

Factors are most commonly linked to youth offending psychology essay



The objective of this paper is to critically evaluate the risk factors associated with youth offending and assess the offender management tools in place to reduce re-offending.

High levels of crime have been a matter of concern for many years, especially in relation to juvenile offending. Finding ways to prevent children and young people becoming involved in criminal and anti-social behaviour has become a policy priority. It is the aim of this paper to investigate the risk factors that contribute to youth offending and evaluate whether that risk is being reduced in order to minimise the probability of recidivism. Also subject to analysis will be offender management tools and government policy, to evaluate whether children and young people are being safeguarded from risk and ultimately criminal behaviour.

To ensure a comprehensive and detailed study, the following objectives have been set and upon completion will ultimately provide understanding and insight into ' What risk factors are most commonly linked to youth offending and what is being done to minimise this risk in order to reduce re-offending?'

In order to answer this question the research will -

Examine in depth the multitude of risk factors that lead to the initial crime

Research risk factors that are associated to youth re-offending in the criminal justice system and analysing the differing theories in this area.

Research risk factors that are associated to youth re-offending outside of the criminal justice system and analysing the differing theories in this area.

Analyse the risk and offender management tools put in place to reduce re-offending and the associated policy changes over the past decade.

Literature review

To enable objectives 1 – 4 to be met, the following section will review the literature of risk factors in relation to youth offending and recidivism.

When researching the terms risk and youth it is apparent that they have become synonymous (Green et al., 2000). Research in this area sees the perception of young people being seen as either ‘at risk’ or as ‘posing a risk’ (Armstrong, 2004, 2006). Kazdin and colleagues (1997) note that a risk factor predicts an increased probability of later offending. Risk factors can be described as factors which ‘either individually or in combination render children’s failure to thrive more likely’. (Howard et al, 1999).

It is apparent that the concept of risk is much debated and clearly a cause for concern. With this in mind, the following literature review will outline the key themes, concepts and debates which will be further analysed in the latter part of this research.

Due to the extensive literature in this review, headings have been used which in turn have their own subheadings.

School Risk Factors

It is argued that many predictors of delinquency and criminality can be found within schools, these include early anti social behaviour, educational failure and low commitment to school. (Home Office 2008).

Aggressive behaviour and bullying

Woodward and colleagues found that young males who demonstrate aggressive behaviour when they start school are at a greater risk of becoming involved in crime and antisocial behaviour later in life (Woodward and McVie 2001). There is a link between early and persistent anti-social behaviour by boys, (more than in girls) findings show an increased risk of illegal drug taking, violent behaviour and overall delinquency (Loeber and Hay 1996). The risk of later delinquency is said to be amplified when aggressive behaviour in the early years of primary education is combined with hyperactivity, isolation or withdrawal. (Kellam and Brown 1982)

Farrington defines bullying as ' the repeated oppression of a less powerful person by a more powerful one'. Bullying is a common problem within schools and indicates the risk of continued behaviour in later life, consequently leading to violent behaviour. (Farrington 1993a). An example of this was found in a Norwegian longitudinal study which found that 60% of recognised school bullies had had a criminal conviction by the age of 24; the researchers also discovered that bullies are four times more likely to be repeat offenders in comparison to non bullies. (Olweus, 1991).

Lack of commitment to school and truancy

It has been argued that children who feel alienated from school are at an increased risk of committing crime or participating in antisocial behaviour. (Graham 1988). An example of this is the findings from an American study in the context of drug misuse; it suggests that children who lack commitment

towards school are at greater risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and adolescence. (Gottfredson, 1988; Johnston, 1991).

Truancy is a measurable and researched indicator of student alienation which has a strong association with juvenile offending. In the Cambridge Study it was found that between 44% and 48% of truants in secondary education were offenders, compared with 14% to 16% of non truants. (West, 1982). This distinction was found to be continued into adulthood. (Farrington, 1996a). It appears that the link between truancy and delinquency is not straightforward, when thinking in terms of cause and effect it is easy to assume that truancy leads to delinquency, but it is likely that delinquency leads to truancy as well. (Graham, 1988). However, surveys have found that truants rarely offend during school hours. (Ekblom, 1979).

Low intelligence

In a study conducted in Sweden it was found that the pre-school boys in their sample who scored less than 88 in an IQ test were most likely to become frequent adult offenders compared with those with an average score of 101 for non-offenders. The authors also note that the results remained the same even after controlling for social class. (Stattin and Klackenber-Larsson, 1993). Similar findings were established in the Cambridge Study, in a non-verbal intelligence test the boys (age 8 and 10 years) who scored less than 90 were found to be twice as likely to be convicted as juveniles than others in the sample. (Farrington, 1992a). The author also found that the results were the same even after controlling for variables such as large family size and low family income. (Farrington, 1990). The Cambridge study also

uncovered that their low attainment and poor IQ scores at school was an indicator as to their involvement in crime. Farrington (1996) concludes that the offending behaviour could be due to an impaired ability to foresee the consequences of their actions and a lack of empathy for their victims.

