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The voices of "at risk" young people about services they received: A systematic literature review

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Abstract

In Australia young people who are at risk of offending have attracted much media and policy attention. In recent times, policy reform has seen increased funding for social services delivery to support young people at risk of entering, or currently in the juvenile justice system. However, limited literature explores how young people experience services delivered to them.

This article reports on a systematic literature review exploring the voices of children and youth on social service delivery for young people who have offended or are at risk of offending. The review aimed to identify English language publications in the fifteen-year period from 2004 to 2018, critique their methodological quality, and analyse and describe the findings of identified studies.

Through a search of electronic social sciences databases twelve (n=12) eligible publications were identified, including six qualitative studies, one quantitative study and five reports. The review highlighted a scarcity of research on this topic but provided evidence about how young people who are at risk of offending experienced social services, and their recommendations for effective service delivery.

Implication Statement

- Practitioners need to create supportive, caring and respectful environments that facilitate young people's agency and self-determination;

- Young people need information and clarification but may not ask for it;

- Experiences of racism need to be acknowledged and racist attitudes actively addressed.

An easy read poster has been developed on the recommendation of practice-based research partners to highlight the implications for practice.

Key Words

Youth; at risk young people; criminal justice; offending; service delivery; service environments; racism

Background

Youth offending and the impact of youth crime has received significant media and policy attention in recent years in Australia (Queensland Government, 2019b; Smith, 2018). The number of youth held in detention grew by 32% between 2011 and 2016 (Queensland Productivity Commission, 2018). Interestingly, while detention rates for young people have increased, it appears there is a decline in youth offender rates (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Queensland Productivity Commission, 2018). A key contributing factor to current imprisonment rates for youth and adult incarceration is recidivism (Queensland Productivity Commission, 2018), which in turn is caused by issues such as "poor school attendance, mental health concerns, domestic violence, drug and substance misuse, housing and dysfunction within households" (Queensland Government, 2019a, p. 14).

Young people who are in out of home care are more likely to be involved with the Youth Justice System than those who are not. This highlights that a large proportion of young people who have offended have experienced family conflict and breakdown, family violence, abuse, poverty, and disengagement from education or employment, in turn, rendering them vulnerable to involvement with Youth Justice (CREATE Foundation, 2018). In particular, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people are 16 times more likely than non-Indigenous children/youth to be both in out of home care and in the Youth Justice System, leading advocates to refer to them as a "new stolen generation" (Australian Institute

of Health and Welfare, 2017). Reforms have been recommended to develop more culturally appropriate solutions to keep young people out of juvenile justice systems. Liebesman and Briskman (2018) argued that solutions need to move beyond the practical reconciliation areas of health, education, housing and employment, to include cultural sovereignty and land recognition. Likewise, Koorie Youth Council (2018) contends that better outcomes are achieved for youth by implementing self-determination and participation and upholding culture, families, elders and community as guiding principles.

The ongoing spotlight on youth crime has led to targeted inquiries and policy reform in Queensland. An independent review into youth detention recommended increased investment in community-based wrap-around services that work with the community and other service providers to address the causes of youth offending (McMillan & Davis, 2016). In Queensland, current legislation concerning crime and young people under the age of 18 years is guided by the Youth Justice Act, principles of which aim to keep children safe, uphold their rights and promote their mental and physical safety (Queensland Government, 1992). Reforms to the Act aimed to address the "4 pillars" of a Youth Justice Strategy recommended by Atkinson's (2018) report on Youth Justice: 1. intervene early; 2. keep children out of court; 3. keep children out of custody and 4. reduce re-offending. Recommendations from the Atkinson (2018) review included multi-agency coordinated approaches, information sharing, after-hours services and prevention and early intervention. That review pointed to the necessity for individual needs assessments to determine young people's physical and mental health, disability and educational requirements. Atkinson (2018) highlighted that alternative education options are required for young people with disruptive lives or behavioural problems and for those transitioning to school from detention. Similarly, the Smith (2018) inquiry about youth crime in Townsville recommended a youth

development strategy based on prevention, intervention and rehabilitation established through seven forums with community members.

Reviews across Australia identified similar strategies to improve Youth Justice. Recommendations from an inquiry in Victoria included detention as a last resort, addressing the over-representation of Indigenous young people and establishment of a youth engagement framework (Armytage & Ogloff, 2017). The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory highlighted mistreatment of young people in detention, and recommended a new model focused on residential care, staff training to facilitate rehabilitation, community consultation and reducing youth detention (Australian Government, 2017). In line with other Australian inquiries, the Commission's findings and recommendations focused on therapeutic services and early intervention rather than a "tough on crime approach' (Commonwealth Government, 2017, p.24).

