

Youth work and anti social behaviour criminology essay



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The purpose of this research is to investigate and explore whether youth work helps in preventing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) amongst young people. It is a worthwhile task to research this specific area as there is little published research on the contribution of youth work in preventing ASB.

The research was conducted using young people and youth workers from the youth centre that I was doing my placement in Warwickshire. The data collected was a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative, however the focus of the data collection was on qualitative data. The main findings from the study revealed that the majority of young people and youth workers felt that attending the youth club helps to keep young people out of trouble. It was confirmed that youth clubs play an important role in informing young people about crime and justice issues, and that young people are likely to approach youth workers for help and advice.

The services deemed important by young people were highlighted, and differences have been recognised between the services deemed most important to provide by young people and youth workers. Issues regarding the role of youth workers were raised, with differing opinions from both young people and youth workers. It has been illustrated that young people have a very positive attitude towards both youth work and youth workers, which is very important if youth workers are to build and maintain good relationships with young people. It is hoped that this research will provide a valuable insight into the possible role of youth work in preventing ASB to those who work in the field of youth work and crime prevention.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential role of youth work in preventing

Anti-social behaviour(ASB). The topic of ASB and youth crime is one used in election

campaigns by all political parties. Since New Labour came to power in 1997 there have been numerous citations of Tony Blair's slogan 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime', especially with regard to the 'phenomenon' of youth crime.

The purpose of this research therefore is to add to the debate on ASB prevention and to investigate a potential avenue that could help prevent it, that is, Youth Work. Relatively little published research has been conducted in the UK specifically on youth work and ASB or crime prevention, especially when compared to the US where Sherman et al (1997) has conducted interesting research. It is the purpose of this piece of research to reduce this gap in knowledge. It is hoped that this research will inform both those who work in the youth work arena and crime prevention strategists in general of the possibilities that youth work holds.

1. 2 Aims and Objectives

The title of the project is 'Investigate and Explore the role of Youth Work in preventing Anti-Social Behaviour'. The broad aim was to explore whether youth work plays a role in preventing young people commit Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) or in severe cases 'Crime.'

The objectives of the research were:

To search, review and critically examine the available literature on youth work and youth crime prevention.

To determine the role and nature of the youth clubs and youth workers in relation to crime prevention

To demonstrate and compare the perceptions of youth work from those who attend youth clubs and those who act in the role of youth worker.

To establish whether youth work can be an effective means in preventing youth crime

1.3 Definition of terms used

There are debates about the precise meaning of the key terms used in this research, therefore these debates will be briefly outlined and the use of terminology justified.

There are three main terms that are used within this report that must be defined. These are: 'anti-social behaviour', 'youth crime', 'youth work' and 'young people'. These terms each have their own meanings that are debated by academics, researchers, politicians and even the media. The biggest debates regarding terminology centre on the terms 'youth crime' and 'young people' therefore these will be discussed first.

There are two initial problems that occur when attempting to define 'youth crime'. Firstly the problem in defining exactly what 'crime' is, and secondly the problem in defining exactly what 'youth' is. Muncie states the common

definition of crime usually takes the form similar to that of 'an act prohibited by criminal law' (2004: 39). Michael and Adler (1933) take this further stating that 'in other words, no act can be considered a crime, irrespective of how immoral or damaging it may be, unless it has been made such by legislation' (cited by Muncie, 2004: 39). On first examination, this definition may seem perfectly viable, however in respect of young people it is argued that such a legal uncontroversial definition is unable to capture the full extent of troublesome behaviour. It is for these reasons that criminologists have used terms such as 'delinquency' and 'antisocial behaviour' to refer to youth misconduct which is not deemed criminal by the law, but is otherwise troublesome.

The use of such terms are used to label and criticise youth behaviour such as hanging around on the streets or being loud as 'anti-social' when this would not necessarily be the case had an adult been behaving in the same manner. These terms therefore provide a way in which to discriminate against young peoples, often not excessively offensive, behaviour.

With regard to anti-social behaviour, even a definition of what amounts to this has contrasting perspectives. For example, Rutter, Giller and Hagell define anti-social behaviour as criminal behaviour whereas the Home Office do not (1998: 1). This could indicate that the location and context in which the term is used can be of significance. It is submitted that over time and in different societies our constructions of what constitutes criminality clearly change. Support for this can be found from Becker who argues that crime is a consequence of social interaction and that crime only occurs once it has been criminalized through public perception and social reaction. Sumner
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(1990) supports Becker's view and argues that 'crime' and 'deviance' are matters of moral and political judgement as they are ideological concepts that justify inequality' (cited in Muncie, 2004: 40).

