Therefore, the dissertation revolves around the critical question of Youth work's role in crime prevention among young people.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to respond to this question, focusing on Youth workers' narratives. By focusing on the qualitative dimension, this dissertation recognises the importance of context-specific insights and the unique contributions of this approach (Gerring, 2017, pp. 18, 20, 31). It is essential to emphasise that the findings of this research must be interpreted within the specific context of the study and cannot be universally generalised. However, by sharing the perspectives of Youth work practitioners, this qualitative analysis offers insights that can inform practice and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of Youth work in general.

Chapter 1 delves into the conceptual debates surrounding youth crime, mainly focusing on the dominant Risk Factor Paradigm (RFP). Based on individual, family and environmental factors, this theory aims to predict the likelihood of criminal involvement. The chapter critically examines the strengths and limitations of this paradigm in understanding youth crime. Additionally, the chapter explores social and developmental approaches, which offer a holistic understanding of youth offending. The chapter challenges the notion that young people are inherently "problematic", advocating for recognising the impact of discriminatory social structures and inadequate support from adults on young people's life outcomes. This section lays the foundation for recognising the essential role the Youth work approach can play in tackling youth crime by addressing the limitations of the RFP and embracing social and developmental perspectives.

Chapter 2 delves into the complexities of youth crime beyond the RFP. It highlights the importance of incorporating the perspectives of young people themselves to gain insights into their experiences and motivations related to crime. The chapter incorporates research projects that prioritise young people's voices, stories and shared challenges concerning crime. As we progress through the section, Youth work emerges as an important approach to tackling youth crime and empowering young people, equipping them with essential tools to resist criminal involvement. In addition, the chapter discusses the debate around the role of Youth work in society; it shows arguments that Youth work can function as a social control mechanism and contrasts these with the notion that Youth work is rather an emancipatory approach. This chapter portrays Youth work as an approach to guiding young people away from criminal activities. Nurturing relationships and supportive adults who believe in them are essential for young people, as underscored by their stories.

Chapter 3 firstly explores the complexities of crime prevention, emphasising the lack of a unanimous definition of prevention and the challenges of developing effective prevention strategies. The chapter then focuses on one of the most critical Scottish studies on the subject, the 'Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime' (the Edinburgh Study henceforth), which examines the factors influencing young people's involvement in crime. The study uncovers significant components such as school exclusion, repercussions of labelling, previous contact with the justice system, previous experiences of victimisation, mental health struggles, social group influence, identity, drug use, skills for employment, diversionary strategies, and use of holistic approaches. It is important to emphasise that these identified factors do not imply direct causality but present components that surround criminal involvement. The narratives of the Youth workers interviewed will be contrasted simultaneously when presenting the factors. Finally, the chapter provides the rationale for defining the role of Youth workers in crime prevention, which will be taken up in the last chapter.

Chapter 4 delves into the role of Youth workers in crime prevention. This role is described in four categories. Firstly, there is the universal approach of Youth work, aiming to serve all young people regardless of background, fostering inclusivity and allowing them to be involved in their activities, preventing them from gathering on the streets unsupervised and finding possibilities of criminal involvement. Secondly, Youth work provides positive experiences that build resilience and allow young people to imagine a better future, addressing the lack of hope linked to criminality. Thirdly, Youth workers support those suffering from victimisation, complex family environments and mental health problems. These relationships create safe spaces that allow young people to create healthy relationships and to have adults they can trust, allowing them spaces in which they can find refuge when they are drawn to engage in

criminal activities. Lastly, Youth work empowers young people to explore their identities, fostering agency, mental well-being, and constructive relationships. This empowerment equips them to discern between positive and detrimental influences and gives them a sense of individual agency that significantly diminishes the risk of engaging in criminal behaviours.

In summary, this dissertation answers its two research questions. Firstly, by analysing the literature on youth crime, this dissertation found factors connected to young people's criminal involvement. Furthermore, the material analysed, coupled with the practitioner's testimonies, led to the description of the role of Youth workers in crime prevention, concluding that the core values of the profession, which revolve around prioritising the well-being and positive development of young people, intrinsically contribute to steering young people away from delinquency and criminal involvement.

METHODOLOGY.

Research design.

The main objective of this dissertation is to understand the role of Youth work in crime prevention among young people. Two main research questions guided this objective and helped to determine the best way to approach it:

- What factors contribute to young people's involvement in crime?
- What is the role of Youth work in crime prevention?

Given the wealth of existing literature and studies on crime prevention, this research will focus on obtaining insights directly from Youth workers as the primary information source. Therefore, a qualitative method is the most adequate approach (King et al., 2019, p. 54). According to Stratford & Bradshaw (2016, pp. 119, 120), the qualitative method is an intensive type of research that explores "how processes work, what opinions are held, or what actions are undertaken." Researchers often adopt this approach to comprehend the factors or actions leading to changes in the subjects' contexts. Therefore, this qualitative approach best aligns with the dissertation's objective.

Collaborative research

The present dissertation is a collaborative effort between the researcher and YouthLink Scotland (YLS), with the organisation proposing the research topic. Working with a national organisation provided access to expertise, data, and networks in the field of Youth work, strengthening the research's foundation by leveraging the organisation's resources. YLS acted as a gatekeeper. King et al. (2019) describes a gatekeeper as someone that "has the authority to

grant permission for access to participants or facilitate such access" (p. 59). Considering this, it was essential to ensure the participant did not feel coerced to participate. Participants were assured that their involvement was entirely voluntary to address this concern. In addition, the organisation did not hold authoritative power over the interviews because they belonged to different institutions.

Desk-based research.

This dissertation extensively explores relevant literature, using sources like DiscoverEd, Google Scholar, and youth-related journals. The YLS page and resources were also thoroughly reviewed, discovering policies, youth projects, reports, and government-related briefings. A coding system was then used to extract two critical elements: 1) theoretical debates surrounding youth crime and 2) characteristics of Youth work. These categorisations served to identify the factors that the literature claims to influence youth criminal involvement and how these are addressed within Youth work according to its principles and standards.

Review of the Edinburgh Study.

This study is highly relevant to the dissertation as it focuses on young people's pathways into and out of offending. It comprises around 4,300 young people who began secondary school in Edinburgh in 1998 (The University of Edinburgh, n.d.). Given the abundant information available from previous analyses of the Edinburgh Study, this dissertation effectively builds upon the existing knowledge and conclusions derived from those analyses.

Interviews.

Sampling.

The selection process for interviewees was established in collaboration with YLS, who agreed to contact key informants through their extensive network of Youth work organisations and practitioners. The primary objective was to engage with professionals who directly worked with young people. As Michael Patton (2002, as cited in Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, pp. 120, 124) notes, qualitative research employs various sampling methods, often using one or a combination of them. In this study, convenience sampling was the primary strategy, focusing on the accessibility and availability of participants. Additionally, the criterion method was used to ensure the involvement of individuals with hands-on experience. Potential candidates were invited via email to participate in the research, emphasising the voluntary nature of their participation and no offering of incentives. To identify potential interviewees, the following criteria were considered.

- Direct experience working with young people.

- Aspiring for gender parity among interviewees to achieve a balanced representation.

- Actively seeking Youth workers from various regions to capture diverse perspectives.

- Actively seeking Youth workers from a variety of Youth work settings.

The characteristics of the Youth workers participating in the study are mentioned below. However, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, the information is presented in broad terms.

