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Permanent exclusion of young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City, Belize

PERMANENT EXCLUSION OF YOUNG MEN FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THEIR OFFENDING AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN BELIZE CITY, BELIZE

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Abstract

Using a qualitative research design, the contextual factors and processes associated with criminal offending and wider social exclusion were examined for six Black young men from the Southside of Belize City. The young men had been permanently excluded from secondary school between the ages of 14 and 17 years and had been criminally charged. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the young men and their mothers after cross-referencing school exclusion data from secondary schools and youth-based organisations with criminal offending data from the Belize Police Department.

The study examined the extent of the influence of permanent school exclusion on the offending behaviour and the multidimensional disadvantages experienced in the post-school exclusion lives of the young men. The findings suggest that multiple disadvantages associated with the social environments of the home, neighbourhood, and peer group served as risk factors that contributed to early offending behaviour. Most of the young men grew up alongside demographically similar peers in lone-parent households in neighbourhoods that had a shared historical experience of social and economic marginality, including poverty, high rates of violence, and a proliferation of gangs.

However, permanent school exclusion served as a critical life event that deprived the young men of access to education and the opportunity to acquire formal educational qualifications, which set into motion a dynamic process of social exclusion through multiple forms of exclusion, particularly in relation to their participation in education and training, the labour market, social networks, and their experience of criminalisation. In the end, they experienced a cyclical pattern of precarious engagement in low-quality or unsecured work, unemployment, and short-term training programmes, none of which ameliorated their economic marginality. A concurrent process of criminalisation occurred as the young men's offending behaviour evolved into serious criminal offending and gang involvement, leading to criminal charges, criminal records, and incarceration, which further diminished their social and economic participation.

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Christina Pantazis and Professor David Berridge, who went above and beyond to support me throughout this difficult journey. The support and encouragement that they provided me in the past five years lifted me when I was discouraged. Their understanding of my delays and consistent request for extensions, as well as my personal problems leaves me emotional and for that they will always have a home in my heart and Belize. The completion of my thesis is a testament to their guidance, mentorship, and unwavering dedication.

I am also grateful to the young men and the mothers who participated in this study and trusted me in their homes and lives. Their experiences are important to me, and I hope that I make them proud as I endeavour to create real change in their communities.

This study would not be possible without the assistance of the schools, youth organisations and the Belize Police Department. They took their time to provide me with the information that I requested and for that I am indebted to them.

My journey would not have been possible without the kind, dedicated and supportive presence of Erin Ling who always had wise advice and sheltered me during difficult times and provided me with a place to call home. I will always remember her kindness.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother who emphasised education throughout my childhood. Her enduring support as a single mother is the stuff of legends and to her, I owe everything. I also dedicate this thesis to David Pook and the many friends I lost to violence. You are not forgotten!

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ……… ███████████ Greg Nunez   DATE: <u>February 19, 2022</u>

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study explores offending behaviour and social exclusion through the experience of permanent exclusion of young men from secondary school in Belize City, Belize. This chapter introduces the background of the study through a brief profile of Belize and the reasons for my interest in this area of research. It then outlines education policy and the challenges of crime and violence in Belize. It also briefly introduces the methodology and main arguments of the study, followed by the research aim, research questions, and outline of the thesis.

Background

Population and Demography

Belize is a sovereign state that is among the last English-speaking Caribbean countries to get its independence from the United Kingdom in 1981 (Gayle and Mortis, 2010). It has the distinction of being the only English-speaking country that is geographically and politically a part of the Central American and the Caribbean regions (see Figure 1.1).

Belize is one of the least populated countries in the world with a population of only 419,199, of which 71 percent is under the age of 35 and almost one in every four persons is an adolescent between ages 10 and 19 (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2020). This makes it one of the countries with the youngest populations in the world (Gayle et al., 2016).

Figure 1.1: Map of Belize in Central America and the Caribbean

Source: https://maps-belize.com, 2021

Belize has six administrative districts – Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek, and Toledo - that comprise cities, towns, and villages (see Figure 1.2). Belize District accounts for approximately a third of the country's population. Belize City is located in the Belize District, which is the commercial hub and the largest urban centre of the country, with an estimated 16 percent (65,173) of the national population (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2020).

Figure 1.2: Map of Belize and Six Districts

Source: worldatlas.com, 2021

Belize City is divided into two geo-social boundaries - Northside and Southside (see Figure 1.3) – separated by the Belize River and constructed along the lines of socio-economic disparities. The Northside of Belize City is characterised by upper middle to high-income neighbourhoods and the Southside has a concentration of low to middle-income neighbourhoods. The Southside of Belize City, which will be referred to as Southside for the remainder of the thesis, has a concentration of gangs

and other social issues related to poverty, high unemployment, poor governance, and low access to public and social services (Edberg et al., 2011; Gayle et al., 2016). Southside is comprised of six electoral divisions that serve as political constituencies: Lake Independence, Mesopotamia, Pickstock, Port Loyola, Queen Square, and Albert constituencies (Land Information Centre, 2005).

Figure 1.3: Map of Belize City
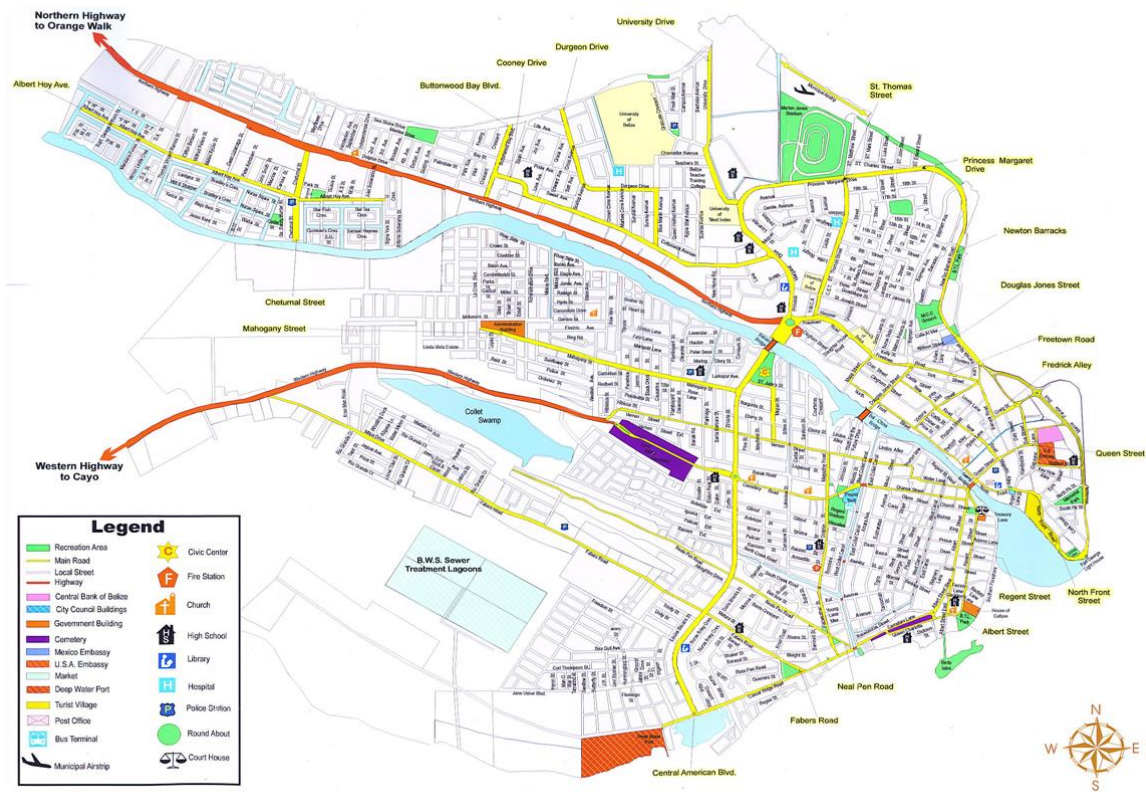
Source: Vidiani.com, 2021