Defining 'youth' is also a problematic task. If attempting to define youth by reference to age, there are no precise moments that mark when childhood ends and adulthood begins (Muncie, 2004: 41). This important change has become known as the 'transition' between childhood and adulthood. Spence argues that 'transition' suggests a journey from one state to another, involving both personal and social aspects, and it is therefore dependent upon the idea that the two stages are distinct conditions and fundamentally different (2004: 48). One possible approach to pinpoint the occurrence of this transition is to use the age of criminal responsibility, which is currently 10 years old in England and Wales.

Ultimately, the concept of youth is one that suggests similarity amongst people of similar age whilst acting as the basis for creating social rules and institutions that reinforce these apparent similarities (Spence, 2005, p. 47). However, despite these definitional problems it is important to define youth in relation to crime. In England and Wales, a person who commits a criminal offence who is between the ages of 10 and 17 years will be treated as a 'juvenile offender', whereas an individual who commits a criminal offence and is between the ages of 18 and 21 years will be tried as a 'young offender' (Davies, Croall and Tyrer (2004. p. 57).

Having taken these debates into consideration, the use of these terms throughout this report have been used to mean the following: the term

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'youth crime' refers to crime committed by those individuals under the age of 18 years, and the term 'crime' indicates 'an act prohibited by criminal law' (Muncie, 2004, p. 39). The term 'young people' has been used to mean those individuals over the age of 10 years and below the age of 18 years, as this also reflects the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales.

With regard to youth work, it is difficult to give a 'text book' explanation of exactly what youth work is and research has illustrated that youth workers themselves find it difficult to put their role into a sentence that gives justice to both the work of the youth worker and that of the young person (Ingram and Harris, 2005, p. 11-12). The nearest one will find to a formal definition of what youth work entails can be found in the statement of values and principles from the National Youth Agency (NYA), which states that the nature and purpose of youth work is:

'to facilitate and support young people's growth through dependence to interdependence, by encouraging their personal and social development and enabling them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society.' (NYA, 2005: 17).

It is through this definition that the researcher uses the term 'youth work' to mean working with young people to help them achieve a sense of personal fulfilment, as well as work that can help and advice young people in their daily life choices and activities. The term 'youth worker' therefore is used to describe those who carry out this role.

1. 4 Organisation of the report

The report is divided into four chapters as follows:

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Chapter Two reviews the design and methodology adopted to conduct the research and provides justification for the design and methods used.

Chapter Three presents the findings of the research and analyse these appropriately.

Chapter Four is the final chapter and will discuss the main findings from the research. It will also draw on these findings and the literature review in order to argue that youth work has the potential to make a significant contribution to ASB prevention and recommendations for policy makers, practice and further research.

The appendices contain copies of all relevant documents referred to throughout the research.

CHAPTER 2

Design and Methodology

Research Design and methods

The overall design of this research incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods. The researcher aimed to collect these forms of data using questionnaires and focus groups.

One set of questionnaires was distributed to six youth workers who works at the youth club. Semi-structured questions formed the interview questions used in focus groups with young people. As the research was an investigation the use of questionnaires was deemed appropriate for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Throughout the literature review, it is clear that there is a number of research/theories and approaches that are based on facts within the topic of ASB. An example is that the Home Office have established that young people with a troubled home life are at higher risk of being involved in ASB and crime than those who have not. Using a quantitative design would be inadequate to offer alternative explanations and explain different personal circumstances, for example, why young people who have come from troubled family life get involved in ASB.

My research question requires me to ask young people and youth workers whether youth work helps in preventing ASB. A qualitative design would therefore benefit me as it would allow me to ask young people directly through the use of semi-structured interviews. This would therefore include their individual understanding and experiences, rather than being given a choice of options to choose from.

It has been stated that qualitative and quantitative research each reflects a different epistemological stance, which ultimately widens the gap between the two (Bryman, 1992).

In terms of epistemological framework, quantitative research is strongly linked to the positivist method of studying society, therefore observing the world in an objective manner, whereas qualitative research entails a more subjective approach. These theories explain why quantitative data is often viewed as 'hard data' and qualitative data as 'real and deep' (O'Reilly, 1996: 7).

It is therefore submitted that it is not a disadvantage to combine quantitative and qualitative data, but that it is an advantage as the utilisation of the two methods allows for an in-depth investigation, which will allow a 'more complete account[s] of social reality' (Bryman, 1992: 126).