Participant code	Sex	Location

Participant 1 (P1)	Male	South Lanarkshire
Participant 2 (P2)	Female	Inverclyde
Participant 3 (P3)	Male	Edinburgh/ Glasgow
Participant 4 (P4)	Female	Glasgow
Participant 5 (P5)	Female	Glasgow
Participant 6 (P6)	Male	East Ayrshire
Participant 7 (P7)	Male	Edinburgh

Sample limitations

The sampling method had limitations mainly related to time, as it was intended to include up to 10 interviews. However, only seven people expressed interest and signed up for the study. The time available for data collection may have contributed to the relatively small number of participants. Due to the restricted sample size the results cannot be transferred or accepted as universal, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to a broader population and may limit the depth of knowledge on specific aspects.

Development of the interview questions.

As the main objective of the dissertation is to understand the role of Youth workers in crime prevention, it was decided to use a semi-structured interview as a data collection instrument to gather the participants' input. This is because it was necessary to incorporate a variety of evidence drawn from different sources and deal with different aspects of a problem (Gerring, 2017, p. 19). Also, this type of instrument was considered beneficial as the data is

based on human experience, and an in-depth interview was seen as the best way to collect complex and unquantifiable data (Anderson, 2010, pp. 2, 3).

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format containing 14 components derived from the literature review. This approach is in line with King et al. proposal (2019, p. 64) for developing interviews based on a literature review. Each interview began with a general question about the Youth worker's role and its relation to the specific component. This format allowed for flexibility, as adjustments were made based on participants' responses (King et al., 2019, p. 63; Anderson, 2010, p. 2).

Analysis.

The interviews were carried out, recorded and transcribed through the software Teams, which YLS provided. Subsequently, the NVivo software was used to analyse the transcripts through identified codes, classifying recurring themes. This method was used because thematic analysis helps to structure data, examine different perspectives of participants, highlight similarities and differences, and generate reflections (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2; Nugent, 2015, p. 273). Moreover, relevant categories were determined based on insights from an electronic and physical reflective journal. According to Genua (2021, p. 227), maintaining a reflective journal is valuable for facilitating new learning and understanding.

Ethical considerations.

This study was conducted under the ethical standards of YLS and the University of Edinburgh. All participants were given information about the study, including its implications and potential outcomes. Each participant gave their consent prior to the interviews.

CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUAL DEBATES AROUND YOUTH CRIME.

This chapter will explore the conceptual debate surrounding youth crime, focusing on the RFP, which dominated youth crime policymaking for nearly two decades. It will also present the theories that came after the RFP to challenge it. By exploring this, the chapter will shed light on the strengths and limitations of each theory in understanding the phenomenon. The central argument is that social approaches can better understand and tackle youth crime. Firstly, the chapter will closely examine the RFP and then critically assess it. Further sections analyse Social and Developmental Approaches, offering a nuanced understanding of youth crime. The reflections made during the chapter will conclude that there are professions that combine a social understanding of youth crime and also are developmentally informed, which will pave the way for the next chapter to introduce the benefits of using Youth work in crime prevention.

According to Armstrong (2004, p. 100), young people's involvement in criminal behaviour raises concerns on multiple levels. The author states that youth crime challenges the collective belief of childhood innocence and questions the possibility of a harmonious society. However, beyond moral concerns about innocence, youth crime is a critical social reflection and a snapshot of the population's complex realities, such as poverty, inequalities, and childhood trauma (Jahanshahi et al., 2022, pp. 752–755). In addition, the media's intense focus on young people's behaviour, often with a negative connotation, has created a culture with widespread harmful perceptions of young people. This is particularly worrying because government agendas and policies are shaped by public concerns (Halsey & White, 2008, p. 1).

To comprehensively understand youth crime, it is crucial to critically examine the possible causes and the evidence surrounding this matter and avoid reliance on only public

perceptions and media portrayals (Halsey & White, 2008, pp. vi, vii). Understanding young people's experiences and the underlying motivations of their actions are critical avenues for demonstrating that young people are not problematic in nature. Rather, a central premise of this dissertation is that the presence of discriminatory social structures and inadequate support from adults can pose obstacles that hinder young people from achieving their full potential. In the next section, the risk factor theory, which has dominated the field of juvenile delinquency for nearly two decades (O'Mahony, 2009, p. 99), will be presented and analysed. This theory has been the basis for many programmes and projects that are still influential today. By analysing this paradigm, the comparison with current theories and the testimonies of the participants in future chapters will become clearer.

Risk-factor paradigm.

Risk-focused prevention significantly influenced social sciences in the 1990s (O'Mahony, 2009, p. 99). This theory aimed to identify and predict the propensity for violent behaviour and engagement in criminal activities. Furthermore, its foundation rested on the correlation observed between youth crime and a range of risk factors (Armstrong, 2004, p. 102; Loughran et al., 2022, p. 6; Matjasko et al., 2012, p. 2). The identified risk factors were built upon longitudinal studies, with one of the most worth mentioning being 'The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development'. This study was initiated in 1961 and remains one of the most comprehensive research projects on the subject (Farrington, 2003, p. 137). This study identified 150 potential risk factors and found 39 significantly linked to offending (Armstrong, 2004, p. 105).

According to Farrington et al. (2006, pp. 159, 160), the identified risk factors can be categorised into three main groups: individual, family, and environmental. Individual factors

include characteristics like intelligence, personality traits, and temperament. Family factors relate to the immediate upbringing and dynamics of an individual's family context. Environmental factors encompass the broader external surroundings and community environment. The theory is built on the idea that the more risk factors a person has, the greater the likelihood of engaging in antisocial and offending behaviour. However, as highlighted by O'Mahony (2009, p. 101), a criticism of this approach is that identifying those with a higher accumulation of risk factors does not necessarily explain the underlying reasons or motivations for people's involvement in criminal activities.

The appeal of the RFP is that it is based on what is considered scientific evidence, translating measurable risks into specific preventive actions (O'Mahony, 2009, p. 100). This paradigm considers protective factors that, in theory, can moderate the effects of identified risks, which is even more attractive to policymakers (Matjasko et al., 2012, p. 2). Furthermore, among the so-called scientific community, there is a desire to adopt prescriptive approaches wherever possible (Armstrong, 2004, p. 103). Consequently, the RFP became the central intervention paradigm. This approach was reduced to an arithmetic, verifiable operation in which the presence of multiple risk factors demanded the introduction of protective factors to mitigate their impact, ultimately leading to a reduction in crime and violent offences (Loughran et al., 2022, p. 6).

Challenging the Risk Factor Paradigm: Towards a holistic understanding of youth crime.

The RFP, while popular, has its theoretical challenges. Academics and professionals from multiple areas put the RFP under scrutiny (Myers et al., 2020, p. 58). According to Haines & Case (2008, p. 7), this paradigm is quite loose in its definitions and descriptions of the relations

between risk and protective factors. Also, the logic behind not linear and not dichotomous since risk and protective factors are often found independently (Farrington et al., 2006, p. 23). In addition, the relationship between risk and protection is influenced by different conditions, such as economic background, gender, and age. This demonstrates the complex intertwining of risk and protective factors.