Ethnic Composition

Shared across the six districts are four major ethnic groups consisting of the Mestizo (48 percent), Creole (26 percent), Maya (10 percent), and Garifuna (7 percent). Ethnic groups of smaller sizes include the Mennonites, East Indians, Hindus, Lebanese, Asians, and Africans. The Creole and Garifuna as Afro-descendant or Black ethnic groups are numerically the majority (63 percent) in the Belize District (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2020). This ethnic predominance in Belize City is important to this study given the sociological analysis of the experience of young men in Belize City and the social environment they are embedded. This is significant when considering the vulnerabilities of the young men and their homes and neighbourhoods when unemployment is highest among Creole and Garifuna ethnic groups, as discussed below.

Poverty and Unemployment

The leading productive sectors in the Belizean economy are tourism and agriculture (Jessen et al., 2013). However, the most recent national data on poverty collected in 2018 indicate that 52 percent of the Belizean population is below the poverty line (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2021). This is a significant increase from the 43 percent reported in the 2009 Country and Poverty Assessment (National Human Development Advisory Committee, 2010). Comparatively, the poverty data of Belize eclipses that of Jamaica which had 12.6 percent of its population living in poverty in the same year (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2021). Belize is also among the poorest and most sparsely populated countries in Central America, alongside Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala (Andreano et al., 2020).

The pre-COVID national unemployment rate in Belize in 2019 was 10.4 percent, with the Belize District having the highest unemployment rate of 12.5 percent. By ethnicity, the highest national unemployment rates were among the Afro-descendant or Black ethnic groups of the Creole (14.6 percent) and Garifuna (14.4 percent), followed by the Mestizo ethnic group (9.3 percent). Unemployment rates among the Creole (16.3 percent) and Garifuna (20.2 percent) were even higher in the Belize District where they are numerically the most populous ethnic groups (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2019). The data, therefore, suggest that Belize District, where Belize City is located, has the highest national unemployment rate, as well as the highest rates of unemployment among Black ethnic groups.

Household Information

According to the last census conducted in 2010, 65.8 percent of children under the age of 18 live with both parents, 22.6 percent live with mothers only and 2.5 percent live with fathers only (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2010). The Belize Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2015-2016 suggests that in terms of household composition two-thirds are headed by women and a third are headed by men (UNICEF, 2017).

Crime and Violence

Belize's high crime and violence rates with rising trends like other Caribbean and Central American countries are identified as the primary negative influences on the country's economic growth and competitiveness (Carneiro, 2016; Peirce, 2017). Having one of the world's highest homicide rates which increased by 150 percent between 2000 and 2010 from 17 to 42 per 100,000, it has consistently remained over 30 per 100,000 since 2007 and peaked at 44.7 in 2012 (Gayle et al., 2016). The most recent decline of 24.3 per 100,000 in 2020 was during the COVID-19 pandemic (Belize Crime

Observatory, 2021) when many other countries also experienced a drop in crime after the introduction of lockdown measures (UNODC, 2020). Despite this decrease in the national homicide rate, Belize City as the largest urban centre had a homicide rate of 72.1 per 100,000 in 2020 – almost three times the country's homicide rate (Belize Crime Observatory, 2021). The disproportionate homicide rates between Belize City and the country have earned Belize City the label of "epicentre of violence" in Belize, with Southside having a concentration of gangs, violence, and homicides (Gayle and Mortis, 2010, p. 64). Much of the violence occurs in neighbourhoods within Lake Independence, Collet, and Mesopotamia (Young, 2019). Therefore, to understand what contributes to and sustains high levels of violence in Belize City, we must examine the social environment of the Southside.

Background Description of Southside

Gayle and Mortis (2010) and Baird (2019) provide descriptions of the social and physical environment of the Southside. In terms of the social environment, Gayle and Mortis (2010, p. 102) characterised the Southside as "the worst human ecology for a youth to grow up" in Belize. The authors cited key variables such as weakness in family form, volatile home environs maintained by poor household financial stability, and poor father presence and power. Father presence was found to be low since two-thirds of the fathers in the Southside were missing. Eighty-three percent of the adolescents in Southside were found to be aggressive or moderately aggressive, which was unmatched in other parts of Belize, by using a Home Nurture Index. The Home Nurture Index comprised of seven factors associated with parent-child relationship, parent-parent relationship, treatment of the child, and violence in the home. Different areas in Southside, like Collet and Port Loyola constituencies, and parts of the Lake Independence constituency were described as exhibiting poor urban planning and "accidental rapid urbanisation" (p. 45):

> …people live in the morass or wetlands connected to solid land by 'London Bridges' expertly built by people who are unafraid to run ahead of the Government. Some of the people have no electricity so people use a flashlight to navigate their way home at nights…The frightening thing is that people consistently use garbage to fill in the morass (p. 133).

Similarly, Baird (2019) provided the following description:

> Below the Haulover Creek that bisects Belize City and its 60,000 inhabitants, Southside is comprised of ramshackle neighbourhoods, many built on unforgiving peri-urban marshlands. Southside and one notorious downtown street called Majestic Alley, has played host to gang violence since the 1980s. Belize is a country characterized by elitism and inequality, and

residents south of the creek have long been at the bottom of the country's socioeconomic strata (p. 7).

As previously mentioned, Southside has a concentration of neighbourhood gangs (see Figure 1.4). The composition of the gangs in Belize is mainly 'Crips' and 'Bloods', with a growing presence of Central American transnational gangs like 'MS-13' and the '18th Street Gang' from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador (Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Peirce and Veyrat-Pontet 2013). Gayle and Mortis (2010) assert that the ethnic composition of the gangs in Belize City reflects the majority population of Black ethnic groups (i.e., Creole or Garifuna) with most gang members (74 percent) being Black. Baird (2019) supports Gayle and Mortis' (2010) assertion on the ethnic composition of gangs in Belize City based on the historic account of the mass emigration from Belize City to the US that occurred in 1961 after Hurricane Hattie destroyed the economic and physical infrastructure of Belize City. The large-scale migration of a predominantly Black population composed of Creole and Garifuna ethnicities was pivotal to the importation of the gang culture when the US deported 'Blood' and 'Crip' gang members back to Belize City in the 1980s.

Figure 1.4: Distribution of Gangs by Neighbourhood in Belize City

 Source: Cacho, 2019.

