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The Media and intervention in Youth Offending: A Narrative Review

Los Medios de Comunicación y la intervención en Delincuencia Juvenil: Una revisión narrativa

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Resumen

La delincuencia juvenil es una de las preocupaciones centrales para la comunidad, legisladores y políticos. Esto ha conllevado medidas severas y populistas, a pesar de las recomendaciones de la evidencia o los acuerdos internacionales. En este contexto, los medios de comunicación, como la principal fuente de información de la realidad nacional, juegan un rol clave. Sin embargo, las representaciones mediáticas no son un reflejo fiel de la realidad.

Este artículo explora las representaciones mediáticas sobre delincuencia juvenil y su influencia sobre el público y la política. Asimismo, contrasta lo que promueven los medios con la investigación respecto a la forma de lidiar con este comportamiento. Finalmente, analiza las consecuencias de las representaciones mediáticas sobre la intervención con adolescentes infractores. Para ello, se realizó una revisión narrativa.

El artículo concluye que las imágenes mediáticas de la delincuencia juvenil pueden tener un fuerte impacto en la comprensión respecto al tema. Esto puede limitar directamente la intervención, reduciendo su éxito y dañando procesos de desistencia. Se promueve futura investigación empírica con el fin de desarrollar estrategias de prevención y conciencia en la comunidad.

Palabras clave: Delincuencia Juvenil; Influencia Mediática, Desistencia; Intervención

Abstract

Youth offending has become a key concern for the community, policy makers and politicians. This has mostly translated in harsher populist measures, regardless of what evidence and international agreements say. In this context, the media, as the main source of information about national reality, plays a central role. However, media portrayals are not a faithful reflection of youth offending.

This paper explores media portrayals about youth offending and their influence over the public and politics. It also contrasts the measures promoted by the media with what research claims should be the way of addressing this behaviour. It finally focuses on the consequences of media portrayals over intervention in youth offending. In order to do so, a narrative review of key research was conducted.

The paper concludes that media images of youth offending can have a strong impact on citizens' and politicians' understanding of the phenomena. This may directly limit intervention practice, reducing its success and harming desistance processes. Further empirical research on the field is encouraged in order to develop strategies that promote prevention and community awareness.

Keywords: Youth offending; Media influence; Desistance; Intervention

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Introduction

Public perception of youth offending acts as legitimizer of crime control measures (Kelly, 2012; Sellers, 2015), which can privilege a rehabilitative or a punitive approach. Research has shown that young people are considered to becoming increasingly violent and dangerous (Hough and Roberts, 2012; 2004). Thus, they are considered more as a threat than in previous years (Hendrick, 2011), even when statistics demonstrate the contrary (McMahon, 2014). This view of young people as dangerous can impact in contemporary public policy: for example, in the permanence of the discussion to lower the age of criminal liability, despite what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child suggest on the matter.

Policies are a useful indicator of public mood as they are populist strategies based on public sensibilities (Tonry, 2004). They follow people's emotions and as a result, youth justice has become increasingly politicised, public safety being its first aim (Goldson, 2013; McAra and McVie, 2010b; Muncie, 2005). In practice, this has involved different approaches, in England and Wales for example, the 1990s were marked by the disillusionment of welfarism (Pitts, 2003; Bottoms, 1995); offending became a free and responsible decision (Sellers, 2015), and tough measures were preferred (Green, 2009; Tonry 2004). In Scotland, this punitive turn appeared from the mid-1990s, slowly leading to the increase of individual responsabilisation (Goldson, 2013) as well as further marginalisation of lower-class and already excluded youth (McAra and McVie, 2005). The child has been transformed into an offender (McAra and McVie, 2010a; 2010b). Thus, representations of young people in youth justice policy are reductionist, while social structures remain unconsidered. Individual blame would only be widened towards the parents (Hough and Roberts, 2004) or youth justice

professionals, because of their inability to stop crime (Marsh and Melville, 2009).

The media acts as the principal source of information about what and who is deviant (Surrette, 2010; Cohen, 1972), therefore its role has been highlighted as especially relevant in influencing harsher youth justice (Hall, Roberts and Clarke, 1978). Media portrayals of juvenile delinquency have been characterized as biased, and spreading misconceptions about offending (Jewkes, 2004a). Young people are usually portrayed as demonized others, strong discipline and permanent deterrence being the only effective solutions (White and Cunneen, 2006). Moreover, by labelling them as criminals, media images may lead to further stigmatisation (Goldson, 2013). Thus, the potential to influence populist and punitive strategies to control youth behaviour is crucial. The media shapes public reactions towards young people, politicians' decisions of the seriousness of the threat, and how young offenders see themselves.