While some progress has been made in including the voices of young people who were offending or at risk of offending in some of those Australian inquiries (see for example, Armytage & Ogloff, 2017; Australian Government, 2017), other inquiries did not include such young people as "key stakeholders" to be interviewed (see for example, Aitkinson, 2018; McMillan & Davis, 2016; Smith, 2018). In the case of young people who have offended or might be at risk of offending, public opinion can hold that young offenders do not deserve to influence decision-making (Suthers, 2011; Trivasse, 2017). Yet, research highlights that the participation and engagement of young people is a crucial element of effective Youth Justice Services, due to young people dis-engagement from intervention when they do not feel listened to (Trivasse, 2017). Listening to children and young people and taking account of their views and perceptions about service delivery is a consideration outlined in the United Nation's (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their participation in research assessing service delivery affords recognition and respect, fosters

their growth as a citizen, builds understanding, and provides insight into their experiences and views (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). Thus, this research explored what was reported in research about the voices of children and youth regarding their perceptions of social service delivery for children and young people at risk of offending.

Methodology

University researchers and community-based agency staff undertook this research jointly with the assistance of two consecutive social work placements. The research team met regularly to guide and implement the research. The research questions were developed based on the expressed interest of the agency staff in hearing the voices of young people about services provided to them.

Research questions

We undertook a systematic literature review exploring studies that included the voices of children and young people who were at risk of offending or have offended discussing the service delivery they received. The review questions were:

1.   What are the characteristics of the studies?

2.   What are the reported outcomes in terms of young people's voices?

3.   What is the methodological quality of the included studies?

Protocol

A study protocol, based on the Prisma-P statement by Moher et al. (2015), was developed and registered with PROSPERO 2019 [CRD42019131732] (Zuchowski et al., 2019). A full-text screening tool was developed. The protocol and tool were circulated among co-authors to incorporate all feedback and achieve agreement.

Eligibility criteria

Eligible research was defined as literature reporting on quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods studies that include the voices of children and young people who a) are/have been in contact with, or are users of social services/social justice services, b) have been cautioned, c) are under supervision, or d) are/have been detained or incarcerated discussing service delivery to them. Participants in the eligible studies include children and young people between 10 and 25 years who may live in unstable family situations and may be or are at risk of offending (i.e. experiencing a combination of issues associated with delinquency, such as family conflict and breakdown, family violence, abuse, drug and alcohol issues, mental health issues, poverty, disengagement from education and/or employment). A time period of 15 years, between 2004 and 2018 was considered adequate to access relevant information and knowledge on this topic.

Excluded from this review were commentaries, study protocols, editorials, dissertation abstracts and case conferences; conceptual papers on young people's involvement in services (frameworks); publications that focussed on parents/carer/or social worker voices; studies investigating the impact of young people's involvement in the planning and decision-making of services; papers that discuss transition from state care only; articles in a language other than English, and publications outside the date range.

Information sources

A research librarian was consulted to refine the search strategy and adapted concepts and databases most useful to be searched (Moher et al., 2009). The following databases were identified as most appropriate for the search: Informit, Proquest, Scopus, Web of Science, Sage, Emerald Insight, Academic One File, Google Scholar.

Database searches

The title and abstract of articles were searched with a combination of the following terms.