Since 2018, the Government of Belize has declared into law and enforced several States of Emergency (SOE) in the Southside as a tool to control rising crime and violence, particularly violence among gangs. The first SOE was declared in 2018 in two neighbourhoods in the Southside (Naturalight Productions, 2018). This measure has been declared and enforced by both major political parties. The declaration of an SOE grants the government the legal authority to detain and remand suspected gang members to prison for a month with the possibility of an extension of detention. The SOE also grants the government the power to suspend certain rights of detained suspected gang members, such as the right to bail or legal counsel. As recently as July 2020, August 2021, and August 2022, respectively, the Government of Belize declared SOEs in the Southside to curtail warring gangs of different neighbourhoods (Great Belize Productions, 2020; 2021; 2022). The SOEs were triggered by a spate of shootings and murders, and importantly, the shooting and killing of two young Black male secondary school pupils in separate incidents, who were innocently shot and killed while walking in their neighbourhoods. The SOE has, however, faced criticism from some members of parliament as a dragnet that captures mostly young Black males (Great Belize Productions, 2022).

In a September 27, 2021, recorded video statement released to news media outlets (Great Belize Productions, 2021) addressing the nation on crime amid a surge in violent crimes and the wake of the murder of a 15-year-old Black male secondary school pupil purchasing bread for his mother at a neighbourhood store, the Prime Minister emphasised the debilitating role that gang violence has played in the neighbourhoods of Southside Belize City. While the emphasis of the Prime Minister's speech, in response to surging violent crimes was to address gang violence through the SOE and stronger policing deterrence, his inclusion of preventative measures to reduce the recruitment velocity of young men into gangs, such as access to education, suggests a recognition of the nexus between education and criminality.

> Less than five hundred gang members have been terrorizing neighbourhoods and communities, particularly in the south side of Belize City. Gang violence is festering in part because of what has become a careless culture of silence and hopelessness, especially in our poor and vulnerable communities…While no law or set of laws alone will end the fear and senseless violence it is clear that immediate action is needed. If such actions means stricter enforcement by the police including reinstituting a longer state of emergency then we must do so...And it will take more access to social intervention programmes in these communities including jobs, free access to education, and a conscious effort to cut off recruitment of children by gang affiliates (Great Belize Productions, 2021).

Likewise, reports from youth camps like Expedition 2017 hosted by the Conscious Youth Development Programme and UNICEF Belize for at-risk young Black men between the ages of 12 and 17 from the Southside of Belize City, many of whom are known, claim, or affiliated to gangs also refer to issues about education. The reports suggest that young men from gang neighbourhoods who are permanently excluded from school at a young age find themselves "drifting aimlessly" and "associating with the wrong type of people" even while resisting recruitment into the neighbourhood gang (Toombs, 2019).

Access to Education and Levels of Education

The education system in Belize consists of four levels: Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary (see Figure 1.5). Pre-primary education is for two years, followed by eight years of primary education, and four years of secondary education (Forms 1-4). After completion of secondary education, young people can continue their education at the Associate or Bachelor's degree level depending on the institution chosen.

Figure 1.5: Belize Education System
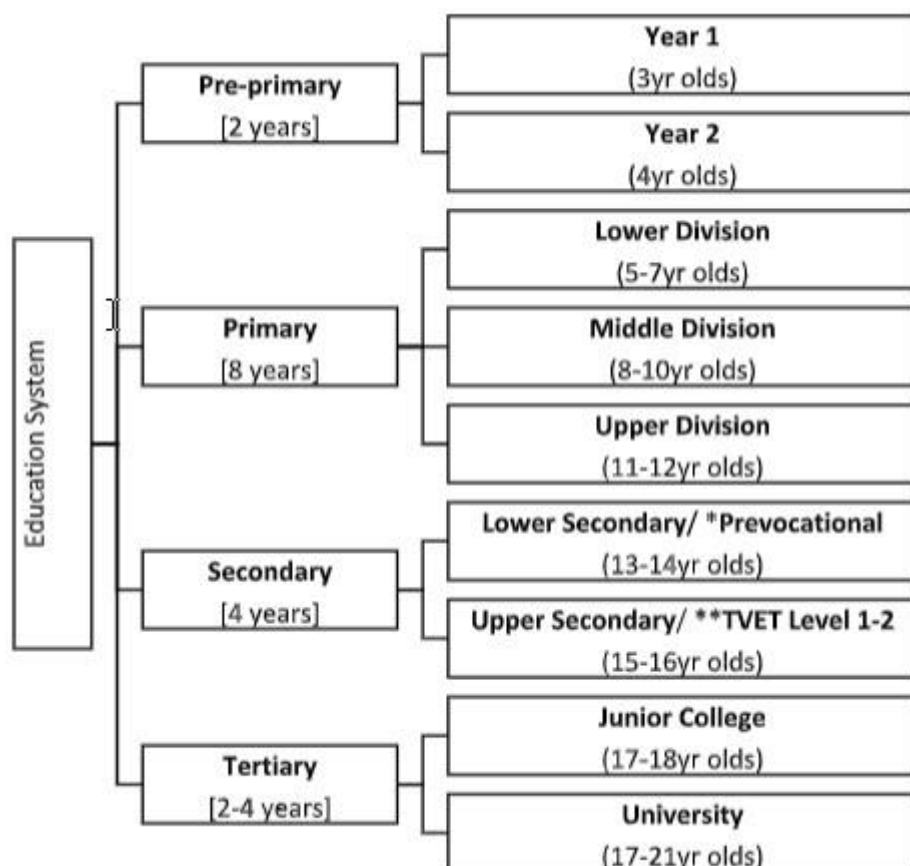
Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, 2022.

There are three types of educational institutions operating in Belize: government, government-aided, and private. Government-aided schools are owned and operated by religious domination or a community group that receives funding from the Government of Belize (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, 2022). Accordingly, under a church-state partnership, most schools are owned and operated by denominational churches, with the government managing 15 percent of pre-primary, 19 percent of primary, and 33 percent of secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2012). As of 2019, there are 229 pre-primary, 310 primary, and 61 secondary schools in Belize. Additionally, there are six TVETs and 13 tertiary institutions (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020).

The Education Act Chapter 36, Revised Edition 2003, is the legislation that governs most of the rules and regulations of the Belize Education Sector (Government of Belize, 2003). The rules refer to the management, inspection, and financing of schools, school fees, school admission, attendance, curriculum, and other areas. Under the Education Rules 2000, government and government-aided schools have Managing Authorities (MA) with responsibility for the management of the school and the development of school policies and rules in accordance with the education regulations (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020; Edward, 2021).

The Ministry of Education (2012) implements a cost-cutting and responsibility-sharing methodology with the church, whereas the government establishes the educational objectives, develops curricula and other educational standards, pays the salaries of teachers, and provides teachers' training, shares the cost of facilities and their maintenance, and administers national examinations. At the primary level, the Ministry of Education pays the salaries of all teachers but at the secondary level, it only pays 70 percent, with the church paying the remaining 30 percent (Gayle and Mortis, 2010). In addition, the church maintains the property that the school is located on and other expenses, which renders the Ministry of education reliant on the church regarding management and financial support.