Proponents of the RFP failed to address the complexity of youth violence and crime prevention and the social issues involved in them. Armstrong (2004, p. 105) explains that a checklist of risk and protective factors may not be valid for crime prevention, primarily as it arises from poorly defined and conducted research. For example, the Cambridge Study's findings were considered "universally-applicable risk factors," yet the sample consisted mainly of young white males. Despite this bias, the study influenced academic discussions and social programs in the 1990s and early 2000s (Haines & Case, 2008, pp. 8, 9). Furthermore, the notion of risk factors perpetuates an individualistic perspective, attributing the likelihood of committing an offence to specific characteristics within a person, often characteristics they cannot control, removing all possibility of agency and accountability.

France (2008, p. 6) and Armstrong (2004, p. 104) illustrate how risk factors promote the idea that individuals are the only ones responsible for their well-being and risk management, leading to a redirecting of attention and resources away from addressing broader societal issues. The authors explain this with the concept of "anti-welfare rhetoric", where a heavy emphasis is placed on individual responsibility, neglecting the role of social structures, systemic inequalities, and community factors that could significantly impact a young person's likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour (O'Mahony, 2009, p. 112). Moreover, the realities of non-hegemonic groups are often overlooked. For example, when considering young women, dominant narratives often

attribute their criminal involvement to factors like 'low self-esteem' or 'family baggage,' disregarding deeper systemic issues such as sexism, classism, and racism (Sharpe, 2009, pp. 257, 258; Pollack, 2000, p. 79; Homel, 2009, p. 2).

The RFP also overlooks that youth crime is not a homogenous phenomenon, as young people have diverse and heterogeneous behaviours (Haines & Case, 2008, pp. 9, 10). Moreover, this paradigm aligns with theories from other fields that reduce human behaviour to concrete, individual issues, for example, with bio-reductionist and psycho-reductionist theories that place young people at the centre of risk assessment, holding them as the only ones responsible for their actions and prioritising factors such as hormones and psychological conditions (Armstrong, 2004, p. 106). However, these reductionist approaches lack sufficient evidence for their validity and can lead to the stigmatisation of young people and people with specific physical or mental health conditions (Armstrong, 2004, p. 108). Considering this, a reductionist approach like the RFP proves unsuitable for predicting whether a person will commit a crime or desist from doing so (Loughran et al., 2022, p. 22). The following section will illustrate some approaches that can challenge the RFP and help better understand youth crime.

Social and Developmental approaches.

Social approaches are essential to address the risk factors paradigm limitations and provide a more comprehensive understanding of youth crime. They recognise the interconnection between individual actions and the complexities of the broader social landscape. For instance, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory offers a challenging perspective on the RFP, placing youth crime in a broader context. Delinquency is seen as a product of a dialectical relationship with various aspects of social life, including the environment, cultural settings, and the influence of

social structures and politics (Bottrell et al., 2010, p. 59; Bronfenbrenner & Cole, 1979, pp. 20–25).

Critiques directed at individualistic theories should not be misunderstood as neglecting the agency of the offender. Vaswani et al. (2018, pp. 18–19) explain that society tends to focus on the risk factors of children while overlooking the shared and collective responsibility of the family, the educational context, society, and surrounding professionals in shaping their behaviours and capacities (Colucci-Gray, 2022, p. 7). Recognising that individual agency exists but operates within a complex interplay of various environmental and contextual influences is crucial for this matter.

Another aspect that reductionist theories often overlook is the developmental stage of young people. The RFP sees risk and protective factors in a vacuum. However, understanding youth crime requires considering the young person and their unique circumstances. All professional efforts should be guided by a comprehensive understanding of their development, focusing on the child's and young person's best interests and recognising their distinct needs and rights due to their stage of life. This principle is known as "Seeing children as children" (Case & Browning, 2021, pp. 6; Creaney & Burns, 2023, p. 2), and it emphasises the importance of child-centred approaches, as young people differ physically, intellectually, cognitively, and emotionally from adults (Case & Browning, 2021, p. 32; O'Rourke et al., 2020, p. 58). Developmentally informed services are especially crucial for young people in contact with the youth justice system. Case & Browning (2021, p. 33) state that stress can significantly impact young people's not-fully developed decision-making processes and problem-solving skills. For those with disabilities or health difficulties, this impact can be even more profound because the transitions

to adulthood can be delayed or prolonged by their unique conditions, making them more vulnerable to stress.

Exploring the complexities of youth crime has highlighted the limitations of reductionist theories. While risk factors provide a glimpse into the elements that are involved in juvenile delinquency, it is a flawed approach because they fail to understand youth crime in a more comprehensive way. Risk factors are characteristics that are analysed retrospectively but do not reveal the true motivations of young people to be involved in such activities. By incorporating holistic theories such as social and developmental approaches, it is possible to understand better what factors are involved. The upcoming chapter will delve into how Youth work integrates these viewpoints. Given that Youth work is a profession deeply familiar with these intricacies and deals with them daily, it is reasonable to expect that this approach can play a role in preventing youth crime.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITIES OF YOUTH CRIME.

This chapter acts as a link between risk factor theory, which does not fully capture the realities of young people, and the crucial emphasis of Youth work on understanding youth people. To achieve this, the chapter outlines Youth work's fundamental principles and professional standards, highlighting its essential role in engaging with young people. Building on insights from the preceding chapter, which underscored the significance of social and developmental perspectives in comprehending youth crime, this chapter further enriches that understanding. Its significance lies in clarifying the core values of Youth work and establishing the groundwork for the subsequent chapter, which will feature practitioner testimonies. These testimonials will be connected to the factors highlighted in the literature regarding youth crime.

Understanding youth crime goes beyond arbitrary risk factors and media perceptions. For instance, the British population tend to exaggerate youth crime figures, distorting the views of young people's involvement in crime (Armstrong, 2004, p. 101). These perceptions portray young people as threats, justifying punitive measures by governments (Goldson, 2001 as cited by Kelly, 2012, p. 103). However, young people are more often victims than perpetrators (Armstrong, 2004, p. 103). To overcome these harmful stereotypes, diverse perspectives must inform youth offending analysis. Thus, it is essential to incorporate young people's voices, as Haines & Case (2008, p. 15) noted. According to the authors, not involving young people in these narratives undermines any crime prevention strategy and creates a democratic deficit. The following paragraphs will present studies where these perspectives have been incorporated.

Youth crime through young people's perspectives.

Involving young people in youth crime prevention discussions and interventions is essential but challenging. Literature often lacks full incorporation of their narratives and perspectives. Bottrell et al. (2010, p. 61) offer unique insights from their "Pathways Into and Out of Crime: Risk, Resilience, and Diversity" research project. This study focuses on young people engaged in low-level offending. In the following paragraphs, excerpts and stories from these young people will be shared, shedding light on their experiences and motivations regarding crime involvement. By doing so, it can be understood how crucial it is to have a professional approach that understands young people, such as Youth work.

The challenges young people encounter with crime and offences are illustrated in the following stories (Bottrell et al., 2010, p. 62). One participant stated that she was involved in a fight within the school premise to resolve a peer conflict, leading to her arrest and school exclusion. The author emphasises that while her actions disrupted the school environment, they were shaped by prior victimisation experiences. She had been bullied and beaten before, reaching a breaking point where she could not tolerate it anymore. Similarly, another participant fought in self-defence, only to be told by the police that she should passively endure any attack and then report it to the police afterwards. These stories exemplify the blurred lines between offenders and victims, also showing the unrealistic expectations imposed on young people by the adults around them.