Table 1 Database search terms

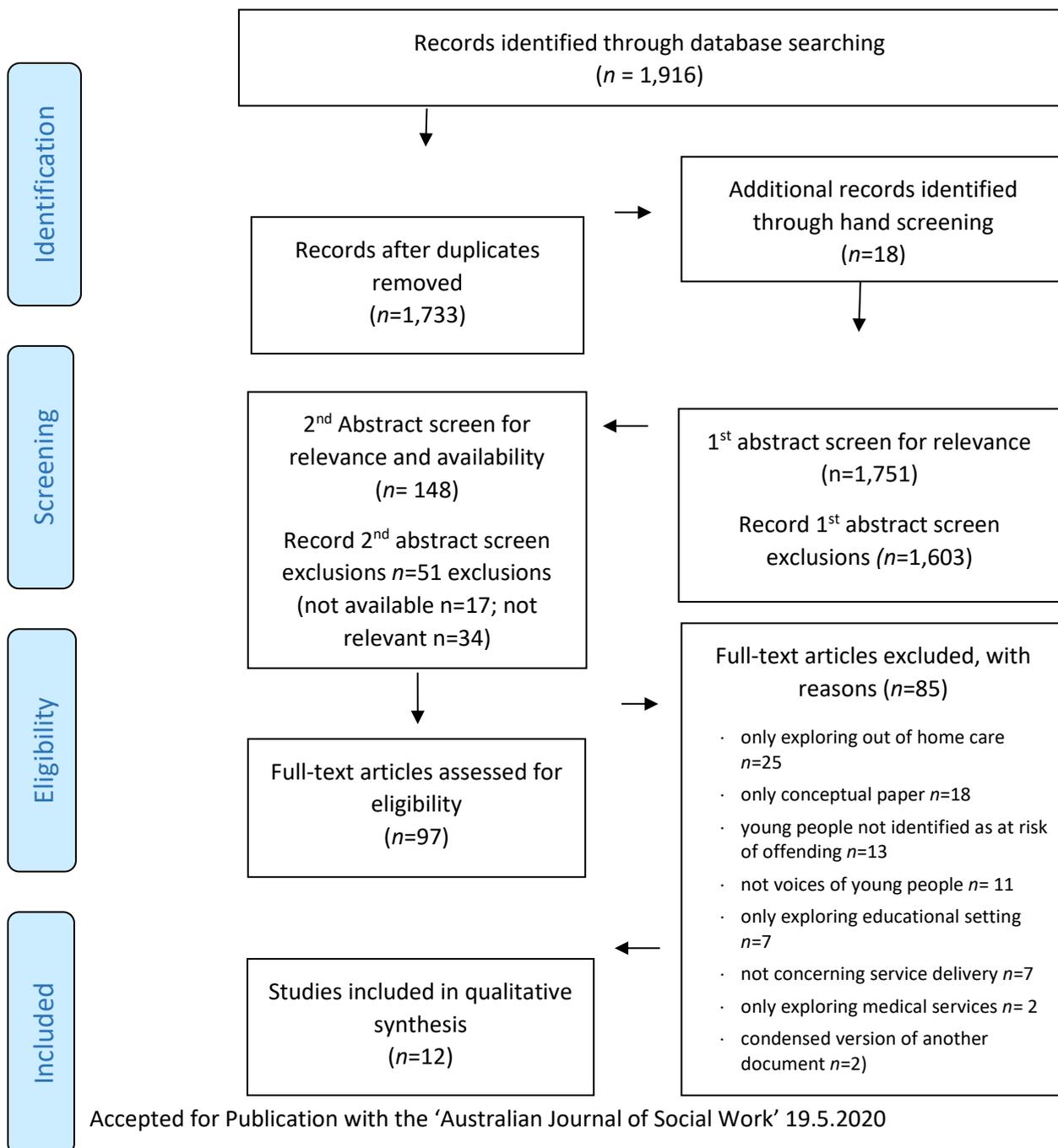| Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3	Concept 4
teenagers	delinquent	voices	services
young people	recidivist	perspectives	social services
youth	offending	views	community services
juveniles	offender		
adolescents			
young			
children			

The following search string was applied, with varying modifications according to database-specific requirements: teenagers OR adolescents OR youths OR "young people" OR juveniles OR "juvenile delinquent" OR "young recidivist" AND services OR "social services" OR "community services" OR "community health services" OR "social justice services" OR "youth services" AND "voices of children and young people" OR "voices of young people" OR "voices of young recidivists" OR "voices of young offenders" OR "voices of juvenile offenders" OR "juvenile voices" OR "perspectives of young people" OR "perspectives of children and young people" OR "juvenile perspectives". Citation and related article functions of the databases were utilised to search for further related results.

Data screening, extraction and analysis

The search returned a total of 1,916 results. These papers were screened using a pre-defined screening tool based on the eligibility criteria. Author five conducted the first screening and removed duplicates and studies that met the exclusion criteria. Two further articles and 16 grey literature studies were located through hand searching the reference lists of full text articles retrieved, and after reviewer feedback. After a second screening of the

abstracts for availability and relevance, 51 further studies were excluded, leaving 97 studies.

Full texts were retrieved for those remaining studies and screened for eligibility by authors

five and six screening 53 and 52 papers respectively. Author one independently screened 10

percent of the 97 papers for moderation and any papers where uncertainty existed about their

inclusion. Any disagreements were discussed with the research team during this process until

consensus was reached. Twelve publications fulfilled the criteria to be included in the review.

Figure 1 is the PRISMA flowchart used to record the literature search, studies

included and excluded and the reasons for exclusions (Moher et al., 2009).

Identification

Records identified through database searching
(*n* = 1,916)

Records after duplicates removed
(*n*=1,733)

Additional records identified through hand screening
(*n*=18)

Screening

2nd Abstract screen for relevance and availability
(*n*= 148)

Record 2nd abstract screen exclusions *n*=51 exclusions (not available n=17; not relevant n=34)

1st abstract screen for relevance
(n=1,751)

Record 1st abstract screen exclusions *(n=1,603)*

Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility
(*n*=97)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (*n*=85)

· only exploring out of home care *n*=25
· only conceptual paper *n*=18
· young people not identified as at risk of offending *n*=13
· not voices of young people *n*= 11
· only exploring educational setting *n*=7
· not concerning service delivery *n*=7
· only exploring medical services *n*= 2
· condensed version of another document *n*=2)

Included

Studies included in qualitative synthesis
(*n*=12)

Figure 1 PRISMA Flowchart

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) statement guided the screening and extraction of the data (Moher et al., 2009). Three authors (author one, five and six) independently extracted the data with the support of a pre-determined extraction form, and then cross-checked results. Included papers were categorised by Reference/first author; Year; Country of origin; Target Group; Service/ Intervention/Areas of focus; Data Collection; and Outcomes. The data on outcomes of the studies were thematically analysed by the whole research team in several workshops, first bringing each author's analysis to the meeting, then discussing, summarising and exploring the themes emerging across all documents. The results were presented in narrative form.