Expenditure on education in Belize as a percentage of the government's recurrent expenditure was 25.3 percent in 2019 or 7.1 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020). In terms of education financing, all government and government-aided primary and secondary schools are tuition-free; however, schools are permitted to charge special fees with the approval of the Chief Education Officer (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, 2022). The Belize Education Sector Strategy 2020-2025 indicates that, unlike pre-primary and primary school where there is a cap for the payment of school fees by parents, there is no cap for the secondary level (Edward, 2021). Furthermore, most of the protection measures that ensure access to education is applied to primary education. The Education Act 2003 stipulates that no government of government-aided primary schools can prohibit attendance at school of a child of

compulsory age because of non-payment of school fees (Government of Belize, 2003). On the other hand, for government or government-aided secondary schools, the Rules only stipulate that schools should set aside an annual student assistance fund equivalent to no less than a percent of income from fees and grant aid that will be administered between the government and the school. However, there is a suggestion that at the secondary level, the Ministry of Education provides some targeted financial aid through a subsidy programme to help address repetition and dropout rates (Policy, Planning, Research, and Evaluation Unit 2020).

Access to Secondary Education

The official secondary school age in Belize is 13 to 16 years, but education is compulsory for children between the ages of five and 14 years. Secondary school is not compulsory in Belize. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (2022), secondary in Belize corresponds to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Levels 2 and 3. To that end, secondary school is divided into two levels – lower secondary and upper secondary. The curriculum for lower secondary corresponds to ISCED Level 2 and is designed to build on foundational skills and expose pupils to different fields. Upper secondary corresponds to ISCED Level 3 and the curriculum includes core courses and subjects arranged into professional specialisations. Pupils are awarded a Secondary School Diploma after the completion of secondary education.

Almost half of the household heads in the Belize Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2015-2016 completed primary school as the highest education, a quarter completed secondary school, 17 percent had a higher education than the secondary level, and 6.2 percent had no or little education (UNICEF, 2017). The data, therefore, suggest that the completion rate of household heads at all levels of education is low.

The Belize Education Sector Strategy 2011-2016 acknowledged the gradual departure of males from the education system as represented in the gender disparity in enrolment in which young women outnumbered young men in secondary school in 2009 at a ratio of 53 to 47 percent and significantly widened at the tertiary level at 62 to 38 percent (Policy and Planning Unit, 2012). At the secondary level in 2009, young men had higher dropout rates compared to young women (12.8 percent compared to only 8.1 percent) and higher repetition rates involving repeating a class level (10 percent compared to 8 percent) (Policy and Planning Unit, 2011) – see Figure 1.5.

Figure 1.5: Secondary Level Education Statistics 2009 and 2019
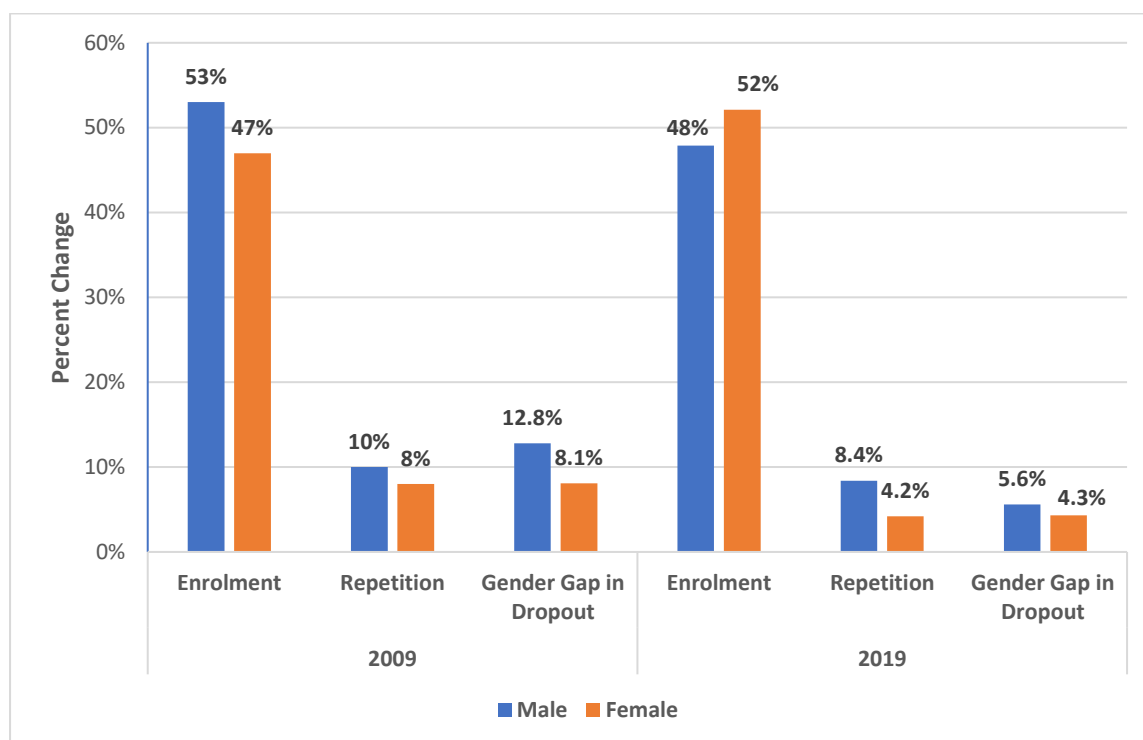
Source: Policy and Planning Unit, 2011, 2012; Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020.

The most recent Education Sector Strategy 2020-2025 identified a marginal shrinkage in the disparity of enrolment at the secondary level between young men and young women in 2019, with young women accounting for 52.1 percent and young men 47.9 percent of pupils, and at tertiary level 62.9 percent and 37.1 percent, respectively (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020). It also showed a gender disparity in the dropout and repetition rates at the secondary level in which young men had higher dropout rates compared to young women (5.6 percent compared to 4.3 percent) and higher repetition rates involving repeating a class level (8.4 percent compared to only 4.2 percent) (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020) – see Figure 1.4. Therefore, while enrolment rates for both males and females have remained static, repetition and dropout rates have seen a sharper decline, but the gender gap remains in favour of girls. In fact, the gender disparity concerning repetition rates has widened and doubled. This prompts a closer look at the education system in Belize and based on the statistics, an emphasis on secondary education.

Provision of Secondary Education in Belize

Policy documents of the Government of Belize overlap with the objectives of the education sector, particularly concerning the participation of young men in secondary education. This includes the Belize Medium Term Development Strategy 2010-2013 which reaffirmed the strategic focus of the National

Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan (NPESAP) 2009-2013 on human development through a greater focus on secondary education. The strategic objectives for education included a focus on reducing drop-out rates at the secondary level and improving achievement and quality (Mendoza, 2009).

Likewise, the Belize Horizon 2010-2030 National Development Framework as a long-term development strategy of the Government of Belize recognises under its theme 'Education for Development - Education for Life' that a decade ago almost 60 percent of the secondary school-age population was not enrolled in school. It, therefore, proposes that children should have access to quality education at least to the secondary level (Barnett et al., 2011).