Family Risk Factors

Parental competence and discipline

Childhood delinquency has been linked with a combination of factors in association with upbringing and parenting styles.

A study of teenage mothers was conducted with a data set consisting of findings from four longitudinal studies. It was found that teenage mothers were most likely to lack parenting skills, and that an increased probability of the child to perform badly at school was present that ultimately resulted in delinquency (Morash and Rucker, 1989). Children who experience poor supervision by their parents are commonly linked with criminality, findings show that 'early onset' offending is also an important factor which has a strong association with a longer persistence of crime and recidivism.

(Farrington 1986a and 1986b). Increased risk of criminality in adolescents is also a concern in children whose parents are highly inconsistent, cruel, harsh, passive or neglecting. (West and Farrington 1973; Newson and Newson 1989). In the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, 55% of the sample boys had been convicted of offences by the age of 32 following observations of poor supervision at the age of 8, compared with a third of the overall sample. In the same study it was also found that poor parenting and harsh discipline at age 8 was coupled with an increased risk of

involvement in crimes of a violent nature by the age of 21. (Farrington, 1978).

Other studies have linked the experience of abuse as a child with the increased risk of future violent offending behaviour. There is evidence to suggest that merely 'experiencing' the abuse and/or neglect is linked to the adoption of offending behaviour as a teenager (Benoit and Kennedy, 1992; Stein and Lewis, 1992, Widom and Ames, 1994). It has been documented in other studies that the experience of the maltreatment encountered by the victim will most likely result in the exhibition of the same kind of behaviour in the future. An example of this is that those with a history of physical abuse will be more likely to progress to violent offending in comparison with other types of criminal activity. (Dutton and Hart, 1992). Likewise, several studies have provided evidence that those individuals who have experienced sexual abuse are more likely to become sexually violent (Bagley et al 1994, Dutton and Hart 1992; Ford and Linney, 1995, Prendergast, 1991). Further to this Rasmussen and colleagues reported that a young person is unlikely to commit crimes of sexual abuse unless they have been previously exposed to some sort of sexual trauma themselves. Watkins and Bentovim (1992) give their explanation that young male victims of sexual abuse attempt to exert control over their personal victimisation experiences by becoming sexual abusers themselves (i. e. re-enactment).

Family Conflict

It is easy to assume that certain family structures have an increased risk of producing a delinquent child, for example lone parents but there is evidence

to suggest that two parent families can also be the product of risk. These include parental supervision and discipline as mentioned above, family income which is mentioned later, conflict surrounding the breakdown of a parental relationship and the quality of the relationship between a child and his/her parents. (Uttering et al, 1993; Farrington 1996).

An example of this is found in a US study which finds that offending was not only familiar among males raised in 'broken homes' without affectionate mothers, but was also found to be present in 'intact' families that had been subject to conflict between both parents. Offending was found to be less frequent among males who had been raised in intact families where conflict was absent and in single parent families where affectionate relationships were formed with their mothers. (McCord, 1982). In the Cambridge study it was found that conflict between two parents had an increased risk of later delinquency for boys, as did parental separation or divorce before the age of 10. (Farrington, 1992a). The National Survey of Health and Development also found a strong correlation between parental divorce, separation and later delinquency. (Wadsworth, 1979).

Crime runs in the family

Risk of delinquency is increased if one or both parents have had an involvement in crime, this is also the case if any siblings have, or still are delinquent. (Farrington, 1995). The Cambridge study found that of boys with convicted fathers, 60% went on to be convicted themselves. Farrington reported that 5% of the South London families examined in the study were

responsible for half the data on family member convictions. (Farrington et al, 1996).

Low income and poor housing

The Thousand Families study conducted by Fleeting (1988) followed participants in a birth cohort up to the age of 33 in Newcastle upon Tyne. It was found that rates of criminal and anti social behaviour rose in accordance with levels of deprivation. It was discovered that within those from the most high risk and deprived backgrounds, 60% of participants were found to have a criminal record by the age of 33. It is identified by the authors that there exists a linking mechanism between crime and deprivation due to the degree of family dysfunction and stress that is often present in deprived families, the authors also draw attention to the individual temperament of the child as playing a significant part in determining future behaviour. (Fleeting, 1988). In a study of 500 delinquents and 500 non-delinquents carried out in the 1950s, it was concluded that poverty was not a direct cause of delinquency but does have an indirect effect on the ability of parenting. The author suggests that in order to reduce the risk of offending, reducing child poverty is a crucial element. (Sampson and Laub, 1994). The Cambridge study of working class boys found that a combination of different interrelated factors such as large family size, family income and poor housing conditions consistently showed an increased risk of criminal convictions, self reported offending and both adult and juvenile offending (Farrington 1992b; 1992c).