Questionnaires

According to Robson, (2002: 230), questionnaires are seen as 'a predominantly quantitative research method'. The questionnaires used in this research asked questions about young people and ASB from the workers point of view, and included both tick boxes and also opportunities to explain further. This offered the researcher qualitative data from the questionnaires. The questionnaire also contained personal data including age, gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. Participants were however not asked for their name or any details which would have enabled them to be identified.

Below is a table adapted from Munn and Drever(1990) and Sarantakos(2005) which shows the benefits and drawbacks of questionnaires.

Fig 1.

Benefits

Drawbacks

Efficient use of time

Greater assurance of anonymity for participants

Standardised questions and format for data collection

Production for quick results

Less opportunity for researcher bias

Easier for data analysis

Allow for a greater coverage of participants

Information tends to describe rather than explain

Information can be superficial

No room for probing, prompting or clarification

No opportunity to provide motivation for the participant to take part

Identity and conditions are not known

Do not allow for additional information

The main benefit of using questionnaires in this research was the ability to gain information in a relatively straight forward. This was also helpful for the data analysis stage as questions were all standardised and could easily be organised to produce results for analysis.

Focus groups

The other method used to collect data in this research was focus groups.

Morgan(1998: 1) states that, 'focus groups are group interviews. A moderator guides the interview while a small group discusses the topics that the interviewer raises'. Morgan went on to talk about the growth of focus groups as a qualitative research method and how discussions that takes

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place 'generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs'(1998: 11).

The purpose of a focus group in this research was to offer a deep insight and gain a greater understanding of the opinions that exist towards the research question being explored. Sarantakos (2005) talks about how focus groups can be used as a tool to explain trends and variances through the views of respondents. Below is a table that shows the pros and cons of using focus groups and have been taken from Morgan(1997) and (1998), Bloor et al (2001), Sarantakos (2005).

Fig 2

Benefits

Drawbacks

Ability to gain understanding o complex issues through group discussions

Ability to understand uncertainties and ambiguity that can underlie group assessments

Allow for easier comparisons of opinions and the similarities and differences that exist

Recording data can be problematic

Being in a group may hide people's real opinions

The process can be dominated by some members

There can be difficulties keeping discussions on track

Findings may not be represented

The reason why these two methods were used in the research was to enhance the data collected and to enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of feelings and opinions that surround the subject. This use of multiple methods is becoming common in social researches which, as stated by Boer et al (2001: 12), contribute to the 'parallel mushrooming commitment of academic researchers to triangulation'. Triangulation is a process by which different methods are employed by researchers to ensure that the methods themselves do not distort data but instead produce similar findings.

Implementation and changes to Design

Due to selected young people not turning up for the focus group, the researcher had to randomly select young people who were present at the time who fitted the criteria. This meant having to postpone the time and some planned activities as the young people had to seek consent first to participate from parents/carers and bring to the researcher signed forms.

This meant that the researcher had to do one focus group instead of two that had been planned in the research proposal. Although it would have been good to have two focus group so as to look for similarities and differences in young people's views, having one group did not make much difference as the researcher felt the young people who participated were a fair representatives of young people who attend youth clubs. Having one focus

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group, in the researchers opinion was more than enough as the researcher had to consider time needed for analysis.

2. 5 Sample Selection and Details of Participants

In total there were 14 participants in the study: eight young people, and six youth workers. It was felt that although this was a relatively small sample, it would allow for a greater degree of qualitative data to be collected and analysed. The researcher felt that the sample of young people was, fairly representative of those attending the youth clubs. The sampling method used was convenience or accidental sampling which 'involves choosing the nearest and most convenience persons to act as respondents'. Robson(2002: 265).

The main limitations to this type of sampling is that there is no way to tell if the findings are representatives of the population or not. Robson(2002: 265). However, the researcher tried to make sure that many groups were represented in the study including every age group and gender. One key group that was not included was young people from ethnic minorities group. This was due to the fact that at the time no one who fitted the criteria was present and the area is dominantly white.

The participants (both youth workers and young people) were all white British. The age range of the young people was between 13 and 16 years old, with 37. 5% being female and 62. 5% male. The youth worker participants were 66. 7% female and 33. 3% male. The table below(Fig 3) shows a detailed breakdown of all participants.