Several years later, the Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy 2016-2019 also highlighted concerns about enrolment and school dropout among young people. In its overriding goal to improve the quality of life of all Belizeans, it identified four 'Critical Success Factors (CSFs),' of which one (CSF1) included education. Particularly, it articulated actions toward an increase in enrolment at the primary, secondary, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) levels, and a reduction in dropout and repetition rates with some support services for pupils at risk of repetition or dropping out (Government of Belize, 2016). The nexus between education and crime or social exclusion is addressed in the Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy 2016-2019 under CSF2 and CSF4, which aimed to enhance governance and citizen security through the amelioration of social issues that influence crime, including increasing access to education and training in high-crime areas by identifying school-age children who were not in school and offering the necessary assistance for their enrolment.

The challenge of increasing participation or retaining young people in education was also noted in the most recent Belize Education Sector Strategy 2020-2025 which identified a key target area to increase the compulsory school age from 14 to 16 years as in other Caribbean countries (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020). Currently, Belize only mandates school attendance up to age 14, which covers the primary school level but contrasts the established expectation within Belize that young people attend secondary school to completion between the ages of 14 and 18 (Young et al., 2017).

These various national policy documents suggest a national concern about the education of boys and young men in Belize. However, the concern over the education of boys and young men in the English-speaking Caribbean has maintained prominence for several decades and has continued to evolve (Figueroa, 2007). Yet, the emphasis in Belize and the Caribbean has been mainly on school dropout as a representation of underachievement and low participation of boys and young men in education. The

extent of the analysis of underachievement or low participation of young men in education often overlooks permanent school exclusion, which is another form of underachievement.

The focus on enrolment and dropout suggests that there is an empirical gap regarding permanent school exclusion as an indicator of underachievement or low participation in education in Belize. The lack of emphasis on young men who are statistically less likely to enrol or complete secondary education, as well as more likely to drop out, provides another empirical gap. In addition, addressing this empirical gap will also allow for an exploration of the relationship between permanent school exclusion and criminal offending and wider social exclusion experienced by young men in Belize City.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (2022), TVET in Belize corresponds to the ISCED Levels 2, 3, and 4. They are described as follows:

> Four levels of TVET are currently offered 1) prevocational, which is designed to build on foundational skills and also to provide students with some exposure to different trades; 2) Level 1 TVET programmes, which are designed to provide students with the competencies needed to perform as an entry-level worker in a particular trade; 3) Level 2 TVET programmes, which are designed to provide students with the competencies needed to perform as a supervised skilled worker in a particular trade; and to a limited extent, 4) Level 3 TVET programmes, which are designed to provide students with the competencies needed to perform as an independent or autonomous skilled worker in a particular trade.

The TVET programmes are designed for persons 15 years and older, but there is no official age for the TVET programmes. However, only young people aged 15 or older can enrol in Level 1 and higher. Pupils younger than 15 years must enrol in prevocational programmes. Many of the TVET programmes have a duration of one year, with some short-term courses also being provided. Pupils who complete the TVET programme are awarded a TVET Certificate.

School Exclusion in Belize

The literature on school exclusion in Belize is sparse. No study in Belize has focused solely on permanent school exclusion as a policy or disciplinary practice. The few studies (Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Young et al., 2017; Baird, 2019) that discussed school exclusion have mostly referred to structural education exclusion based on issues of access to education or have emphasised dropout based on poor attendance and poor performance. Gayle and Mortis (2010), for example, focus more on the areas of structural exclusion from education from a human rights approach related to equitable

access rather than the intentional act or policy by schools to formally exclude pupils. They do, however, provide some insight into the perspective of teachers or school administrations on formal school exclusion. They suggested that in some schools, up to one percent of boys or young men are likely to be fixed-term excluded during the school year due to indiscipline. Moreover, the perspective of teachers is that the proportion of fixed-term excluded male pupils would be higher if the exclusion process was less complicated.

Young et al. (2017) in an Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) study suggested that disciplinary and exclusion policies in schools were precarious because the Ministry of Education guided schools but schools through the Managing Authorities were responsible for establishing policies on disciplinary matters at the schools, including permanent school exclusion. This was an important finding given that some teachers and counsellors felt that some schools abused the demerit or deterrence systems in place to tackle pupil indiscipline or infractions, including a fixed-term exclusion for lateness. The use of the demerit system aimed at addressing school policy infractions was considered by some participants to be used punitively and resulted in the fixed-term and permanent school exclusion of difficult pupils, which could influence the chance of placement in another school. As described by Young et al. (2017, p. 72), a lack of standardisation and autonomy provided to Managing Authorities may result in different policies and application of disciplinary measures:

> The demerit system is used for various offenses. In one school system, teachers can apply up to two demerits for a single offense, and five demerits result in a detention. Five detentions result in a working suspension, and two suspensions result in expulsion. In another school, students [pupils] can earn both merits and demerits, and five merits can remove one demerit. Five demerits result in a detention, and twenty demerits or four detentions will result in a one-week working suspension.

Young et al. (2017) found that some teachers preferred that schools enforce penalties for truancy and other disciplinary infractions other than fixed and permanent school exclusions. For them, these stringent methods of addressing indiscipline only serve to further disadvantage pupils academically and contribute to school disengagement.

The administration of disciplinary policies is complicated by various other factors espoused in the literature. Firstly, Gayle and Mortis (2010) referred to a prioritisation of training at the primary level but not the secondary level in 2009. They refer to the disproportionate number of over half of teachers in primary schools that were not trained compared to almost two-thirds of teachers at secondary schools. For the authors, this is particularly noteworthy when considering the developmental stage of secondary school pupils as adolescents at an educational level where more extra-curricular activities

are demanded. Young et al. (2017) agreed that there was a training deficit but specified that this may contribute to higher rates of fixed and permanent school exclusions because school administrators and teachers needed training and support in dealing with behavioural challenges presented by pupils, so as make fixed and permanent school exclusions last resort measures.

Secondly, Gayle and Mortis (2010) suggested that teachers, principals, and government personnel in their study complained about the power relations between the church and the Ministry of Education and claimed that at times the church tried to undermine the policy frames and principles of the Ministry of Education in relation to the human rights of children. More specifically, they gave cases in which the Managing Authority through the Board of Directors of schools made the wrong decision that resulted in the permanent school exclusion of a pupil, but the Managing Authority went unchallenged. Interestingly, the criticisms of the church are also matched with the perceptions of some teachers toward the administration of secondary education in Belize. Some teachers felt that smaller numbers of privileged pupils getting into secondary school was good for the education system because fewer pupils reach and complete the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) Examination and they do well to bolster the reputation of Belize in the region.

Thirdly, teachers in Southside are overwhelmed by the level of violence and the vulnerability of males in their schools. Teachers in Gayle and Mortis' (2010) study distinguished between the levels of stress experienced in Northside and Southside schools. Teachers in Northside schools were suggested to experience lower levels of stress than teachers in Southside particularly because they had a critical mass of supportive parents, unlike in the Southside where teachers "are really operating clinics rather than schools" (p. 121). Incidences of "gang violence and masculinity-related violence" were more than eight times higher in Southside secondary schools than in Northside secondary schools. Teachers in the Southside were aware of the involvement of male pupils in illicit activities, like drug selling, and predicted that some young men in their classes would likely not return the following school year. The main reason attributed to drug selling was that the young men hustled to contribute financially to their homes or were independent of their parents and had to hustle to provide for themselves. Likewise, teachers in Southside schools reported that troubled male pupils often came from families living in poverty. The families were often single female-headed households with large family sizes, poor infrastructural houses, no running water, no electricity, and no unemployed adults.