Study quality appraisal

Each study was appraised for research rigour and quality. Authors three and four independently applied the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme [CASP] checklist for qualitative research (Critical Appraisal Skills Program, 2018) to the eleven included papers that reported on qualitative research. Authors one and five applied the Effective Public Health Practice Project [EPHPP] tool (2009) to assess the two studies that included quantitative data. Each study was independently assessed by the respective reviewers and the results discussed until consensus was achieved.

Results

Country of Origin and Data Collection methods

Table 2 summarises the outcomes of the systematic literature review. Of the 12 identified publications, four originated in the United Kingdom, four in Australia and one each in China, New Zealand and the United States. Ten studies applied qualitative, one mixed and one quantitative methods to data collection.

Table 2 Data Extraction table

Author Country of origin	Target group	Service/ Intervention/ Areas of focus	Data collection	Outcomes
Australian Government. (2017) Australia	Young people in detention and others up to 21 years of age	Detention Centre	Interviews, groups (*n*=34), submitted stories (n=117)	Dreadful conditions highlighted, verbal abuse, inappropriate force, inappropriate sexual attention, humiliation, racism, boredom, arbitrary punishment. Lack of direction and abuse lead young people to leave detention angrier and less engaged. Identified importance of rules clearly explained and applied consistently. Needs being met, activities and directions.
Brady et al. (2018) United Kingdom	Young people at risk of offending aged 10-19 (55/47 M/F)	Youth Cafes	Focus groups, participants (*n*=102)	**Young people felt:** Supported, accepted, not judged through friendships forged in the cafes. Sense of belonging and connection Cafes facilitate personal and identity development Formal and informal (life, skills, nutrition, exercise) education. Time at cafes decreased smoking, drinking, drug-taking and stress. Confidence boost Trust relationships between practitioners and young person; felt like family.
Chui & Chan (2014) China	Male juvenile probationers aged 14-20	Probation officers and services	Questionnaire (*n*=113)	Role of the probation officers perceived as punitive and law-enforcing. Called for respect, and access to local resources. **Recommendations.** Supervision plan should be tailored to individual and social needs and capabilities of offenders. Officers to share resources and knowledge to help probationers overcome obstacles.

Author Country of origin	Target group	Service/ Intervention/ Areas of focus	Data collection	Outcomes
CREATE Foundation (2018) Australia	Young people: Offenders (*n=86*) aged 18-25	Youth Justice system	Interviews (*n=148*)	**Negative experiences:** Stigmatised, labelled, disrespected, humiliated, fearful, anxious and intimidated by the justice system officials. Police perceived as "arrogant", "rude", "frightening" and "intimidating". Offenders wanted chance to tell their story, need more specific information. Felt powerless, minimal support and communication from the justice system professionals. Need for more emotional support from case workers and family. **Positive experiences:** 25% expressed fair, straightforward experiences with the justice system. Felt they were treated with respect, had a chance to explain their actions and received a sentence that was justified. Were connected with support services and learned ways to better control their behaviour from their youth justice officers. **Recommendations**: Adopt a trauma-informed approach, explain processes and justice system terminology clearly, train staff to identify trauma –influenced behaviour. Appropriate case planning; clearer expectations, provision of more information, more support, less police antagonism and more empathy; opportunity to be heard and believed; positive interactions; understanding why young people offend, support individual responsibility.

Author Country of origin	Target group	Service/ Intervention/ Areas of focus	Data collection	Outcomes
France & Homel (2006) United Kingdom	Young people at risk of offending aged 11-18 Total children n=110	Institutions in general	Total case studies (*n*=13) with interviews (*n*=3 each)	Social workers not making a difference in their lives, risk assessment inadequate- offending not picked up in assessment, service has not much to offer. Peers important.
Hartwell et al. (2010) United States	Young people post release from detention Aged 14-20	Residential juvenile justice treatment program	Interviews (*n*=35)	Treatment programs can be useful. Importance of fair treatment of young people and availability of different activities.
Koorie Youth Council (2018) Australia	Aboriginal young people in detention or under supervision order	Youth detention Centres, Police, residential homes, Koorie Court	Yarning circles and interviews (*n*=42)	Not understanding department workers' language use or the 'dictionary words' of the magistrate. Abused by police, being stripped and watched undressing in detention, not being safe. Experiences of racism. Placed with people who offended and used drugs led to further offending. Being listened to, support and cultural programs and cultural connections important. Need to feel loved and be safe. Family-like setting important. **Recommendations:** Self-determination, youth participation, and culture, family, Elders and communities as guiding principles for successful solutions.
Moore et al. (2008) Australia	Young people in detention Aged 16-18 (9/2 M/F)	Youth Detention Centre	Interviews (*n*=11);	Importance of positive relationships, supportive interactions with other inmates. Programs that respond to individual learning needs in supportive environments facilitated engagement. Strength-based workers enable participant decision

Author Country of origin	Target group	Service/ Intervention/ Areas of focus	Data collection	Outcomes
				making and ownership of plans. Non-engagement of services or staff seen as personal let-down. Poor communication restricted service delivery. Trauma to be considered in service provision.