The struggles young people face concerning crime are influenced by various factors, including their developmental stage and the significance they place on their social circles, often leading to risk-taking behaviour. Bottrell et al. (2010, pp. 62, 63) share the story of one young person who stated that peer pressure and the desire to fit in were crucial motivators for their involvement in criminal activities. Another aspect to consider in the analysis is the adult-centric

perspective of justice, in which the voices of young people are often ignored. For instance, a young person narrates an incident where he and his friend were wrongly arrested while approaching an abandoned car out of curiosity, highlighting the tendency to suspect young people based on preconceived notions. These stories offer insights into young people's struggles with crime and the importance of involving their voices.

Another study that gives insight into young people's experiences, concerns, and motivations about crime is the RECLAIM Project. This study gave young people a platform to express their reflections and concerns about youth crime (RECLAIM Project, 2020, pp. 11-20). Many of the participants highlighted the challenges they experience in their communities, where violence is prevalent. Young people stated that communities have certain reputations, and living up to such expectations becomes problematic. They feel unsafe on the streets and struggle to trust authorities due to past bad experiences. There is also a lack of hope and opportunities in their communities, leading some to resort to the streets for a sense of belonging. These young people also stress the importance of addressing underlying drivers of violence, such as inequality, racism, classism, toxic masculinity, and misogyny.

Trust is a central concern in both studies, with young people distrusting the police and professionals who fail to listen and understand their experiences. These findings highlight the importance of building trusting and genuine relationships with young people. The following paragraphs explain how Youth work can meet this need.

Empowering young people through universal Youth work.

Youth work is a professional practice dedicated to fostering the growth and development of young people. It entails actively connecting with young people within their communities and

recognising the impact of peers, culture, and the broader social environment. At its core, Youth work aspires to empower young people to unleash their true potential. Youth work embraces diversity, unfolds in diverse settings, and employs various strategies, from outdoor activities to indoor workshops, health initiatives, and peer education programs (Scottish Government et al., 2014; Welsh Government, 2019, pp. 5, 6).

Based on this understanding, Youth work emerges as a discipline and perspective that seeks to overcome the limitations of individual-level interventions in youth crime. Community-based programs, like those offered by universal Youth work, have been shown to yield superior results compared to individual-level interventions (Myers et al., 2020, p. 64; Bui & Deakin, 2021, p. 1; Matjasko et al., 2012, p. 19). However, to address the root causes of youth crime, it is essential to prioritise broader policies that tackle structural conditions, such as increasing job opportunities, ensuring universal healthcare, and promoting educational equality (Myers et al., 2020, pp. 66, 67). By adopting a comprehensive approach combining evidence-based individual-level efforts, community programs, and policies addressing social issues, Youth work can be a powerful tool to effectively tackle youth crime and promote positive outcomes for young people.

While the RFP offers the advantage of being measurable and specific, Youth work takes a broader and more varied approach, allowing for a wide range of interventions. Despite its flexible nature, attempts have been made to measure the efficacy of these activities. Studies examining community strategies, a crucial part of Youth work, have demonstrated mixed results (Matjasko et al., 2012, p. 12). Mentoring and after-school programs have shown positive outcomes, but awareness programs targeting risky behaviours have been found to be counterproductive (Matjasko et al., 2012, p. 12; Russell, 2021, pp. 43, 44) raising concerns about how reliable Youth work is (Russell, 2021, p. 7). Despite this, Youth work has consistently

demonstrated its effectiveness in qualitative aspects, particularly in enhancing self-efficacy, resilience, communication, confidence, and interpersonal skills (Edinburgh Youth work Consortium & University of Edinburgh, 2015, p. 42). Although measurability and evaluation remain areas of opportunity for Youth work (Emslie, 2013, p. 129), it continues to play a vital role in empowering and supporting young people.

Principles of Youth work.

The heart of Youth work can be stated in three principles: young people choose to participate; Youth work must build from where young people are; and Youth work recognises the young person and worker as partners in a learning process (YouthLink Scotland, n.d.). Regarding the first principle, Youth workers provide welfare and support without discrimination or targeting specific audiences (Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium & University of Edinburgh, 2015, p. 62). This is further corroborated by a study by Smith (2020, p. 7), where he interviewed both young people and Youth workers, who emphasised the distinctive nature of the relationships formed in Youth work due to voluntary engagement, leading to more impactful connections compared to mandatory interactions in other settings. Furthermore, services that exclusively target specific groups can create divisions and stigmatise those receiving the services, as established by Haines & Case (2008, p. 13). Such labelling can harm the individuals seeking help and may prevent others from joining due to fear of being labelled.

Secondly, Youth work is distinctive in its adaptability and responsiveness to meet young people where they are in their lives (YouthLink Scotland, n.d.). Instead of imposing preconceived notions or one-size-fits-all approaches, Youth work values and recognise the diverse backgrounds of young people. Moreover, Youth work is thoughtfully designed to address

the developmental needs of young people. When working with young people, the primary focus is on ensuring their safety, stability, and social support, mainly because their capacity to regulate emotions is still maturing (Myers et al., 2020, p. 62).

The third principle refers to Youth work being an equal partnership. The young person is recognised as an active agent who can and should have opportunities and resources to shape their life (YouthLink Scotland, n.d.). Because of their age, young people are often perceived as protection recipients rather than active agents of change (Case & Browning, 2021, p. 55). However, Youth work challenges this notion by creating a space in which young people can actively participate in the development of activities and have their voices heard on issues that directly concern them.

Youth work Occupational Standards.

Youth work is guided by the "Youth work National Occupational Standards" (NOS) (National Youth Agency, 2019, p. 5). These standards outline the necessary skills and attitudes for effective work in the field. While the NOS do not directly correspond to qualifications, they establish relevant competence and attitude-based characteristics for the Youth work sector. They emphasise the importance of collaborating with young people, their families, and communities to promote their development and well-being. Personal values, such as promoting nurturing emotional health and amplifying youth voices, are also essential. According to the NOS, to become a Youth worker, the person must align with specific personal and professional values when engaging with young people.

Emancipatory action within Youth work.

An ongoing debate in the social sciences, especially in youth research, is the role of social control that Youth work can play (Edinburgh Youth work Consortium & University of Edinburgh, 2015, p. 19; Lorenz in Verschelden et al., 2009, pp. 22–24).On the one hand, some argue that Youth work is an example of the ruling class and the elite exerting control over the poor through their children (Donald, 1992, as cited in Yum, 2006, p. 471). Here, it is argued that Youth workers play a role of social control by promoting specific ideas and practises to ensure young people's conformity through various "institutional and ideological means" (Yum, 2006, pp. 471). On the other hand, some academics and practitioners believe that organising with young people can promote social justice (Coussée in Verschelden et al., 2009, pp. 52, 57). Under this view, the objectives of the interventions are to provide young people with the tools to positively intervene in their communities, to promote social change on issues that affect them and to challenge cases of injustice (Yum, 2006, pp. 471-477) According to Coussée in Verschelden et al. (2009, p. 52, 57), Youth work can even be considered, if done right, as a bottom-up approach.

For Yum, 2006 (p. 472), Foucault's work on power and resistance can be drawn on to analyse the actions and emancipatory potential of disadvantaged and marginalised groups. According to the author, Youth work is an appropriate field to examine the possibilities of emancipatory action because young people that attend Youth work activities are frequently individuals who have been disempowered within society due to various social conditions. The author also states that Foucault's concepts of power and resistance are a point of reference for Youth work theory and practice. These principles generally include equal participation between the practitioner and the service user; they incorporate the empowerment of disadvantaged groups and recognise the value of social action.