Young people

Age(years)

Male

Female

Total

13

1

1

2

14

1

1

2

15

2

1

3

16

1

-

1

Fig 4

Youth Workers

Age range

Female

Male

Total

18-25

2

-

2

25-30

1

1

2

30+

1

1

2

2. 6 Young People's Focus Group

The researcher arranged semi-structured questions in advance and sent them to the Youth Worker in charge for approval. A place and time was allocated where the group would not be disturbed. By planning in advance, the researcher was able to avoid interruptions and ensure people could not overhear the discussions. Facilitating a focus group allowed the researcher to be creative in the types of questions that she could ask. Interactive and visual exercises were included which enabled young people to keep focused, interested and engaged in the topic.

2. 7 Youth workers questionnaire

There were several questions that could be compared to the questions given to young people, in order to reach the objective of determining and comparing the perceptions of youth work from youth workers and young people. Due to the mixture of open and closed questions it was possible to extract both quantitative and qualitative data from the youth workers. However, because the sample size was relatively small the focus was to collect qualitative data that was rich in both information and experience.

At the youth club the questionnaires were handed to the worker-in-charge who ensured that the researcher was handed the completed questionnaires back. All six questionnaires were completed and returned. Confidentiality was ensured and maintained throughout as the questionnaires were handed out with an envelope for use after completion of the questionnaire.

2. 8 Ethical Issues

It is vital when completing research that the importance of ethical issues is observed. (Walliman 2006: 151). The ethical issues identified for this research can be found in the research proposal (Appedix). No further ethical issues were identified. Consent forms forms were all signed and retuned to the researcher. The researcher further emphasised on confidentiality issues within the group. Throughout the research, all the procedures identified to promote ethical practice were put into place. A place that was free from noise, interruptions or risks that others could overhear was used and this was important in maintaining confidentiality.

2. 9 Data Analysis

In presenting and discussing the research findings a mixture of summary and descriptive statistics were used. Generalizations from these statistics were kept to a minimum due to the research design and methods adopted. As the research sample was relatively small and manageable, the researcher felt confident to complete the statistical calculations herself.

In addition, as the research sample was relatively small it was not thought appropriate to use any other statistical tests in the data analysis

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3. 1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the research and provide a basic interpretation of these findings. Quantifiable data will be presented in a graphical format.

Qualitative data will be illustrated by quotes and written observations.

The findings of the study have been provided through the use of data analysis by using 'a grounded theory approach'. A grounded theory is 'dedicated to generating theories. It emphasises the importance of empirical fieldwork and the need to link any explanations very closely to what happens in the real world'.(Denscombe, 2007: 89) The researcher analysed the data after recording all of the information provided from the focus group onto one sheet. This meant putting all of the participants' answers to each question together, therefore analysis on possible themes and categories was made easier. An example is provided in Fig 5 below:

Key

P1= Participant 1

Q1 - What do you understand by the term Anti-Social Behaviour?

P1- ermm, I think its crime committed by youth like young people

P2- ohm ermm I don't know (pause) young people messing around on the streets getting into trouble

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P3- aint it just teenagers doing nothing on the streets or corner shops

P4- Like graffiti, hanging on the streets, smoking, drinking, things that young people do

P5- It's like all these guys with 'hoodies' hanging about getting into trouble by misbehaving, acting stupid

P6- Petty crime like hanging about on the streets, making noise, vandalising property

I used this process to look at specific parts of the interviews which were important in order to meet my research objectives. My data analysis was based on looking for similarities or differences in the answers given and categorising relevant themes. Denscombe (2007: 98) states that,

'the first stage of analysis involves the coding and categorizing of the data. This means the researcher begins to assign bits of 'raw data' to particular categories. Careful scrutiny of the data will allow the researcher to see that certain bits of the data have something in common'.

3. 2 Focus Group-Young people

The objective of having a focus group with young people was ultimately to discover their views on both the youth club they attended, the youth workers that worked there, and whether having a youth club helped keep the young people out of trouble, therefore addressing the issue of reducing and preventing youth crime. In order to do this it was considered important to discover how often the young people actually attended the clubs.

Youth club attendance and spare time activities

Figure 6 below illustrates that nearly two thirds of the young people, (5, which is 62. 5%) attended whenever the clubs were open.

It is argued that this is an important finding for the foundation of the research as if young people were not attending the clubs then the potential of youth work to help reduce Anti-social behaviour and crime would be dramatically reduced from the outset.