Lastly, Gayle and Mortis (2010) indicated that teachers from Southside schools reported that some male pupils were vulnerable to gang formation and recruitment from neighbourhood gangs, and many were already aligned with a gang. The interactions between the neighbourhood gangs and the schools were frequent due to conflicts related to gang-involved pupils, and the presence of rival gang-involved

pupils, but also because some gang leaders provided financial support to some schools to address the welfare of their pupils in poverty areas. For male pupils navigating this dynamic, protecting their female teachers was important. For example, Gayle and Mortis cite an example of a female teacher seeking to call the police to prevent a gang leader from recruiting a pupil, and the pupil having to rush over to the teacher to advise her not to do so because the pupil did not want her to be harmed. While the findings of Gayle and Mortis (2010) are extensive regarding the environment that schools are in and the interaction between teachers and pupils who are at-risk or gang-involved, which may influence their responses to school exclusion, other research supports the seriousness of the findings. Baird (2019, p. 2), for example, detailed the response of a teacher on the level of gang violence in the Southside of Belize City where the school was located through her lamentation that "young men round here have become an endangered species." Young et al. (2017) supported these findings in their study but from the perspective of pupils as children and adolescents who identified stressors, such as gang activity, drugs, physical abuse, and other issues, as reasons for their indiscipline or dropping out of school.

Education, Crime and Social Exclusion

Challenges in access and quality of education have been considered to contribute to poverty and crime in Belize (Jessen et al., 2013). Therefore, my interest in exploring the relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending and social exclusion was influenced by the high crime and violence rates among young people in Belize, particularly between males aged 15 and 25 (Peirce and Veyrat-Pontet, 2013; Peirce, 2017). In 2010, in my professional capacity as the Social Policy and Community Development Programme Officer employed by RESTORE Belize Programme within the Office of the Prime Minister, I was tasked to identify out-of-school young people and enrol them into school as a part of the 'I am Belize' scholarship initiative. The programme was designed to advance coordinating efforts to improve the quality of life of Belizeans through the restoration of law and order and community building (Catzim-Sanchez, 2011). During my professional tenure, I observed that many out-of-school young men were involved with the criminal justice system.

My interest in exploring the relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending and social exclusion at the start of this thesis was also influenced by previous research studies in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010; American Bar Association, 2011). Both studies, which will be discussed in the Literature Review, suggested that there was a link between the schooling career of young people and their involvement in crimes or gangs in Belize.

The study also intends to fill empirical gaps by exploring the social outcomes of young men who experienced permanent school exclusion because previous studies in Belize and the Caribbean on out-of-school young people focused on enrolment and dropout (United Nations Development Programme, 2012; UNESCO, 2015; Knight and Ogunkola, 2016; Young et al., 2017) but did not specifically examine *permanent school exclusion* as a policy decision by schools to remove a pupil from the school environment. The United Nations Development Programme (2012) provided an important framework in its focus on the relationship between education and wider social exclusion in the Caribbean based on low levels of educational achievement, early school leaving without requisite skills, and unemployment among young people. These socio-economic risk factors were examined for their relationship with violent crime due to the emotional frustration associated with social exclusion. Perhaps most salient, a recognition of the disparity in participation and performance between young men and young women in education, specifically secondary education, led the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat to establish a Regional Caribbean Initiative on Keeping Boys Out of Risk involving 15 Caribbean countries, including Belize (Orlando and Lundwall, 2010; Figueroa, 2010). Among its main aims was to address problems of boys at risk as a gender issue related to economic and social development and wider forms of social exclusion, including their alienation from education, school dropout, involvement in crime and violence, male marginalisation, reduced labour market access, and alleviation of levels of poverty. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the permanent exclusion of young men aged 14 to 17 from secondary school and considers the influence of that life event on their experiences of offending and wider social exclusion.

This thesis is guided by a caution issued to Caribbean countries by Figueroa (2010) that the analysis of young men at risk of poor educational outcomes should not focus on statistics without an appropriate probing into the more detailed underlying causes within the life course. Importantly, policy solutions should not detach issues relating to the home and school from the wider socioeconomic and cultural framework that young men find themselves in, including the relevance of gender construction such as masculinity identity formation.

Main Arguments of the Study

These considerations call for the investigation of the importance of permanent school exclusion as a critical life event (Levitas et al., 2007) and the social outcomes for later life chances. The examination will, therefore, study the transition of young men from secondary school based on the interplay between their lives, the social ecology that shapes their lives (home, neighbourhood, peer group, and school), and the contextual factors (e.g., culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, interpersonal and institutional relationships) that can influence their offending behaviour and wider experiences of

social exclusion, such as exclusion from participation in education and training, labour market, and social relationships (Bronfenbrenner 1972; Teruya and Hser 2010; Bailey, 2017; Fahmy, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and the Social Exclusion concept will be used in combination to develop an explanatory framework that accounts for individual and environmental factors that may shape patterns of offending behaviour and wider social exclusion in the lives of young men who have been permanently excluded from school. The use of a mixed-method research design through quantitative and qualitative inquiries set out to consider the multiple factors and contexts that influence young men while giving the young men, parents, and educational staff[1] a voice to describe their multiple realities (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2006).

Aim of Study

This study aimed to examine the influence of permanent school exclusion from secondary school on the offending behaviour and experience of wider forms of social exclusion among young men within the context of the social environments of the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school in Belize City.

Research Questions

To examine the contextual factors and processes associated with criminal offending and social exclusion in young men who were permanently excluded from secondary school in Belize City, four research questions were initially developed.[2]

RQ1 What are the characteristics of young men who are permanently excluded from secondary school?

RQ2 How do the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school influence the lives of young men experiencing permanent school exclusion?

RQ3 What are the implications of permanent school exclusion on criminal offending in young men?

RQ4 How does social exclusion manifest in young men who have experienced permanent school exclusion?

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[1] The inclusion of educational staff in the chapters leading up to the Methodology chapter reflects the original research design that eventually changed because of challenges experienced during fieldwork. This will be detailed in Chapter Four.

[2] Research question one is also included in the thesis until Chapter Four when it is dropped because of changes to the methodology.

The thesis has nine chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the education policy context of Belize and the Caribbean along with their challenges of crime and violence that suggest the importance of this research study. Chapter 2 provides the context of the study through a review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of a combination of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion. Chapter 4 details the research design, methodology, methods, and fieldwork experience. Chapters 5 to 7 present three chapters on findings, with Chapter 5 looking at the experiences of the young men within and the influence of their social environments, Chapter 6 presenting the implications of their permanent school exclusion on offending, and Chapter 7 examining their experiences of wider social exclusion. Chapter 8 elucidates a discussion of the findings and Chapter 9 concludes the study with policy implications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant research, policies, and legislation regarding permanent school exclusion and schooling experience. The chapter starts with a review of the education literature in the Caribbean with a focus on gender socialisation and masculinity and factors that influence the participation of young men in education. It is followed by a discussion on the reasons and process of disciplinary exclusions that contribute to differential rates of school exclusion among different groups of pupils. Subsequently, it examines the literature on social exclusion outcomes experienced by young people following their permanent school exclusion. The conclusion of the chapter outlines the empirical gaps that this study proposes to fill and the contribution it anticipates it will make to knowledge in Belize, the Caribbean, and international literature on the relationship between young men's experience of permanent school exclusion, offending, and wider social exclusion.