This dissertation is based on the idea that Youth workers are individuals intrinsically drawn to the principles of Youth work as professionals who are concerned with the well-being and empowerment of young people; this incorporation of the principles of Youth work enables their interventions to be effective and therefore has a potential indirect effect on crime prevention. As Jarpa-Arriagada, (2020, p. 311) points out, working with young people at the margins of society through socio-educational action holds immense potential for creating autonomous spaces for social participation. This endeavour constitutes an emancipatory action in which young people learn to be responsible for their actions in a safe space. Overall, this section allowed an understanding of what Youth work does and in the following chapters, this can be linked to crime prevention.

CHAPTER 3. UNDERSTANDING YOUTH CRIME AND EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES.

The previous chapter established youth work principles for guiding interactions with young people. This section aims to link the principles to the specific aspects of criminal involvement and analyse how practitioners intervene in addressing those elements. The core premise of the chapter is that in alignment with the profession's standards, youth workers address these identified aspects naturally. In the next chapter, the role of youth workers will be defined based on the content presented in this section.

Understanding crime prevention is complex because the term is widely used, constantly debated, and lacks a unanimous definition. This ambiguity leads to varying interpretations and arbitrary characteristics that might or might not work (France, 2008, p. 3; Clancey, 2014, p. 37; Challinger, 1992, as cited in Clancey, 2014, p. 39). In this regard, Saraiva (2022, p. vi) notes that crime prevention is interdisciplinary, drawing from law, criminology, behavioural sciences, public health, and urban planning. Thus, no approach or theory is universal or better than others; it depends on the (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010, p. 15), Context-driven, evidence-based strategies are vital for tailored prevention addressing youth's unique needs.

Insights from the Edinburgh Study and Practitioners' Testimonies.

In the late 1990s, crime rates fell in some English-speaking countries in the Global North (Susan McVie, 2020, p. 1), leading to several studies seeking to explain this trend. Some scholars suggested that lowered youth crime played an important role in the phenomenon (Susan McVie, 2020, p. 1; Matthews, 2017, p. 18). Around that time, a research team in Scotland embarked on creating the Edinburgh Study. They studied a cohort of 4,300 young people who started

secondary school in Edinburgh in 1998 (McAra & McVie, 2022, pp. 4-8). This dissertation will benefit from analysing the Edinburgh study since examining longitudinal studies allows to observe the development of anti-social behaviour and offending over time and how it relates to different life events and ages (Farrington et al., 2006, p. 25; Nugent, 2015, p. 273; McAra & McVie, 2022). McAra & McVie (2022) recently published a follow-up report on the cohort at age 35, sharing critical findings on aspects that influenced participants' criminal involvement (McAra & McVie, 2022, pp. 4-8). The forthcoming paragraphs will present the findings along with practitioner testimonials, which will contribute to either supporting or challenging the presented argument.

General characteristics

First, the study identified four different patterns of criminal conviction behaviour, including a group with a low likelihood of conviction, another with a high likelihood, one that showed involvement in their younger years, and one with involvement in their adult years (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 15). According to the report, the low-likelihood group had a lower probability of growing up in deprived areas, early drug use, police encounters, school exclusion, adverse childhood experiences, and impulsive personality. In contrast, the high-likelihood group showed severe offending by age 12, police or youth justice system interactions, school exclusion, higher impulsivity, and lower self-esteem.

School exclusion.

The Edinburgh Study (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 6) links school dropout to persistent poverty and limited job opportunities in adulthood. The work of Berridge et al. (2001) supports this notion, especially regarding permanent educational exclusion, which causes identity shifts,

family issues, peer disconnect, police scrutiny, and personal challenges for excluded individuals. While permanent educational exclusion has almost been eliminated in Scotland (McCluskey et al., 2019, p. 1141), less severe exclusion still affects young people. The consensus among the participants was that when young people are excluded from school, they may face challenging situations on the streets, where they might encounter the opportunity for criminal involvement.

Participant 3 further highlighted that school could be disruptive for some young people and not the other way around as is usually thought, especially for those with neglected learning needs, which is what often led to problematic behaviour in the classroom in the first place. This observation aligns with the Edinburgh Study's findings, which indicate that exclusion often results from "undiagnosed learning difficulties" (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 36). To address this, participants are committed to innovative informal education. Practitioners 1, 2 and 6 highlighted initiatives such as barista training and teaching practical skills to balance the effects of school exclusion. This provides employability skills which may contribute to moving away from criminal involvement.

Labelling.

The Edinburgh Study highlights concerns about early identification of at-risk children leading to labelling and long-term stigmatisation, impacting future involvement in criminal activities (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 8). This aligns with critiques of the RFP, where early identification can inaccurately label vulnerable populations like low-resource families and minorities. According to Participants 3, 4, and 7, institutions like the police and education system often initiate labels, and young people tend to internalise these labels, perpetuating harmful outcomes. Participant 3 also observed instances where young people actively seek labels for

reasons like finding a sense of belonging to a group, feeling connected and seeking explanations

for their emotions and actions. Participant 2 noted that young people might struggle to break free

from these labels, especially when they come from their families' history; they might feel

compelled to follow predefined criminal paths. Participants actively seek out activities in which

they can challenge these labels and reduce harm.

Contact with the justice system.

The Edinburgh Study highlights the prevalence of prior justice system contact in adult

criminal pathways. Participant 4 further stressed the significant impact of being known by the

police. According to her, the police often have a stigma towards young people and exercise

discrimination towards them. She also states that greater familiarity with the police leads to more

attention, increased likelihood of contact, and more arrests. She highlighted how this is even

more evident in people with challenging backgrounds, which aligns directly with one of the

critical findings of the Edinburgh Study that expresses that "those persistently in contact with the

justice system are often among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the cohort" (McAra &

McVie, 2022, p. 4). In addition, a study in Manchester also establishes that contact with the

police is also promoted by racial biases and targeted at specific populations, such as minorities

and socially deprived individuals (RECLAIM Project, 2020, pp. 11–13, 18; also seen in Nugent,

2015, p. 276) This sheds light on the role of police interactions in shaping patterns of offending

behaviour among young people.

Victimisation.

Another significant finding in the Edinburgh Study is the role of victimisation. The

research revealed that individuals who continued offending at age 25 had experienced high levels

of victimisation during adulthood and were more likely to self-report adverse childhood experiences (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 26). This is also in line with what Basto-Pereira & Farrington (2022, p. 9) found in their research, where apart from family factors, child maltreatment or abuse was the most critical predictor of offending. During the interviews, most practitioners (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6) shared that most of the young people they work with have experienced some form of abuse, such as negligence, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse. This underscores the importance of addressing victimisation as a crucial factor in understanding and addressing youth offending patterns. Especially since the Edinburgh Study also states that desistance for the people who continue offending after 25 is more complex and challenging due to "the scarring effect of victimisation and lived adversities" (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 26).

Mental health.

The Edinburgh Study revealed that individuals who continued offending at age 18 exhibited higher impulsivity and anxiety scores, and this trend was even more pronounced in those who persisted in committing offences beyond the age of 25 (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 26). While the Edinburgh Study provided insights on this, practitioners did not establish a direct link between mental health and personality to offending. However, they did highlight that mental health and emotional regulation are sensitive issues they encounter regularly in their daily practice. It is worth noting that these concerns have seen a significant increase since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (P1, P2, P7).

Social group.