Optimistic, centre-based strategies might not work in outside environments. People not willing to accept they had changed, constant monitoring, people believing in them was empowering. It is up to young people to change.

Recommendations. Early intervention, assessing young people holistically; integrated case plan; improved coordination; responsive to individual needs; responsive service. |
| Munford & Sanders (2016) New Zealand | Young people at risk of offending aged 13-17 | Child welfare services, juvenile justice services, remedial education services and mental health service | Surveys (*n*=605) semi-structured interviews (*n*=109) | Forced to attend services disempowering, felt disrespected, and irresponsive. Lack of engagement when service is intermittent and inconsistent. Responsive, respectful and empowering practices provide better outcomes for young people.

Relationship between young person and worker fundamental. Important: respectful practitioners; considering young person's values and beliefs; listening and encouraging decision-making with practitioners.

Helpful when social workers experienced with complex issues and harmful environments. Social workers respected more when they |

Author Country of origin	Target group	Service/ Intervention/ Areas of focus	Data collection	Outcomes
				were persistent and engaging through creative ways Empowering young people achieved better outcomes. Felt confused when there is a lack of information. **Recommendations.** Practitioner-client relationships to achieve substantive change; social workers need to be emotionally connected, take time to understand experiences, provide consistent support and encouragement to make decisions with practitioners.
Ritchie & Ord (2017) United Kingdom	Young people at risk of offending aged 13-19	Open Access Youth Work	A series of focus group interviews (*n*=not stated)	Importance of peer-networks, "makes us feel like family"; importance of acceptance and respect, being given a chance. Attendance can keep them out of trouble and in a safe space. Trusting relationship facilitates developmental change. Activities framework for the education aspects of the work with young people, conversations that develop as part of activity more important than activity. Workers easy to talk to.
Suthers (2011) United Kingdom	Young offenders aged 12-17	Youth Offending Panels	Focus group and semi-structured interviews (*n*=14)	Youth offending Panel atmosphere: 'Friendly 'and "relaxed. The participants perceived the contract as punitive, rather than restorative. Most had insight about early involvement in offending and steps needed to stop it. Young offenders themselves could affect change in their lives. **Barriers:** poor access to information; terminology/jargon used by panel members, did not understand the relevance between

Author Country of origin	Target group	Service/ Intervention/ Areas of focus	Data collection	Outcomes
				their community service and the offence – punitive instead of restorative, pressured to agree to contract, some told they had no choice. Trust and sharing information an issue, young people do not want to be stigmatised. **Recommendations**. Timing more appropriate to young person's attention span; important that panel members understand issues facing young people, stronger emphasis on involving young offenders in the delivery of Youth Offender Panels with a view to improving outcomes and consulting with and recruiting ex-offenders.
Trivasse (2017) United Kingdom	Young offenders aged 14-18	Children's Services; Youth justice Service	Semi-structured interviews (n=11)	Genuineness and parental-type quality of the relationships with worker more important than formal interventions. Friendly relationships result in engagement. Clear explanations reduced anxieties. Confusion when many agencies involved –preferring one person to collate the information and discuss with them. A trusting relationship led to feeling heard and able to open up. **Recommendations.** Create a context of genuine care, building a relationship and ensuring clarity of service provision. Tailoring community work so young person build on their current skills and see the relevance. Maintaining high standard of communication- assists cohesion of information and clarity of service provision. Enforcing boundaries, attendance and adherence shows commitment

Target groups

Target groups included young people at risk of offending ($n=5$), post release from detention ($n=1$), pre-sentencing ($n=1$), in detention ($n=2$), or under supervision ($n=4$). One study included young people in detention and under supervision as one group in the reporting.

Service/ Intervention

The area of focus of the study included detention centres (n=2); open access youth work ($n=2$); probation services ($n=1$); Youth Justice ($n=4$); institutions in general ($n=1$); education/ mental health services ($n=1$); youth offending panels and children's services ($n=2$).

Outcomes: Identified Themes

The systematic literature review revealed informative evidence about how young people who are at risk of offending experienced social services delivery to them and provided recommendations for service delivery.

Six themes were identified from the data within the reviewed documents: "supportive and caring relationships", "the importance of connecting with peers", "respectful engagement", "racism", "information and clarification", and "valuing young people's individuality: agency and empathy". These themes are discussed in turn below and further summarised in an easy read poster for workplaces [see https://doi.org/10.25903/5ec200492cc57 (Zuchowski, 2020)] as recommended by the practitioner partners in this research team.