This paper is a narrative review of key research on the matter, and attempts to answer the following questions: How is youth offending presented by the media? Does it relate to academic knowledge? What are the consequences of such understandings and portrayals in terms of the work with young people who displayed offending behaviour?

In order to answer such questions, I will start by presenting what research says about youth offending. It will be followed by how media influence works, to then focus on the image of young people in trouble that is being spread. The following section will refer to what experts claim to be the characteristics and purposes of effective and ethical intervention. To then conclude regarding the interaction of these elements and how media perspectives may influence in both prevention and the desistance of offending behaviour in young people.

Understanding youth offending

Youth offending research has been broadly focused on identifying the causes and risk factors involved with such behaviour. Most findings emphasise this population as vulnerable, marginalised and facing multiple disadvantages (Brown, 2009; Morgan, 2009; McNeill and Whyte, 2007). Thus, this section intends to answer the question: What are the features and factors strongly associated to juvenile delinquency?

Individually, predominant risk factors would be: impulsivity, risky behaviour (McAra and McVie, 2012; 2010b; Agnew, 2009; McNeill and Whyte, 2007; Muncie, 1999); aggressiveness, tending to anti-social behaviour (McAra and McVie, 2012); low intelligence and hyperactivity (McAra and McVie, 2012; Agnew, 2009); lack of empathy; diminished social skills; pro-criminal beliefs; and scarce problem-solving strategies (Agnew, 2009). At family level, youth offending is associated with poor parenting (Egan, Neary, Keenan and Bond, 2013), low supervision (McAra and McVie, 2012; 2010b; Marsh and Melville, 2009); harsh or inconsistent discipline; neglect; abuse (McAra and McVie, 2012; Muncie, 1999); broken homes (McAra and McVie, 2012; 2011; 2010b); and familial criminal history (Agnew, 2009; Muncie, 1999). Socially, they usually come from poor, deprived, excluded and high crime environments (McAra and McVie, 2012; 2011; 2010b; Marsh and Melville, 2009). Delinquent peers also play a relevant role to reinforcing offending behaviour (McAra and McVie, 2012; McDonald, Webster, Shildrick and Simpson, 2011; Agnew, 2009; Marsh and Melville, 2009; McNeill and Whyte, 2007).

Other elements highly associated with youth crime are school disengagement (McDonald et al., 2011; Agnew, 2009); substance misuse; more benefits than costs; and the need for cash

or status (Agnew, 2009; McNeill and Whyte, 2007). These factors can be understood in the context of coping with senses of oppression and frustration, derived from constrained transitions from youth to adulthood (Corr, 2014). Together with the exposition to high levels of police intervention, where fairness, respect or integrity are felt as absent (Deuchar, Miller and Barrow, 2015), increasing the rejection towards what they represent: intolerance (Hancock and Matthews, 2001). The magnitude and presence of these elements can make the difference between criminal desistance or persistence, which also relates to the success they have accomplishing personal, social and cultural goals (Corr, 2014). Moreover, young people need to satisfy their needs for education, relationships, recreation and personal development (Prinsloo, 2014), which when truncated can lead to prioritise other needs, as peer belonging or status on their environment (Rogowski, 2014).

The peak age for offending would be between 15-18 years of age (Morgan and Newburn, 2012; Marsh and Melville, 2009). The age-crime-curve illustrates that after late adolescence criminal behaviour declines (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; McVie, 2009; McNeill and Whyte, 2007). Thus, young people are more likely to face the justice system (Marsh and Melville, 2009), being the population with highest crime rates (Agnew, 2009). However, this behaviour is not persistent nor constant, and most youngsters abandon it when growing (Maruna, 2001). Moreover, according to McGhee and Waterhouse (2007) there is a significant overlap between children in protection systems and those in youth justice institutions, giving strength to the argument that this population is criminalised more because of their vulnerability, age and context than their actual offending.