The Edinburgh Study sheds light on the influence of peer pressure as a context where pathways into and outside of criminal activity occur. Young people interviewed in the Edinburgh

Study revealed significant pressure to engage in anti-social behaviour because it was perceived as "cool" or as a means of fitting in. In some cases, criminal activity was seen as a form of self-defence (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 33) These findings align with other studies where young people manifested the same experiences (Bottrell et al., 2010, p. 61). The participants have also seen this in their practice. For example, Participants 1 and 3 highlighted that many young people view exclusion from school and anti-social behaviour as desirable and exciting because it gives them a sense of liberty and a certain social status. The mutual understanding between the Edinburgh Study's findings and the practitioners' insights emphasises the importance of addressing peer influences and social dynamics in developing effective crime prevention strategies for young people.

Identity.

The Edinburgh Study emphasises the role of identity reconstruction in avoiding reoffending. It reveals that those with a more positive outlook on life, and a life path away from criminal activity, had distanced themselves from their teenage friendship circles (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 6). However, practitioners held diverse opinions on this matter. Some, like Participants 2, 3, and 4, endorse the finding, suggesting that Youth work can help young people redefine themselves and form healthier friendships without being too directive. In contrast, Participants 1, 5, and 7 express concerns about risks associated with leaving these problematic groups, commenting on territorial conflicts among gangs. For them, addressing other aspects of identity first, and allowing disengagement to occur organically later in life, is a more cautious approach.

Drug use.

The Edinburgh Study also includes interviews on drug use, revealing that drug use was "normalised" among individuals and usually seen in criminal involvement. In more severe cases of drug consumption, it was linked to drug use within their families (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 35). This finding aligns with the practitioners' perspectives. They emphasised that complex family backgrounds often contribute to developing these habits. In many cases, such behaviours originate within families with a significant local reputation, and young people feel compelled to live up to this image (P2, P6).

Employment.

The Edinburgh Study emphasises employment as a vital factor in changing pathways away from criminality, especially for those from challenging family backgrounds seeking to disengage from social groups. Employment is a significant motivation for young people, offering new perspectives and enriching experiences (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 38). Beyond the job itself, the Study also highlights the value of joining new social circles with alternative activities. The research reveals a strong interconnection among outcomes like mental health, employment, social integration, and criminal involvement, mutually influencing each other (McAra & McVie, 2022, pp. 5, 18; Mairesse in Verschelden et al., 2009, p. 15) Practitioners address this component in their work, aiding young people in gaining employability skills and providing comprehensive employment support, from CV assistance to referrals and references.

Diversionary strategies.

The Edinburgh Study presents compelling evidence highlighting the effectiveness of diversionary practices combined with access to relevant services, such as Youth work and community activities (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 41). The participants also recognise the importance of having strategies to keep young people away from the streets and engaged in positive activities under adult supervision. All the participants unanimously agreed on the necessity of planning activities that attract young people, encouraging them to interact with Youth workers. Some of the mentioned strategies include playing pool, cards, providing food, and organising outdoor activities, among other things.

Holistic approaches.

Lastly, a crucial insight from the Edinburgh Study highlights that governmental systems alone cannot achieve the healing and transformation of individuals; the people within these systems and institutions play an essential role. This highlights the significance of staff training, multiagency collaboration, nurturing skilled personnel, and creating positive and enriching work environments (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 41). The research also states the value of holistic approaches that go beyond individual policy portfolios and address factors at the community level rather than only focusing on individuals. Implementing such integrated strategies has the potential to effectively reduce criminality across the life course (McAra & McVie, 2022, p. 4; Homel, 2009, p. 2).

Although the Edinburgh Study report is concise and does not claim to be a manual of answers or solutions to juvenile delinquency, its role in encouraging reflection is critical. As a longitudinal study, it gives an accurate picture of people's lives and does not rely solely on

abstract theorising or biased studies such as risk factor theory. From these considerations and the input provided by the participants, it can be seen how in each of the components identified by the literature, youth workers are involved in some way. This is because they work with the whole young person, not just with one aspect of them.

One of the key reasons why youth work is so crucial is its ability to tackle the multifaceted challenges that come with youth crime. Although not all participants are able to address every aspect of the issue due to the variety of settings in which youth workers operate, they are able to make direct or indirect contributions to the cause. The fact that these contributions converge highlights the significance of taking a holistic and collaborative approach, such as that of youth work. After all, professions that use reductionist approaches would not be able to offer the same level of insight and support as a youth worker.

CHAPTER 4. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK IN ADDRESSING CRIME PREVENTION FACTORS?

In the previous Chapter, research findings from the Edinburgh Study were compared with insights from interviewed Youth workers. This analysis unveiled key factors influencing criminal pathways, including school exclusion, labelling, justice system contact, victimisation experiences, mental health struggles, social group influence, identity, drug use, employment skills, diversionary strategies, and holistic approaches. In this Chapter, the focus shifts to a thematic exploration of these components. The analysis revealed recognisable patterns that allowed for the clustering of information, pointing to the multifaceted role of the Youth worker in crime prevention. The categories that resulted from the thematic analysis will be explained in depth in the following paragraphs.

The Universality of Youth work.

> *"We want them to be here as much as they possibly can. We just don't discriminate, and we want to make sure they're feeling part of something"* (Participant 6).

This category was mainly observed when asked about educational exclusion, previous contact with the justice system and social deprivation. In the interviews with the practitioners, inclusivity emerged as a predominant theme, with the practitioners expressing a strong dedication to ensuring all young people can engage with Youth work (CLD Standards Council for Scotland, 2022, p. 1). This is translated to the concept of the Universality. In Youth work, it entails a political commitment that rejects targeting services to specific individuals, instead

choosing to extend these services to anyone willing to participate (Edinburgh Youth work

Consortium & University of Edinburgh, 2015, p. 74).

As the Edinburgh Study showed, educational exclusion is strongly linked to criminal

involvement. This is supported by other studies, especially when coupled with other categories

of vulnerability (Berridge et al., 2001, p. 49). To address this, the interviewed Youth workers

stated their aim to create an open environment in the settings they work in, supporting excluded

students through informal formative activities (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7). This is favourable since

young people who have faced exclusion from formal education would still possess opportunities

for successful employment, thanks to the diverse pathways offered by Youth workers. As young

people acquire a broader range of skills, their prospects for securing employment significantly

improve. This favourable landscape is underscored by the Annual Participation Measure by

Skills Development Scotland (2022, p. 1), which reported a record-high of 92.4% of young

adults participating in education, training, or employment during 2022. One possible

explanation, according to the report, is due to "more young people choosing to work instead of

further education" (2022, p. 1).

While all participants stated that part of the foundation of their work is inclusivity and

equal treatment, not all participants agreed on how this manifest in interventions. Participants 1,

2, 3 and 6 claimed to treat all young people equally, even when faced with resistance initially. In

contrast, Participants 1 and 4 acknowledged that while the general approach is to treat all young

people with equal acceptance, there is a difference between equality and equity, and those with,

for example, prior involvement in the justice system may benefit from tailored interventions to

effectively support their unique needs.

This perspective is consistent with Nugent's (2015, pp. 279-280) research, in which he interviewed young people in the weeks following their release from prison. In this study, young people reported that Youth workers played a crucial role in helping them not to return to old habits and offending. Persistent interventions by Youth workers, such as home visits and offering transportation to facilities, were reported by the young people to be what made it successful. According to this study, Youth workers went beyond conventional means to truly support and motivate the young people, which was pivotal in preventing re-offending.