Supportive and caring relationships

Young people identified the need for supportive and caring relationships with peers, youth workers, family, and law enforcers to help foster positive change within their lives. Forming trusting and supportive relationships with workers helped young people to feel a sense of connection and belonging. For example, Ritchie and Ord (2017, p. 275) identified that forming trusting relationships with workers and peers "makes us feel like family". Another young person similarly reported "I try not to think about where I'd be without that tree, this family, this place. Finding home saved my life." (Koorie Youth Council, 2018, p. 23). In research by Munford and Sanders (2016, p. 295), young people asserted that "empowering and respectful relationships made a difference for young people".

In contrast, negative perceptions and encounters with the criminal justice system, police officers and probation officers hindered a young person's ability to change, "never giving me a chance, never thinking I have changed" (Moore et al., 2008, p. 18). As reported by Chui and Chan (2014, p. 414) young people identified the "inappropriate use of authority" by probation officers damaged their working relationships, and ultimately jeopardized their ability to reintegrate back into the community. Young people recommended that workers implement trauma-informed practices (CREATE Foundation, 2018).

The importance of connecting with peers

Young people emphasised the importance of being connected to peers and having social networks. Relationships with peers encouraged young people to engage with services where they felt safe and not judged, and where they could receive and give support to one another (Brady et al., 2018). Young people valued being able to maintain their peer group and make new friendships within services, which helped build their confidence (Ritchie & Ord, 2017).

Equally, some young people reasoned that their offending was due to the influence of peers they recognised as "the wrong kind of people" (CREATE Foundation, 2018, p. 34) who modelled criminal behaviour. Young people reported they would start "drifting into crimes with groups of friends" (France & Homel, 2006, p. 303), but when supported, were able to recognise negative peer influences and acknowledge they could stop offending by "steering clear of certain friends" (Suthers, 2011, p. 19). Services that enabled and encouraged peer relationships facilitated a "key factor in helping them cope with adversity" (Brady et al., 2018, p. 395) and make positive changes in their lives. Re-engaging young people in peer-related activities was a "significant intervention and one that youth valued highly" (Munford & Sanders, 2016, p. 298).

Respectful engagement

When service delivery reflected responsive, respectful and empowering practices, better outcomes for young people were evident (Munford & Sanders, 2016). Some young people asserted that when they were treated with respect by justice system personnel and given a chance to explain their actions, they ultimately felt they received a sentence that was justified (CREATE Foundation, 2018). Young people recognised fair, respectful and helpful intervention (Hartwell et al., 2010; Trivasse, 2017).

Young people had difficulties engaging with services when there was no respect and no trust in the service relationship. Research highlights humiliating and abusive behaviour towards young people who were in detention or had come to the attention of Youth Justice (Chui & Chan, 2014; Create Foundation, 2018; Australian Government, 2017; Koori Youth Council, 2018; Trivasse, 2017). For example,

> *"One of the guards treats us like shit all the time. He disrespects us and threatens us. He swears at us a lot. He calls me a motherfucker and says "fuck" a lot. This makes me feel unsafe and also angry."* (Australian Government, 2017 p.103)

Racism

Three of the four Australian studies referred to racism. One study pointed out the surprising finding that racism was not mentioned (Create, 2016) and two studies emphasised the experience and impact of racism on young people, including the way they perceive themselves and their relationships with others, and how it impacted their mental well-being (Australian Government, 2017; Koorie Youth Council, 2018).

> *"There's racism. People think just 'cos you're black you're a criminal, an alcoholic. I feel it at school, I feel it down the street. I feel like I get looked down on in my community"* (Koorie Youth Council, 2018, p.52)

Information and clarification

Young people identified the need for clearer, more accessible information about available services, formal procedures, charges, and programs they were involved in (Australian Government, 2017; CREATE Foundation, 2018; Koorie Youth Council, 2018; Munford & Sanders, 2016; Suthers, 2011; Trivasse, 2017). Feelings of confusion were common regarding inadequate information being provided to young people (Chui & Chan, 2014; CREATE Foundation, 2018). Young people often felt pressured into making decisions without careful consideration of the consequences of their decision. Young people needed questions asked during formal proceedings to be clarified, otherwise, they responded with "yeah" as their answer when they did not understand the question (Suthers, 2011, p. 17).

Valuing young people's individuality: agency and empathy

"Agency" captures what many young people expressed as important to achieve positive outcomes. They wanted strength-based workers who saw the positives in them and challenged pessimism and hopelessness (Moore et al., 2008). Various studies highlighted that when young people's involvement was invited within the service, they felt a confidence boost which also increased the service quality. Young people found it difficult to engage when they felt powerless, unsupported and had no control over decisions being made on their behalf (Munford & Sanders, 2016). It was emphasised that when it came down to it, only young offenders themselves could affect change in their lives (Moore et al., 2008; Munford & Sanders; 2016; Suthers, 2011). Chui and Chan (2014) and others identified that to help foster positive outcomes for young offenders, workers must build collaborative working relationships with them, ensure clarity in service provision, and tailor work to the individual, the offence and the community (Trivasse, 2017). Munford and Sanders (2016, p. 299) argued that opportunities for positive change increased when social workers "harnessed their resources and strategies" when working with young people.