Literature Review Strategy

The main literature search for this review was undertaken between the period of October 2017 and June 2018 but continued throughout the thesis period. The literature search strategy was based initially on a search of relevant articles in major peer-reviewed journals using relevant databases (Paré et al., 2015). These included: Google Scholar, Wiley Online Library, Psych INFO, ERIC (Educational Research Information Centre), JSTOR, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, Semantic Scholar, Academia, Scientific Research Publishing, and others. I also updated the literature based on cited works in other articles, books, and policy documents. This was done through a snowball method to identify other relevant publications in the list of references following their citation.

It was difficult to develop quality criteria for Latin American and Caribbean literature because the relevant publications were limited, and some earlier academic articles or research studies did not sufficiently meet some contemporary research standards. Nevertheless, to ensure the relevance and trustworthiness of the sources cited in this review, I developed inclusion criteria as follows: the publication was relevant to the research questions, international literature dated no later than the year 2000, literature from Belize, Latin America, and the Caribbean dated no later than the year 1990, and publications needed to be written in English.

During my review, I identified a paucity of literature, especially peer-reviewed literature, from Latin America and the Caribbean or Belize regarding permanent school exclusion. Most sources did not address permanent school exclusion directly, rather they conflated permanent school exclusion,

voluntary withdrawal, and other forms of school exclusion under a wider category of school 'dropouts.' Therefore, there was also an inclusion of literature on dropouts in this review. Also, I relied on the literature on permanent school exclusion from other countries and regions, such as the US, UK, Europe, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria referred to publications that did not focus on the topical areas, were not dated, were not included in a peer-reviewed journal if not from Belize, Latin America, or the Caribbean, and were not written in English.

A combination of search terms and keywords were used to locate the articles and publications used in this review, i.e., "permanent school exclusion," "school exclusion," "fixed-term school exclusion," "expulsion from school," "suspension from school," "secondary school," "high school," "social exclusion," "offending," "crime," "violence," "ecology," "family," "peer group," "neighbourhood," among others. After the identification of the relevant literature, I reviewed the abstracts and perused the publications to ensure that the inclusion criteria were adhered to (Cooper et al., 2009; Snyder, 2019).

Factors that Influence Young Males' Education in the Caribbean

Literature in the Caribbean has demonstrated that many factors influence the schooling experience and educational outcomes of young men. These factors have also been shown to contribute to lower academic performance, higher rates of dropout, and fixed-term and permanent school exclusion. The following factors are discussed in this section: Gender, Masculinity and Education; Teacher-Pupil Relationship; and Violence in Schools and Gang Involvement.

Gender, Masculinity and Education

Not many studies in Belize have explored the relationship between gender with a focus on young men and the influence of home and school factors on educational outcomes at the secondary level. Edberg et al. (2011) in a situational analysis of children and women in Belize used an ecological approach to identify home factors and concluded that home environments characterised by low support because of limited resources, absence of parents, or parents who had low education and knowledge about school resulted in issues of affordability, low bonding, or low school attachment of young men. Additionally, the disciplinary atmosphere in classrooms was considered inflexible to their learning, and school was at times perceived as irrelevant when young men were faced with the possibility of legal or illegal income, especially those in the Southside of Belize City where opportunities in the drug trade existed.

On the other hand, many researchers in the Caribbean have explored the relationship between gender and the educational outcomes of young men (Evans, 1999; Plummer et al., 2008; Plummer and Geofroy, 2010; Figueroa, 2010). Most of these studies featured a Black working-class sample that focused on the construction of masculinities and their effect on education among young men within the school environment and their peers. In an early mixed-method study Evans (1999, p. 25) suggested a relationship between the male peer group and anti-school behaviour from a surveyed sample of 3719 male and female pupils, and interviews with pupils and teachers from grades nine and 11 from 45 secondary schools in Jamaica. This large study in the context of the small Jamaican population suggested that the peer group adopted a masculine culture linked to "crew or gang" membership that resulted in situations where peer group members demonstrated behaviours of nonconformity to school norms, which was supported and reciprocated by the other members. Teachers and schools were also noted to reinforce gender differences between young men and young women in relation to secondary school curricular activities. These gender differentiations translated into distinct tasks for males and females, higher expectations of females than males by teachers, and the separation of young men and young women in the school environment, including seat arrangements, sporting activities, and subject areas.

Schools were noted as reinforcing the gender socialisation of young men which contributed to the view that educational achievement was effeminate. In a review of literature on socialisation and teacher expectations of Jamaican young men, Clarke (2005) noted that the gendered curriculum designated specific subjects as feminine which resulted in a rejection by young men at the secondary level, such as their attitudes toward English, Reading, Foreign Languages, Typing and Shorthand, Home Economics and Office Practice. The characteristics required for academic success, including good behaviour, obedience to authority and school rules, and preparedness were considered to contravene masculinity which often resulted in fixed and permanent school exclusion. Le Franc et al. (1998) in an earlier study using a sample of eight- to 20-year-olds from three unnamed Caribbean countries concluded that boys and young men were socialised to be rough and tough so that as early as 10 years of age they realised that physical strength, toughness, and sexual dominance were expected of them. By accepting physical domination as their nature, young men were exposed to harsher physical punishment, which was reinforced in the school environment. At school, boys and young men were viewed by teachers as rebellious and tougher, and excluded from important roles, while girls and young women were perceived as socially responsible. As this differential treatment was eventually accepted by young men, educational motivation and achievement were associated with effeminacy.

Some Caribbean studies explored the perspective of teachers and education staff on how gender identity formation influenced the schooling experience of young men. Parry (1996) in a qualitative study interviewed 47 headteachers of whom only 10 were male, guidance counselors and teachers from eight Jamaican secondary schools and suggested that male pupils were observed to be less responsive or participatory in class than female pupils and were more disruptive and focused on activities outside of schoolwork, while female pupils were more interactive toward classwork. In another qualitative study in Jamaica, Parry (1997) in eight Jamaican secondary schools also interviewed mostly female teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors and concluded that the formation of masculine gender identity among young men was influenced by a range of factors, including the absence of male role models, being from a lone parent, female-headed households, and a predominance of female teachers that contributed to a rejection of many aspects of schooling.

Other Caribbean studies suggested that within the peer group, conformity to prevailing masculine standards influenced the way young men viewed academic courses and school participation. In a qualitative study of 138 men in late adolescence and early 20s in eight English-speaking Caribbean countries (Anguilla, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica. St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago), Plummer et al. (2008) suggested that the authority of the male peer group often competed with and at times exceeded the authority of adults in the lives of adolescent young men. This authority was accompanied by an aspiration to a masculine status that regulated behaviour to ensure conformity to prevailing masculine standards, such as viewing certain academic subjects and academic performance in contravention to those standards. Similar findings by Plummer and Geofroy (2010) in 54 interviews with men between the ages of 18 and 38 in Trinidad and Tobago concluded that the masculine gender identity that emerged during the transitional years reflected social conventions that contributed to the view among male peers that education was effeminate and required rejection.