If we analyse the characteristics associated to young offenders, most relate to aspects that do not depend on them, but on their social and structural environment (Marsh and Melville, 2009). Deviant behaviour can be understood as symptomatic of their context (McAra and McVie, 2010a), and strongly related to social needs and deprivation. Thus, social exclusion influences offending. According to Muncie (1999), offending is the rational reaction to their situation, where they lack the opportunities they need to develop a positive and empowered self-image that keeps them focused on pro-social goals. Therefore, what seems to become relevant is the need to address the sources of vulnerability and marginalisation, which would result in more effective strategies to both prevent and stop youth crime.

The influence of the Media

Nowadays, the media is the primary source of knowledge about crime and justice (Greer and Reiner, 2012), selecting and presenting stories and viewpoints according to what it decides is relevant. Therefore, the media constructs crime meaning and expectations (Surrette, 2010; Jewkes, 2004b; Cohen, 1967). Likewise, it guides the understanding of causes for crime, impacting on social control mechanisms and social sensitivities (Greer and Reiner, 2012; Kitzinger, 2004) and fuelling individual emotions (Jewkes, 2004a; Tonry, 2004). Thus, the role of the media becomes highly significant to the study of youth offending. In order to analyse this role, the following questions will be answered: How influent can media portrayals of criminal youth be?

Media influence is a highly complex issue. Initially, it was understood as a direct force over a passive audience (Carrabine, 2008; Kitzinger, 2004). With time, media content was recognised to be interpreted by the public (Gillespie and McLaughlin, 2003), locating the audience as the

central element (Stark, Paterson and Devlin, 2004). They would select what to consume according to personal experiences and understandings of the world (Carrabine, 2008), which in turn would strengthen the audience's previous views (Green, 2009; King and Maruna, 2006). Thus, the media was understood as reinforcing instead of challenging existing beliefs. Then, the notions of frames became significant. These frames, also based on previous public knowledge, would be an integral element in the co-construction of the world (Jewkes, 2008; Kitzinger, 2004), future perceptions of the public (Green, 2009; Altheide, 1997), and the definition of new situations, such as crime (Stark, Paterson and Devlin, 2004). Therefore, the media do not tell people what to think but do influence what to think about (Altheide, 1997). According to Surrette (2010), mediated experiences and knowledge dominate real experiences, thus the media would influence audiences' understanding of the world through a complex and subtle process. As such, media influence would be more powerful than telling a passive public what to think.

This position of media in modern society is especially relevant, because some information is privileged and over-published, while other remain unmentioned (Davis and Bourhill, 1997). The selection would be based on market-driven news values (Jewkes, 2004b) instead of being objective and informative. Thus, the media directs public attention and shape social conflict based on profit (Robinson, 2011; Marsh and Melville, 2009). The implications are that the media privileges a conservative worldview and supports the status quo (Surrette, 2010; Carrabine, 2008; Jones, 2006), which is reinforced by media dependence on the information provided by the institutions that hold the power, to gain legitimacy (Davis and Bourhill, 1997). Likewise, dramatic headlines

(Cohen, 1972; 1967) about violent, risky or sexualised events (Jewkes, 2004a) are used as information and entertainment (Jones, 2006). The media combines sensationalism and conventionalism in its manner of presenting youth crime to the public (Davis and Bourhill, 1997), regardless of distortion of facts (Hough and Roberts, 2012).

Moreover, the media selects and distributes stories that reinforce the image of serious crime as unpredictable, where all are potential victims (Jewkes, 2008; 2004a), and the world is a dangerous place (Altheide, 1997), expanding fear of crime. This leads to public alarm and moral panic, generating social and political overreactions (Garland, 2008). Which relates to maintaining the control over society, sustained through the discourse of public protection. In that way, the public becomes dependent on measures to fight crime, allowing further punitive and interventionist responses (Kelly, 2012; Silverman, 2012). This preserves the situation that located the elite in a powerful position, in order to calm their anxieties about crime (Simon, 2007). Fearful people are more willing to support tough measures against crime (Garland, 2008).

The media and youth offending

The image of young people has a dual effect, because the media acts as both the provider of information to audiences and the representative of public opinion to politicians (Green, 2009). Thus, when the image of young people spread is negative and promotes harsh treatment, the attitude of both public and those in charge of crime control reforms is shaped in such direction. At the same time, media also feeds on the context, thus it is ideologically and politically charged (Egan et al., 2013). Therefore, this section will attempt to answer the following questions: What is the image of juvenile delinquency being spread? What are the consequences of media representations of young offenders?