Young people's comments highlighted the importance of empathy. Trivasse (2017) recommended workers need to be more self-aware and have a holistic understanding of each individual's situation by considering the young offender's personal and social lived experiences and circumstances. Young people said they wanted to be listened to and encouraged to make decisions with practitioners, and to feel supported and connected (see for example, Brady et al., 2018). For successful intervention to occur, Munford and Sanders (2016, p. 284) recommended workers "take time to understand young people's contexts and how young people make sense of these contexts" while providing consistent support.

In some studies young people overwhelmingly reported they had "no-one" to support them during stages of contact with the justice system (CREATE Foundation, 2018). Offenders felt that their interactions could have been improved if they had been given a

chance to tell their side of the story and their individual context and needs were considered (France & Hommel, 2016; Munford & Sanders, 2016). To understand why youth commit crimes, it was recommended that police officers be more empathetic, give more information and support, and provide opportunities for young people to be heard and believed. One young person explained:

> *I walked into Koori Court ready to be locked up. I looked at the lawyer I'd met five minutes before, waiting to hear the same old stuff , but the Elders asked me to talk up. They listened to everything about home, school, Nan, resi, the cops, the crash. It was the first time I told my story where people heard me. They asked me what I needed and what my family needed. I felt a spark of trust light up again* (Koorie Youth Council, 2018, p.15).

Quality of Studies

Table 3 and 4 provide quality appraisal results. All of the qualitative studies provided descriptions of the methodology and findings, and the majority outlined ethical issues and were appraised as valuable research (see table 2). Some studies did not detail the research design, recruitment strategy or data collection. Very few studies reported if they had considered the relationship between researcher and participants or detailed the research aims. The publications by the Create Foundation (2017), Munford and Sanders (2016), Suthers (2011) and Trivasse (2017) evidenced the strongest quality and rigor of the research methodology reporting.

Table 3 CASP assessment

Reference / Question	Australian Government (2017)	Brady et al. (2018)	Create Foundation (2017)	France & Hommel (2006)	Hartwell et al. (2010)	Koorie Youth Council (2017)	Moore et al. (2008)	Munford & Sanders (2016)	Ritchie & Ord (2017)	Suthers (2011)	Trivasse (2017)
1 Research aims	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
2 Methodology	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3 Research design	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4 Recruitment strategy	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓
5 Data collection	✓	✓	✓	x	X	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
6 Relationships	✓	x	x	✓	X	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
7 Ethical issues	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
9 Findings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10 Value of research	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Overall, the methodological quality of the quantitative studies was assessed as weak to moderate, with both studies only showing strong elements in selection bias and withdrawals and dropouts. It would have been particularly useful if there was further evidence concerning study design and analysis. However, it needs to be acknowledged that some items could not be assessed due to the nature of the cross-sectional design of the studies.

Table 3 EHPP tool applied

Reference / Criteria	Chui & Chan (2006) [Quantitative]	Munford & Sanders (2016) [Mixed Methods]
A Selection bias	Strong	Strong
B Study Design	Weak	Weak
C Confounders	N/A	N/A
D Blinding	Weak	Moderate
E Data collection methods	Weak	Moderate
F Withdrawals and Drop outs	Strong	Strong
G Intervention Integrity	N/A	N/A
H Analysis	N/A	N/A
I Global Ranking for the paper	Weak	Moderate

Discussion

Albeit limited, available studies provided insights into what young people value in service delivery, what supports their engagement with services and addresses their offending behaviour, and what disrupts their positive engagement. Identified as important was that workers support peer relationships and utilize peers as co-mentors and co-motivators to encourage positive engagement within services. More positive outcomes may be achieved if social workers respectfully support young people to extend their sense of agency and control over their circumstances. It seems essential that young people are provided with clear and accessible information. When confusion is perceived or expressed, workers need to provide information to create opportunities for youth's decision making, ultimately enhancing their service experience. As reported by Trivasse (2017), Youth Offending Team practitioners helped young people to feel calmer by clarifying what was happening. Maintaining high standards of communication aided cohesion of information and clarity of service provision. Young people wanted their individual circumstances and contexts to be heard. Relationship-based practice seems crucial in working with young people who might be at risk of offending.

The implications for practice are multi-layered. Service providers in social services and Youth Justice Services need to work actively to build positive relationships with the young people they serve. In relationship-based practice, the quality and character of the relationship are central to any intervention, more so than the intervention or chosen method (Howe et al., 2018). Important aspects of building trust include creating safe relationships and environments. Rights and responsibilities need to be clearly communicated and upheld to develop a space where young people can safely "share". Relationships are complex with possibilities for "misunderstandings and confusion, connection and collaboration, anger and disappointment, hope and belonging, possibility and hope" (Howe et al., 2018, p. 8).

Explorations of how we can share power with young people rather than applying it over them is central to the work (McCashen, 2010).