Community Risk Factors

Disadvantaged Neighbourhood

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Children who are brought up with poor living conditions in economically deprived areas and with high unemployment rates are at an increased risk of becoming involved in criminal activity including violent behaviour.

(Farrington 1991; Bursik and Webb, 1982). Park and Burgess studied the city of Chicago and its characteristics such as, social change and distribution of people within it. The authors refer to 'concentric zone theory'. This theory divided the city into five zones. Particular focus was placed upon zone two which was the zone in transition from business to residence. It was argued that the expansion of the business sector continually meant that residents were displaced and this led to the living area being the most undesirable. This was characterised by poverty, cheap theatres, deteriorating housing stock, new immigrants in the area and a breakdown in usual methods of social control. Park and Burgess hypothesised that it was within this zone that crime and delinquency would thrive. (Park and Burgess, 1925). It was also found that a large percentage of offenders belonged to a relatively small proportion of neighbourhoods. (Shaw and McKay, 1969). A comparison study was carried out in the United Kingdom; a sample of 10 year old children in the Isle of Wight was compared with children living in inner London. It was found that the latter had a much higher rate of conduct disorders. It was concluded that living in a disadvantaged area was an indirect risk and that other contributing factors were present including, parental conflict, family breakdown, criminal parents and having a large family. (Rutter et al, 1975a and 1975b). It was also found by Sampson and colleagues (1977) that living in areas with high levels deprivation and violence had a strong association with criminality and delinquency. This was mediated by the seeming lack of social cohesion and informal social control in those neighbourhoods.

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Individual and Personal Risk Factors

Hyperactivity

Hyperactivity and impulsivity are both considered as risk factors towards criminal behaviour. Hyperactivity can often be recognised in toddlers and pre-school children and is associated with restlessness, impulsive behaviour and difficulty maintaining concentration (often referred to as ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Research suggests that this disorder is constantly linked with anti-social behaviour in childhood which often persists into adulthood. (Rutter et al, 1998). A study conducted in the United States compared a group of 9 to 17 year old boys with hyperactivity problems with a control group of the same gender and age. It was concluded that those who presented hyperactive behaviour were most likely to pursue serious criminal activity. (Satterfield and Schell, 1997).

Delinquent Peers

It is found that delinquent acts are carried out in small groups opposed to individually (Reiss, 1988) and peer influences on anti-social behaviour appear to be the most common during adolescence. (Thornberry and Krohn, 1997). In the Cambridge Study, association with delinquent peers at the age of 14 was said to be associated independently with an increased risk of committing crime as a young adult, these findings also stayed consistent after controlling for other possible variables. (Farrington, 1986b).

The above review of literature has uncovered and highlighted a multitude of key risk factors that lead to crime and in some cases persistent offending. A

conclusion is far from being drawn, however it is clear that no single risk
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factor acts a main contributor to anti-social behaviour, it is a combination of factors that increase a young person's probability of committing criminal behaviour.

Methodology

This methodology will outline the methods and approaches that will be used to enable data to be collected and analysed.

Secondary Research

The majority of this research will be conducted using secondary research.

There are many advantages of using secondary data; these include the ability to access a wide variety of information quickly and effectively. Many of the existing studies will have used a variety of sampling methods and in most cases this can result in samples being close to representative. The use of secondary data will allow the analysis of a wide collection of studies with a large degree of geographical spread and subject participation. There will be the opportunity to evaluate existing longitudinal studies which will allow examination of the differing trends and behaviours over time, which is something this research is unable to do due to time constraints. (Bryman, 2008)

When accessing existing research and data from a variety of different sources the researcher must evaluate the authenticity and credibility to confirm whether or not they are 'real' and worthy of use, this is especially important when looking at newspaper articles and internet websites. Also for consideration is if the studies presented are representative in terms of <https://assignbuster.com/factors-are-most-commonly-linked-to-youth-offending-psychology-essay/>

whether they are typical or if sampling or selection methods or participation raises issue to the validity and generalisation of the results. Finally the meaning of the texts used will be analysed, ensuring the language and context by which it is written is fully understood. (Bryman, 2008)

When gathering literature in support of this study it is apparent that some of the most influential research, theories and concepts are drawn from longitudinal studies. However, caution will be exercised surrounding issues of validity this is due to a number of studies having reported a lack of participant participation in the latter years due to lack of co-operation or being unable to locate participants. This method of data collection can be very reliable if a large enough sample is used and participant numbers stay consistent throughout the data collection periods. (Denscombe, 2003).

Primary Research

Primary research will be used to formulate a case study that will subsequently provide evidentiary support to all objectives.