As the youth clubs are regularly attended by young people it was felt that because the youth club studied in this research were not open seven days a week, it was important to try and discover what young people were doing in their spare time when they were not at the club. As was discussed in Chapter Two, according to research, social skills are an important part of the transition into adulthood (Spence, 2005). However, the effect of socialisation and peer group pressure can have differing effects on individuals. It is clear to see from figure 7 below, socialising with friends is a large part of the young people's lives.

It is interesting to observe that only a small proportion (2), which is a quarter of young people thought that they 'got into trouble' in their spare time. This figure could be a result of several different factors such as different opinions as to what is classed as 'getting into trouble', for example is it only 'trouble' if you have broken the law or when you are being 'antisocial'? Subjective factors such as these could have affected the answers given by the participants and this must be kept in mind when analysing the findings

Keeping out of trouble

The young people were asked to rate the extent of their agreement to the statement 'coming to the youth club keeps me out of trouble' (question 3). It is submitted that the results (see figure 8 below) are encouraging on several levels. Firstly, no one disagreed with the statement therefore it is possible to argue that the youth clubs could help reduce youth crime, at least for the period in which the young people attended the club. Support for this argument can be found in the fact that 62.5% of young people rated their extent of agreement at 4 or above on the scale.

To make a direct comparison, the youth workers were asked the same question (question

6). The results are also illustrated in figure 3 above. It must be remembered when interpreting these findings that the sample size of the two groups were different, as the young people sample (n= 8) was larger than the youth worker sample (n= 6). The findings from the youth workers indicate a strong extent of agreement that youth clubs do help keep young people out of trouble, illustrated by the fact nearly all responses (4: 66.7%) were marked 4 or above on the scale.

Comparative means to indicate the level of agreement to the statement that 'youth clubs keep young people out of trouble'

The role of a youth worker:

Question 1-Youth Workers/ Question 10-Young people

It was important to discover what the young people and the youth workers perceived to be the role of a youth worker in order to see if there were any major differences. If they were there, these would need to be resolved in order to provide the service that young people want and need. The young people in the stated that 'someone to offer help/advice' as the main role of a youth worker. 'Help/advice/guidance' is one perception of the role that is shared by both the young people and youth workers.

There was a difference in that young people felt that to 'provide activities' was an element of the role, as opposed to youth workers. This information was difficult to quantify the data into categories in that the answers given by the youth workers were very serious, whereas the young people's answers were more focused towards fun and activities as opposed to being focused on serious matters such as guidance

The NYA promotes that the main purpose of youth work is 'the personal and social development of young people and their social inclusion' (NYA, 2006: 6). . In comparison to Merton's study (2004), which found the role of a youth worker to be a social educator and mentor, it is possible to argue that these elements are also visible in the findings from this research as helping, advising and guiding young people can fit into both of the roles Merton found.

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Referring to the literature review, I had based my research on the risk factors identified by the home office that increase the chances of young people be involved in ASB. Within these risk factors, peer pressure was established as one of the risk factors associated with ASB. My results supported this as 7 out of 8 young people mentioned copying their friends, trying to 'fit' in and peer pressure as a reason for engaging in ASB.

Chapter Four

Discussion, Conclusions and Implications

4.1 The most important findings

The study found that there was a high level of agreement amongst young people and youth workers that going to the youth club keeps young people out of trouble. It is therefore argued that youth work is already contributing to ASB prevention, at least during the period in which the youth clubs are open.

Regarding what the participants thought were the most important services to provide, Q4-YW and Q9-YP, the study found a difference of opinion not only between youth workers and young people, but also amongst youth workers themselves. Young people felt that a place to socialise, access to information and advice, and a safe place to be were the most important services, whereas overall youth workers felt enthusiastic workers and the building of relationships were paramount. If youth work were to hold a substantial ASB or crime prevention role, differences such as these would need to be straightened out in order to ensure the most important services are clearly defined in terms of what the young people want and need from the clubs.

With regard to the informative function of youth work, it was found that youth work does indeed play an important role in informing young people about ASB, crime and justice issues.

This provides the foundation on which to argue that youth work has an extremely important role in providing young people with information on important issues.

The study found that young people were likely to approach a youth worker for support and advice. This is very encouraging in terms of youth work holding and maintaining a successful role in ASB prevention, as it would be paramount that young people feel both confident and comfortable in approaching youth workers for help. It was also illustrated that in general young people have a very positive attitude towards youth workers, which supports the argument that youth workers have the potential to cross the barriers with young people where others fail, especially in terms of promoting pro-social behaviour and social inclusion. This finding als