Respectful practice with young people requires active consultation that affords them recognition and respect and provides insight into their experiences and views (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). It can allow young people to build a picture of their future and allow them to create opportunities for change (McCashen, 2010). It would also meet recommendations by Indigenous leaders about improving Youth Justice work through implementing self-determination, youth participation and prioritising culture, families, elders and community (Koorie Youth Council, 2018). Such an approach requires workers to be non-judgemental, believing what young people share about their experiences and acknowledging them as experts of their lives because "it can be difficult for anyone to move beyond the problems facing them unless they are well heard and validated" (McCashen, 2010, p. 54). Focusing on young people's strengths, showing respect, collaboration, consultation and self-determination are satisfying principles of social justice (McCashen, 2010).

This review revealed that the impact of racism on young people needs to be further considered in service delivery. While not all studies reported racism, this does not mean that it does not shape the experiences of young people. For example, the CREATE Foundation (2018) highlighted that racist attitudes were not reported by the young people, however, the authors commented that omission could have meant that young people felt uncomfortable reporting racism, not that they did not experience it. Our research team reflected on the "invisibility" of racism as an everyday occurrence for Indigenous people that impacts and permeates every aspect of their experience. For young people, a consequence of everyday racism can be that they feel disconnected from the overall society, resulting in them being desensitised to racism, and seeing it as the norm. Young people might need help to identify racism and understand the impact in order to grow.

Non-Indigenous researchers undertake much of the published research, and experiences of racism might not be shared with, or recognised by them. Similarly, non-Indigenous workers deliver much of the service delivery to Indigenous young people. In working with Indigenous young people, their every-day experience of racism needs to be assumed. Services need to actively work to be non-discriminatory and to decolonise their assumptions, attitudes, behaviours and service delivery. This proactive effort requires the development of strategies and accountability. Young people need to be supported in developing trust that the practice engagement will occur in a safe, respectful space. This includes acknowledging their overall experience of racism, but also positively valuing and connecting them to culture, to bring "…healing that can prevent the hurt and loneliness that causes young people to harm themselves and others" (Koorie Youth Council, 2017, p.6).

Prior research has shown that peer support can have a positive impact on young people's health, sense of self and self-efficacy (Turner, 1999). This research team discussed how peer support can be fostered, including creating physical spaces that can facilitate peer engagement. Shared spaces need to be developed and allow "co-clients" to attend in a shared space. Peers can be used as co-mentors, co-motivators and co-facilitators in group work and team activities (Brady et al., 2018).

The need for young people to be informed and have sufficient knowledge is central to strengths-based practice and links to the discussion about respect and consultation. Workers must ensure information and knowledge is shared appropriately and assists the ongoing work and consultation with Indigenous people to facilitate an understanding of their aspirations (Liebesman & Briskman, 2018). Implications for service delivery include the importance of staff having sufficient skills, information and knowledge to engage with young people in respectful and empowering ways, being knowledgeable on a wide range of issues and having the skills to seek specific information when required. Workers need to be able to translate

information appropriately to young people. It seems crucial to include young people as active participants in meetings that concern their lives, behaviours and future expectations of them. To be able to actively participate, young people need to understand the formal charges, content and format of processes, otherwise, due to a fear of losing face, they might not indicate that they are confused and feel pressured to comply. This would undermine rather than facilitate future positive engagement and relationships.

The recommendations of inquiries into Youth Justice Systems highlighted the importance of early intervention, wrap around services and rehabilitation and therapeutic services (Atkinson, 2018; Commonwealth Government, 2017; McMillan & Davis, 2016; Smith 2018). The findings in this study fit with these intentions. There is complexity in implementing the findings in the statutory Youth Justice Systems as this requires a cultural shift, an emphasis on rehabilitation/ therapy and appropriate resource allocation that can be difficult to achieve. However, the findings emphasise the need to support young people to develop the ability to make positive choices in their lives about offending, building relationships and peers. This requires developing approaches for use in involuntary settings to guide young people in decision making processes and in growing pro-social networks. This will involve exploring when and how young people can be involved in decisions about their lives, what information they need explained, role-modelling supportive caring relationships and respectful engagement, and dealing with racism.

Limitations

Only English language journals were included in the data base search which excludes a wide variety of potentially useful sources. Nevertheless, the systematic application of the PRISMA approach, and the high levels of agreement achieved between the independent reviewers, makes the results compelling. Second, the study has not explored particular

barriers to implementation of the recommendation of the studies in statutory settings. A further exploration of research in this area could be linked to the current findings in order to strengthen the practice application of the findings.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review explored what young people, who are at risk of offending and/or have offended, say about services delivered to them. Young people highlighted that peer relationships and peers as co-mentors and co-motivators encouraged their positive engagement within services. It was revealed that positive outcomes can be achieved through respectful engagement with young people that supports their sense of agency and control over their circumstances. Young people needed clear communication, accessible information, and empathic, supportive workers. It is important to treat each young person's story as unique. The implications for service delivery are the need to create spaces for peer support, train workers to implement respectful service delivery that supports young people to make informed life decisions. Moreover, it is important to assume Indigenous and ethnic diverse young people will experience racism and work to address it.

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