Snowball sampling will be used to form primary data. This method uses a non probability sample in which initial contact will be made with a source relevant to the research area and then use this to establish contacts with others. The initial contact will be using a family member. The advantage of this technique is that it enables contact with a variety of sources and knowledge bases. However, this form of research can produce good qualitative material but can be deemed poor in terms of generating reliable data that can be generalised. (Bryman, 2008)

The research will use interviews to enable the formulation of a case study. The interview technique will be semi-structured. This method has been chosen as this will enable research to be gained without pigeon holing the responses of those interviewed. The semi structured interview will involve a series of questions which will act as an interview guide however the sequence can be varied if needed. The questions will be more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a structured interview. An advantage of this technique is that there will be some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies. Disadvantages to be aware of when using interviews is that they are time consuming therefore a small sample may only be used due to time constraints and also interviews can be subject to interviewer and respondent bias. The quality of the information can be largely dependent upon the interpretation of the information obtained. (Bryman, 2008).

The qualitative data received from the interviews will be analysed and used to formulate a case study.

The primary research will formulate a case study of a ' Progress2Work' (P2W) service in Salford. The P2W assists those with a history of drug misuse to engage with the world of work and, through training, support and other interventions, secure and maintain suitable and sustainable employment. Due to time constraints and lack of resources a large scale case study will not be conducted, however alongside detailed secondary research a primary case study will provide significant findings if conducted well.

The basic case study will be conducted with a family member and will entail a detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. As Stake (1995) observes, case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. When looking at case study literature, questions are raised as to the external validity or generalisation of case study research, how can a single case be representative? This criticism is fully accepted; however the research to be conducted will be for intensive analysis and examination which will engage with theoretical reasoning.

Ethical implications

To ensure that the research does not breach any ethical issues in relation to secondary data the researcher will certify that all research is referenced appropriately and the use of words are ones own so not to plagiarise.

When conducting a primary data collection Pope (1992) outlines several general principles that should be observed:

1. Do no harm to participants.
2. Practice only with competence.
3. Do not exploit.
4. Treat people with respect for their dignity as human beings.
5. Protect confidentiality
6. Act, except in the most extreme circumstance, only after obtaining informed consent.

Doing no harm

One should ensure that all reasonable efforts have been made to identify the hidden and unexpected harm that might befall as a result of assessment and/or action leading from assessment. This includes psychological harm as well as physical harm, and the risk that interventions leading from assessment might make circumstances worse. (Bryman, 1998). The initial practitioner involved is a family member; this has ethical implications that will need to be considered. The primary research will ensure the full support of the ' progress2work' management team before obtaining information from my contact so to ensure all information provided for research has no negative consequences. It is important that neither the participants nor researchers are harmed in any way throughout this study. To ensure this, one will make certain that all permissions are granted before conducting research and that all interviews are carried out in a safe environment.

Practicing with competence

Practitioners must recognise the limits to their own professional knowledge and expertise, as well as the limitations of any tools or instruments and the boundaries in interpretation of any results. Where experience and knowledge are lacking, practitioners have a responsibility to make use of all the resources at their disposal to increase their knowledge and enhance their training in order to improve the quality of the service they provide. (Bryman, 1998)

Non-exploitation

Those conducting assessments have a duty to maintain standards of conduct in their work co-operate with other agencies where appropriate and develop non-exploitative relationships with the people being assessed. Assessment can seem intrusive and personal and it is not acceptable to use extensive procedures unless the information they provide is absolutely necessary and the reason for its collection is made clear. (Bryman, 1998)

Treating people with respect

Respect for the human rights and dignity of, and the differences in, others is paramount. Participants must be made aware of their right to privacy and this will be kept to a minimum. (Bryman, 1998)

Confidentiality

In light of government plans for agencies involved with children to increase information sharing and for adoption of Common Assessment procedures, parties providing information for assessment purposes should be fully informed about which information is confidential. It is, therefore, important to:

- identify the sorts of information which will be treated as confidential
- be aware of legislation that governs confidentiality
- make sure that all involved clearly understand the boundaries between what is and is not confidential

- develop effective mechanisms for handling documents to ensure confidentiality
- develop procedures to guard against the accidental disclosing of information

Informed consent

When conducting assessments it is vital that all participants are willing and regularly informed. Adopting the principles of informed consent is one way of ensuring that this is happening. Informed consent can be defined as happening where:

1. An individual has the capacity (understanding) to consent.
2. They have been told fully, in language they understand, what the assessment process involves.
3. They have given their consent freely without duress or undue pressure.
4. Their consent is appropriately documented.

Once the interview has been conducted with all the appropriated permissions in place, the researcher will seek confirmation that all content can be used and will allow the participants to make any changes to the transcribed interview to ensure that the content is correct and does not breach any security or work place confidentiality. (Denscombe, 2003).

Chapter?