Media portrayals of juvenile delinquents have been characterised as mostly distorted and biased (Sellers, 2015). They are usually presented as evil people (Jewkes, 2008) who act freely and fully responsible (Fox, 2015; Phoenix, 2009), threatening society's moral values (Rogowski, 2014). Young offenders are treated as a dangerous other (Goldson, 2009). This is usually accomplished through the prioritization of magnified violent or bizarre events over daily criminality (Cohen, 1972). As a result, prejudice, rejection, and a simplistic understanding of youth crime are promoted (Kidd-Hewitt, 1995), locating the emphasis in individualised responsabilisation (Goldson, 2013; Hendrick, 2011; Jewkes, 2011; 2004a; Marsh and Melville, 2009). Thus, structural or social explanations disappear (Greer and Reiner, 2012). Therefore, media portrayals and academic knowledge are highly different.

Media opinions have been especially aligned with political tendencies which focus on antisocial behaviour with a 'tough' approach. This materialises on the emphasis made in the need to privilege criminals' responsibilities over their needs (Raynor, 2012; Muncie, 2005). Which leads to the preference for punishment; the turn of crime control in the main national goal (Pitts, 2003; Sparks, 2003), even under the name of public protection; and the transformation of youth justice in a politicised, populist and highly punitive institution (Chaney, 2015; Garland, 2000).

This relates strongly with labelling processes. Labelling theory emphasises how youth crime is socially constructed by those defining what is deviant (Becker, 1963). The media has this power to define how serious and against the rules certain attitudes are, especially those in the antisocial category, which is broad enough to allow any kind of disturbance. As a result, public tolerance decreases (Hancock and Mathews, 2001), and non-criminal acts are treated as deviant (Hendrick, 2011), for example

loitering (Hughes and Follett, 2006), making restrictive approaches easier. Labelling has a strong class factor, affecting directly those with greater neighbourhood deprivation (Hughes and Follett, 2006; Pitts, 2003). Moreover, it can create a target group, to whom McAra and McVie (2005) refer as the 'usual suspects'. Young people who have already experienced adversarial contact with law enforcement institutions remain under the 'suspect' label regardless of their actual offending. This facilitates the symbolization of law enforcement agencies as an 'enemy' (Cohen, 1972). In consequence, they reinforce deviant attitudes instead of containing them (McAra and McVie, 2005). Furthermore, the stigma is likely to persist in time (Maruna, 2001), and influence future judgements of young people and their behaviour. Usually, the result is the integration by the young person, of the label on his/her self-identity, acting in consonance to it (Cohen, 1967).

Thus, this is a cycle in which the risk factors that lead to the first offence are not addressed, strain augments and offending amplifies, strengthening the stereotype which at the beginning did not had enough elements to remain (Cohen, 1972). This leads to measures facing the problem with the wrong focus, increasing restraints, control and exclusion, while the structural context remains the same. The consequence is the failure of the justice system and rehabilitation programmes (McAra and McVie, 2011; McNeill, 2009). Therefore, the principal risk factors for future offending depend strongly on the response to youth behaviour as a crime (Hall et al., 1978). In fact, according to the Edinburgh study the best predictor of reoffending is justice system contact, in which frequency and depth lead to worst expectations (McAra and McVie, 2007; 2011).

Thus, the main effects of media representations of young offenders are, firstly, the harshening of

approaches against them, which fail because do not consider the evidence which locate the problem as structural instead of individual. As measures are not effective and the belief that they need stronger punishment is legitimised, more intrusive and coercive methods are approved. However, there is bias towards already vulnerable groups (White and Cuneen, 2006). Secondly, the negative labels are interiorized by the community, enforced by the media association between antisocial behaviour and a lack of societal values (Maruna and King, 2009). They emotionally shape public opinion and attitudes (Hough and Roberts, 2004), turning them against youth, who become enemies to defeat (Hancock and Matthews, 2001).

This leads to two main consequences: On the one hand crime control requires community participation (Sellers, 2015) and popular consent to be legitimate (Hough and Roberts, 2012; Hall et al., 1978). If the community is fearful of crime and supporting of higher control, politicians will follow that position, and punishment becomes an expression of disapproval of their behaviour (Rogowski, 2014), instead of a solution to the causes of crime. On the other hand, the public judges young people under the negative stereotype, making reintegration even harder. This decreases the consideration of the opinions and needs of young people, privileging only adults' interests (Hughes and Follett, 2006). Moreover, feelings of being an outsider increase and in their search for status and peer validation, deviance may become easier. The role of the community is thus central in deviance amplification, as they can become the central instrument of marginalisation (Young, 2001).