However, as Coussée in Verschelden et al. (2009, p. 46) notes, a concern arises within the concept of Universality. While Youth workers often engage with vulnerable populations, some young people still miss out on these activities. Those facing harsh life situations tend not to participate in these activities, even when they are the ones who could benefit the most from them. Russell (2021, p. 44), Gravel et al. (2013, p. 232), and Brisson et al. (2019, p. 5) echo this, emphasising that one of the most challenging parts of engaging with young people, when aimed at crime prevention, is identifying, recruiting and retaining the people at more significant risk of being involved in criminal activities. This reflection presents a valid critique regarding the universal approach. It encourages thinking about the young people that participate in and gain from Youth work and drawing attention to those who might not be participating.

In summary, in this category, the role of Youth workers in crime prevention is indirect but influential. Through formative activities, Youth workers engage with excluded young people and offer equal acceptance regardless of their background. These actions tackle on the identified factors surrounding crime involvement. Although youth workers do not directly stop delinquent activities, their efforts address the underlying factors that often lead to delinquent behaviour.

Facilitating new and positive experiences.

> *Some people haven't even seen the beach. They've never touched the sand. So, it's always something that we want them to experience. It gives hope to see different things in life (Participant 7).*

This category was mainly observed when participants discussed diversionary strategies, hope, and skills for employment. As young people navigate the shift from childhood to adulthood, they encounter various challenges. When these challenges are compounded by complex backgrounds such as victimisation, substance abuse or poverty, maintaining a positive perspective becomes a considerable struggle. In these instances where young people lack optimism for their future and lack positive influences, Youth workers help by providing new and positive experiences.

One participant stated that all the Youth workers' interventions go far beyond the surface level of the activities; it is not just about learning new skills; it is about helping young people to discover new things about themselves. This is supported by the work of Colucci-Gray (2022, p. 9), YouthLink Scotland (2022, p. 4) and Stein (2005, p. 10). Participant 6, a former service user, chose to become a Youth worker due to his involvement in Youth work activities. He stated that Youth work provided him with opportunities he would not have had otherwise, such as travelling and engaging in sports, leading to valuable and positive friendships. Without the involvement of Youth workers, many young people might not have access to such enriching experiences, which

play a vital role in promoting opportunities and steering them away from potentially harmful paths, directly linking Youth work to crime prevention.

The participants manifested to be aware of the prevalent sense of despair among the young people and communities they work with, especially in the post-COVID era. This, coupled with limited job opportunities, dangerous communities, and complicated family backgrounds, contributes to hopelessness (Khadim Ali & Muhammad Soomar, 2019, p. 1). Concerning the topic of crime, this goes in line with what Billingham & Irwin-Rogers (2022, p. 154) refers to as "Nihilistic violence"; they say violence can arise when life feels devoid of meaning and hope, leading to a sense of valuelessness within oneself and the external world, creating fertile ground for criminal involvement.

Billingham & Irwin-Rogers (2022, p. 154) note that while hopelessness is prominent in marginalised British communities, is also linked to crime in other regions. Mayombe (2021, pp. 10, 138) echoes this in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Briceño León (1999, p. 129) and Moya & Carter (2018) highlight Latin America's link between hopelessness and crime due to unmet needs and social violence. Literature in Asia (Gulec Oyekcin et al., 2017; Kay et al., 2009; Page et al., 2006; Stewart et al., 2005) and Oceania (Carnie et al., 2011) mirror these themes as well. Despite regional nuances, it is notable that global youth need support to fight hopelessness.

Addressing hopelessness demands interdisciplinary teamwork and Youth workers play a crucial role in this endeavour, contributing at the grassroots level. They offer new experiences, friendships and skills to broaden young people's horizons and opportunities. For example, this goes in line with the findings of the Edinburgh study, which indicate that involvement in criminal acts can be rooted in a desire for belonging. Smith (2020, p. 10) reached similar conclusions in

his research on young people and their gang involvement. They revealed that their engagement with these groups originated from a desire for friendships. An essential aspect of Smith's study is that young people discovered a similar feeling of belonging when participating in activities facilitated by youth workers, channelling this feeling in a positive direction.

Furthermore, the interviewed Youth workers unanimously emphasised the importance of diversionary strategies in removing young people from unsafe environments. These strategies are integral to Youth work. By designing activities that gather the young people and ensure they enjoy themselves and benefit from supervision, Youth workers create a safe and supportive environment (P1, P2, P6). This keeps young people away from the influence of drugs and alcohol as well as criminal involvement, at least for the duration of the activities, fostering a secure setting.

Finally, the interviewed Youth workers highlighted that a key objective of all their activities is to promote the development of life skills (National Youth Agency, 2019). The participants involve young people in decision-making roles, supporting them to practice skills like filling out applications, participating in interviews, and planning events. Through their efforts, participants help young people develop confidence, self-esteem and emotional intelligence, which might help them resist involvement in crime.

In summary, Youth work provides the possibility to expand young people's horizons through new challenging but formative experiences and go outside of the harsh reality they are living. By nurturing personal growth, helping young people finding hope, and fostering positive connections, Youth work empowers young people to make better choices, showing a possible future away from potential involvement in criminal activities.

Being a responsible and supportive adult in the lives of young people.

> *"Our primary function is protecting*
>
> *young people and nurturing them so they*
>
> *can have the best possible chances in life"*
>
> *(Participant 1).*

When discussing crime victimisation, difficult family backgrounds, drug use, and the overall well-being of young people with the Youth workers, it was observed that they play a critical role as reliable and caring adult figures in young people's lives, which is in line with other research on the matter (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers 2022, p. 222). The Youth workers interviewed highlighted the support they provide to young people with challenging backgrounds especially victimisation. Despite limited resources, they emphasised the importance of creating safe spaces for young people seeking refuge and assistance. When made aware of a young person's victimisation, the participants activated all necessary protocols. They referred them to the appropriate services, providing support and fostering resilience throughout the process (in accordance with the CLD Standards Council for Scotland, 2022, p. 1).

Furthermore, they focus on creating supportive networks around young people and helping them make informed decisions (CLD Standards Council for Scotland, 2022, p. 3). This is particularly important regarding drug use, where Youth workers manifested using harm-reduction approaches and provided evidence-based information to young people. The participants emphasised the importance of open and honest communication with clear boundaries with young people. Due to their stage in life, developmentally, young people need boundaries (Sonneveld et al., 2022, p. 363). One participant said that young people often push the limits set by Youth

workers to see if they are consistent and then decide if they can trust them; this is in line with other research on adolescents and boundaries (Batsleer, 2008, p. 61).

In summary, the participants manifested that they remain dedicated to mitigating the impact of harsh experiences on young people's lives. Ultimately, their relationships with young people are the column of their work (CLD Standards Council for Scotland, 2022, p. 1; National Youth Agency, 2019). As research has shown, the support and guidance provided by Youth workers can make a significant difference in the lives of young people, especially when based on trust, consistency, and emotional support (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022, p. 224; Wong et al., 2018, pp. 567, 572). This establishes that the relationship between Youth workers and young people is vital in desistance and crime prevention (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022, p. 224).

Helping young people explore and discover who they are.

> *"...you can spend a whole day out canoeing, and the goal is not about that. It's about all the other stuff that goes with it. It's about who you are and how you fit into this world"* (Participant 3).