In summary, media role in affecting public perceptions of criminals is key (Marsh and Melville, 2009). They provide an image that acts as the definition of criminality. This definition is not innocent, but the result of the interaction of

power and profit. Thus, it primarily affects those who already come from marginalised backgrounds. The portrayal of young offenders is negative and set a label on them which has significant consequences: politically, new measures of greater control are designed and approved against youth; legally, harsher punishment is allowed; socially, they are further marginalised, the blame is individualised and the public believes they deserve worse; individually, they feel constrained and frustrated, reacting against such a context, which crystallises the label on their self-identity and may lead to increased deviance. Moreover, the risk factors that contribute to offending initially are not being addressed.

Intervention in youth offending: What should be done?

Intervention with young people in trouble is usually understood in terms of ‘helping’. However, this ambiguous term does not clearly illustrate its meaning (Souhami, 2007), and how it relates to youth justice’s goals. Broadly, ‘help’ can be associated to privileging the comprehension of young people in general and each individual in particular, prioritizing their welfare and protecting them from measures that seem counterproductive (Souhami, 2007). This understanding of youth offending places deviance as related to structural factors over individual elements (Rogowski, 2014), recognizing these people as heterogeneous. Likewise, it involves a mixture of concrete problem-solving strategies, work with the family and counselling (Burnett, 2004).

The relationship practitioners generate with the programme’s user is their main working tool (Souhami, 2007). This relation should be supportive, it is the medium to mobilise capacities, resources, and motivation for change (Burnett, 2004). Other skills considered as essential are flexibility, initiative and discretion (Souhami, 2007). Practitioners will deal with

elements such as abuse, neglect, delinquent peers, poverty, family relationships, and school problems (McNeill, Batchelor, Burnett and Knox, 2005). Therefore, successful practice requires commitment (Pitts, 2003), trust on both sides, interpersonal skills (McNeill et al., 2005; Burnett, 2004), mutual understanding, agreement about treatments’ conditions, and a person-centred approach (Rogowski, 2014; McNeill et al., 2005; Pitts, 2003). Thus, they relate to the recognition of the other as a unique individual, where understanding of circumstances is essential.

Successful programmes, besides professional and personal skills, privilege holistic approaches, work in the construction of a positive self-image and prosocial goals, have a focus on reintegration, provide clear guidelines on the behaviours considered positive or negative with their consequences, are conducted outside the justice system (Pitts, 2003), and involve organizational support (McNeill, 2009). Moreover, needs, strengths and risks should be assessed (McNeill et al., 2005), calibrating the intensity of the intervention according to them. Programmes should also be community-based, well-resourced, and with a motivated staff (McAra and McVie, 2011). Planning is paramount (McNeill et al., 2005), and the goal is desistance: the ‘long term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending’ (Maruna, 2001, p. 26).

Desistance is an individual and subjective process (McNeill, 2009) of gradual change and learning a different way of living in the community (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011); as such, it is full of ambivalence (McNeill and Whyte, 2007). Thus, they need persistent support (McNeill et al., 2005), and privileging diversion which is more effective to reach this goal (McAra and McVie, 2011; 2010a; 2010b; 2007). It is about helping them to decide stop offending (Souhami, 2007).

The obstacles to intervention practice would be the maintenance of the circumstances that previously led to offending: financial issues, lack of emotional support and self-efficacy, and the stigma of being an offender (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; Maruna, 2001). In order to desist, people need to develop agency (Fox, 2015; Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; McNeill et al., 2005), feel socially included, motivated and confident about desisting (McNeill and Whyte, 2007). Therefore, if they are surrounded by people who believe they cannot change or do not deserve opportunities, they may fail. This relates to the concept of social capital, which refers to social inclusion and chances to develop and participate within the community, it needs to be generated together with the individual work (human capital) (McNeill et al., 2005; McNeill, 2009). Thus, practitioners also need to work with the community, because reintegration and feelings of belonging could be the turning point (Weaver and McNeill, 2015).

The political, social and law enforcement situation increases the complexity that intervention practice already has, taking the attention away from internal towards external measurements. The main critics against practice are the targeting of specific groups (implying discriminatory application), and excessive power over offender's lives (Bottoms, 1995), which can constrain the relationships they form with young people (Rogowski, 2014). Moreover, high levels of intervention can be coercive, eroding children's rights and silencing them (McAlister and Corr, 2014).