This category emerged from Youth workers' discussions on young people's friendships, agency, stigma, and mental health's impact on identity. Furthermore, pandemic-related mental health concerns were highlighted by all the practitioners, resonating with the broader literature on the impacts of the pandemic on young people (McCluskey et al., 2021, pp. 56, 57).

One participant shared that young people often prefer confiding in youth workers instead of counsellors due to the established trust. The participants also expressed to use of creative activities such as colouring, mindfulness, and hand-made emotional toolboxes for helping young people with their mental health (P1, P3, P6). One practitioner reflected on the process of identity formation in young people; he said that in today's world, young people are desperate for a diagnosis, it does not matter if it is regarding their identity or mental health issues, young people seek that label to understand their feelings and actions. While Youth workers provide full acceptance of who young people are, they also challenge preconceived ideas they have about themselves (P3).

The participants stated that they collaborate with other professionals to create strong holistic support, aligning with the CLD Standards Council for Scotland (2022, p. 4). One practitioner shared how boosting self-esteem is critical during these years. He collaborates with local businesses to help young people feel confident and good about themselves, this could involve taking them to hairdressers or barbers for special events, like job interviews. This approach is consistent with other research that highlights the positive impact of youth work on a young person's well-being, particularly in terms of their psychological health and confidence (Fyfe et al., 2018, p. 14).

The Youth workers interviewed emphasised the importance of promoting a sense of individual agency among young people. To achieve this, they focus on giving young people ownership over their projects and creating a safe environment where they can freely express themselves and have a voice (CLD Standards Council for Scotland, 2022, p. 2). According to their NOS, in Youth work, the opinions and ideas of young people are highly valued. So, the participants aim to give young people opportunities to plan, organise, and choose the activities

they want to participate in. Promoting confidence in articulating their ideas and solutions, and at the same time, taking accountability for their actions and decisions.

In summary, the role of Youth workers in crime prevention revolves around supporting young people's identity formation and mental well-being. They do this by providing avenues for creative expression, fostering connections within their context, challenging self-perceptions, collaborating with professionals to deliver their activities holistically, building self-esteem and promoting autonomy. This holistic approach empowers young people to make positive choices, increase their self-worth, feel valued by others, and contribute positively to their communities, indirectly mitigating factors that can lead to delinquent behaviour.

Overall, this chapter highlights the significant impact of youth work in addressing the factors contributing to young people's involvement in crime and offending, even when their interventions do not explicitly aim to do so. Through an inclusive approach, facilitating positive experiences, providing support and guidance, and empowering young people to discover their identity, youth workers play a critical role in diverting young people away from offending and crime.

CONCLUSION.

The dissertation aimed to explore the role of Youth workers in preventing young people from engaging in criminal activities. To achieve this goal, the study identified influential theories, strategies, and initiatives from the literature and then compared those findings with the perspectives and direct experiences of Youth workers. Through dialogues with practitioners, it became clear that while Youth work is not explicitly directed towards crime prevention, it has a significant impact on reducing criminal behaviour among young people. Youth workers emphasised the importance of nurturing relationships, protecting the rights of young people, and providing care and support to prevent them from engaging in criminal behaviours. Overall, the study demonstrated the vital role that Youth workers play in promoting positive development and reducing crime among young people.

It is important to note that various crime-related factors do not exist in isolation and can impact young people's lives in interconnected ways. For example, educational exclusion can harm mental well-being and be connected to drug use. At the same time, employability can be tied to mental health, and abuse can lead to feelings of hopelessness. By considering the interdependence of these factors, Youth work can address the complete person instead of just focusing on individual aspects. Through engagement with young people, Youth work is able to comprehensively and simultaneously address multiple challenges, ensuring that young people receive the support they need.

Crime prevention is seen by practitioners as a natural outcome when the main focus is promoting the well-being of young people. An important aspect is its action-oriented approach, meaning that Youth Work proactively engages with young people, offering them accessible

support without labelling or stigmatising them. In universal Youth work, any young person

seeking the service can access support and a safe space to interact with positive role models

under non-punitive supervision (Mundy-McPherson et al., 2012, p. 226). This environment

allows them to explore new relationship dynamics, gain confidence, and discuss their aspirations

with adults outside their immediate family or other professionals they may not trust as much.

It is also worth highlighting the social influence and empowering potential that Youth

work possesses. By providing a platform that amplifies the voices of young people, who often

encounter marginalisation, stigma and dismissal due to their age, Youth workers emerge as

agents driving social change. Given that individuals exist within interconnected systems, changes

involving young people can produce positive and transformative societal outcomes.

While youth workers prioritise the well-being of young people and possess specialised

knowledge, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of their work. It is unrealistic to expect

Youth work to stop crime entirely by merely addressing the surroundings of crime involvement.

Youth work cannot solve all the issues that young people face, especially when facing financial

cuts and a shortage of personnel. However, it is safe to state that youth work can still make a

significant difference in the lives of young people by promoting positive experiences, a reliable

adult and autonomy. This can help young people develop a sense of hope and purpose,

empowering them and indirectly potentially preventing their involvement in criminal activities.

In essence, Youth work's commitment to holistic development, positive experiences and

inclusive environments not only shapes the individual lives of young people but also could

contribute to less criminal involvement. However, the field of Youth work has faced challenges

in recent years. Due to the need of funders and policy-makers for tangible evidence translated

into numbers, often related to specific interventions, Youth work is sometimes perceived as less important than other professions. Across the UK, budget cuts are being made to Youth work programmes without realising that this deprives young people of the opportunity to have a supportive adult, to engage in new experiences and to discover their identities and motivations in life. To address these challenges, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations.

The dissertation primarily recommends advancing the understanding and effective management of knowledge about youth work. Although progress has been made in evaluating the impact of youth work in recent years, the literature review highlights the need for more illustrative anthropological success stories that depict the operational dynamics of youth workers. Future research could delve deeper into the interactions between youth workers and young people, particularly regarding crime prevention, as exemplified by Nugent's work in Chapter 4. Additionally, incorporating youth voices in future research is essential for academics to grasp the genuine impact on young people's lives beyond standardised tests used in longitudinal studies.

It is crucial to acknowledge the broader challenges that the youth work sector faces due to financial cuts. These cuts have created a pressing need for innovative approaches to sustain and develop effective youth work practices and research. Strengthening collaboration with universities could present a promising path forward. This collaborative effort could bridge the gap between practical youth work experiences and academic insights, addressing the scarcity of comprehensive academic publications in this domain. However, it is also essential to recognize that measuring the outcomes and impacts of youth work interventions and approaches poses challenges. The flexible nature of youth work interactions makes capturing the outcomes of these

interventions difficult, especially in the academic field where quantitative methods are highly regarded. Adequate funding is crucial to support comprehensive research initiatives that can illuminate the direct approaches of youth workers in practice.

Another crucial recommendation is to address the issue of young people facing exclusion from education, which is closely intertwined with their involvement in criminal activities. The proposal suggests the integration of youth workers into all formal educational settings. By acknowledging the positive impacts of youth workers on the lives of young people, governments and schools would act in the best interests of young people by endorsing this idea. Nevertheless, not all school settings might have the necessary resources to accommodate youth workers. To effectively address this challenge, proactive measures involve training teachers, counsellors, and relevant staff in youth work principles. While recognising that the unique rapport established by youth workers cannot be entirely replicated, teachers and staff can incorporate youth work principles to comprehend better the effects of exclusion and the reasoning behind preventing it.

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