Practice understands young offenders as vulnerable. Therefore, to realistically consider desistance, socio-structural risk factors associated with marginalisation, a criminalising justice system, punitive approaches towards young people (influenced by a misinforming and biased media), and the satisfaction of children's basic needs should be addressed.

Conclusion

The literature revised about media and practitioners' relations with young offenders shows two contradictory positions. Media identifies juvenile delinquents as individually responsible criminals, being punishment and control the only solutions. They are demonized, and any uncivilized attitude is linked to a hopeless future. On the contrary, academic research and practice consider the wider environment as crucial in the development of antisocial behaviour. The best way to work with them is in terms of personalised involvement, but one that includes and works with the community, addressing the factors around the offending behaviour and promoting finding new ways of interacting with the world.

Youth offending is a broader issue and directing the intervention towards one of all the elements involved -only the individual- can only have partial success. The broader context and the unique social situation of the young person should be considered, and labels overcome. Therefore, an open and more realistic understanding of what is the reality of young people in trouble and what they need, becomes essential. Not only in terms of the general community, but also involving those in charge of public policy making. If the factors leading to offending behaviour remain, and the risk factors increase through processes of labelling and the permanent unfulfillment not only their basic needs, but also their basic rights, such as education, the behaviour is likely to remain.

The reduction of youth offending to a political debate of ever-increasing toughness is not only doomed to fail in terms of both prevention and decreasing offending. It is also an irresponsible practice of prioritizing political struggle and competition over the wellbeing of citizens, including the overused notion of 'social security'. Because media and political discourses around youth offending have promoted fear and

insecurity, while having little impact on crime itself.

Moreover, practitioners will probably have limited impact on the public, because people with the authority to make structural changes support what the majority seems to believe. In this case, social opinion is based on the negative mediated stereotype. These stereotypes may also negatively impact directly on practice, as young people face daily the labels spread by the media, where they are identified as undeserving. Some of them may internalise these images on their identity, leading to resentment, further aggression or authority repudiation. Mediatized definitions of youth offending increase the vulnerability of those that already come from marginalised environments. It also legitimises harsher approaches, and individualise the blame, making intervention harder and more prone to failure.

The role of public opinion and the community is central to both the young person and effective practice. However, community's active role has become lost through the professionalization process described by Christie (1977), in which conflicts have been taken away from people. Thus, practitioners hold the knowledge about the actors in conflict, and the possible solutions, while the community remains in the dark, becoming another constrain to successful practice.

The media, has then, a key role in promoting an image that rise public concerns, leading to demands of strong intervention, which are defined by those who depend on popular vote and not necessarily have specific knowledge or trained advisors on the subject. As such, specific events may be more powerful than national reality in defining the future guidelines and funding to work with young people in trouble, together with the support of the community to get involved in processes of desistance and integration. Instead of working all together to

improve the structural factors leading to youth offending, they remain the same, opportunities are closed, stigma prevail and becomes part of their identities.

A good way to fight this grim future is awareness, promoting knowledge directly with the communities and in the political realm. But there is also a great deal of good the media can promote. Collaboration between those who work directly with young people in trouble; those who make the laws, regulations and policies that focus on offending, vulnerability, and young people; and the media, could all help to spread a new understanding of youth offending, a clearer notion of practices with positive impact instead of stigmatization, and the responsabilization of the wider community and the political system, comprehending that youth offending is not an isolated issue, but that there are social aspects that must be addressed at an structural level. Replace populism and the neoliberal fixation on personal gain for ethical and responsible consideration of the reality of youth offending, and of the children's rights that are not being guaranteed by the different states, is paramount.

The present paper intended to highlight what may be seen as a subtle influence, but that is present in everyday life, with direct impact on all actors involved around youth offending: the young person, the practitioners and people from the justice system that work with them, but also the general community, politicians and the whole society. The purpose is to bring this topic to discussion and promote empirical research that contrasts how it works in different realities and more practical means of overcoming this situation. Media portrayals of offending have been widely researched in England and the US. However, there is less development on this field in other realities. Moreover, with the widespread use of social networks as a key source of information, the interaction of knowledge, practice, public

opinion and public policy is subject to quick changing dynamics of strong emotions associated to specific events. It is worth, then, to

discover how does it work in larger and smaller communities, in different age groups, when the media is public or privately owned, and what prevention strategies could be implemented with media participation.

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