Other studies have theorised that male marginalisation influenced educational outcomes. Figueroa (2007, 2010) analysed how Caribbean males who have historically occupied positions of power and social prestige within arenas such as the home, school, and work, have become marginalised as the education system has changed. The studies theorised that the education system has increasingly clashed with male gender socialisation and gender formation that in the past complemented the social construction of maleness through the promotion of adventure, curiosity, and camaraderie. For Figueroa, the loss of male pre-eminence in education, which he identified as occurring in the latter part of the twentieth century coincided with changes in the status of women and advancements

towards greater equal opportunities within the education system; this served to propel many Caribbean males toward hypermasculinity that conflicted with the education system.

Other factors have been suggested to explain the educational outcomes and perceptions toward education by young men. Chevannes (2001) in an ethnographic study of five inner-city working-class communities in Jamaica found that most children of school age, mostly boys and young men, did not attend school. Young women attended secondary school in a larger number than males and were carefully watched and protected by family and community members. Chevannes argued that the prevailing attitude of parents was that school was for young women and that young men should prepare themselves for traditionally male jobs that did not require high educational qualifications, such as agriculture, construction, and wholesale or retail jobs. Young men were often forced to leave school early when parents experienced financial strain, as well as financially contributing to the household, while their sisters attended school.

The different educational outcomes between young men and young women based on a gendered perspective on educational opportunities were similarly identified by young people and fathers in several Caribbean studies. Qualitative studies by Gayle (2002) and Gayle and Levy (2009) in Jamaica concluded that there were higher expectations and financial investment in the education of young women than young men. Specifically, Gayle and Levy's (2007) participatory ethnographic evaluation and research (PEER) study among 72 young men and women in three working-class communities in inner-city Jamaica concluded that both males and females were of the shared view that young women received opportunities for education that were not afforded to some young men. So much so, that many young men who did not have family support were unlikely to pursue education, while females were perceived as a better school investment by parents. Anderson and Daley's (2014) study on fatherhood and social class among 229 fathers from a low-income community and 382 fathers from a middle-income community in Kingston, Jamaica supported those findings and suggested a relationship between the social class of fathers and the gendered expectation of education outcomes. Among low-income fathers, 23 percent emphasised that girls should value education and complete their schoolwork, while only eight percent considered this for boys, and among middle-income fathers, seven percent emphasised it for boys, while five percent did so for girls.

Teacher-Pupil Relationship

A recurring theme in several Caribbean studies was the teacher-pupil relationship. Knight and Obidah (2014) sought pupil perspectives on the secondary school system in Grenada by surveying 400 pupils and conducting eight focus groups from eight predominantly low-performing public secondary

schools. Pupils suggested that a positive pupil-teacher relationship could be achieved through mutual respect between pupils and teachers, established boundaries of pupil conduct, and positive interest in pupil welfare that included a willingness to help pupils. Similarly, Knight and Ogunkola (2016) suggested that the way teachers viewed pupils also played a critical role in the service they provided, and pupil performance. Secondary school teachers were found to have a negative perception of the transition of low-performing pupils to secondary school because they felt it negatively affected their traditional approach to teaching and performance standards. Teacher perceptions were evident to pupils which helped to erode the relationship between teachers and pupils in the school.

Much of the literature on school factors that influence the educational outcomes of children and young people in the Caribbean concluded that boys and young men were treated more harshly and severely punished, physically, and otherwise than girls and young women at school (Figueroa, 2000; Smith and Green, 2007; Plummer, 2007; Pottinger and Stair, 2009). For example, Pottinger and Stair (2009) explored peer-on-peer and educator-on-pupil bullying experienced by 225 undergraduate university pupils in Jamaica who retrospectively recalled their experiences of bullying during primary and secondary school. Male pupils reported being threatened, beaten up, treated unfairly, and excessively punished at school by both male educators and peers compared to female pupils. Bullying by educators was associated with increased oppositional conduct during school, while other forms of bullying led to fighting, loss of trust, depression, feelings of hopelessness and suicidality, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Not all interactions between teachers and pupils are negative, however. Gayle and Mortis (2010) conducted a mixed-method study on male social participation and social violence in Belize with a sample of 2,210 young people, community members, and various service providers and found that 62 percent of young people had immense respect for teachers. The authors concluded that the support offered by some secondary school teachers to pupils who were going hungry at school helped to reduce the number of young people who resorted to selling marijuana at or outside school or relying on gang leaders or engaging in sexual exploitation. While the study focused more on male pupils, no gender differences were specifically reported in the relationships between pupils and teachers. On the other hand, in Trinidad and Tobago my previous work, Gayle et al. (2012) with a sample of 2,749 people from different age cohorts, concluded that less than a quarter of young people had a strong respect for their teachers, which suggested that the school environment did not hold a high level of positive influence or connectedness in the lives of the children.

Cunningham et al. (2008) conceptualised school connectedness as a feeling that a young person had that someone or some people at school cared about their wellbeing. This connectedness was

negatively correlated with several risky behaviour, including school repetition, school leaving, early employment, early onset of sexual activity or participation in risky sexual activity, violence, and substance misuse. The gendered effects of school connectedness were established by Blum et al. (2003) in a study based on data obtained from the 1997 Caribbean Youth Health Survey of 15,695 young people ages 10 to 18 in nine Caribbean countries (Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, and St. Lucia). They concluded that males were much more likely than females to be involved in violence, and school connectedness, as measured by trying hard in school, was the most important protective factor in reducing violent youth behaviour. School connectedness also had significant effects on reducing other risky behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug misuse.

An earlier study by Parry (1996) suggested that the gender proportion of teachers at school influenced the education experience of young people. Parry suggested that the higher proportion of female teachers to male teachers left a deficit in male teachers as role models or authority figures. In terms of pupil-teacher interaction, female teachers considered males easier to teach because they responded to criticism more nonchalantly, while females were difficult because they sulked and held grudges. On the other hand, male teachers preferred female pupils because they were motivated and less disruptive.

Violence in Schools and Gang Involvement

Another factor that influenced the schooling experience of young people was prominently identified in the literature as school-based violence among young people, with implications for masculinity identity formation and the social environments of the home, peer group, and neighbourhood factors. Cunningham et al. (2008) opined that school-based violence among young people between the ages of 12 and 24, mostly young men in Latin America and the Caribbean was a major problem that involved different incidents of abuse, threats, intimidation, humiliation, or physical assault between members of the school community. The UNDP (2010) further asserted that school-based violence in the Caribbean was more pronounced in secondary schools between different groups of pupils or gangs from other schools which also resulted in homicide.

Early research in the Caribbean by Halcon et al. (2003) using the 1997 Caribbean Youth Health Survey of 15,695 young people ages 10 to 18 in nine Caribbean countries (Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, and St. Lucia) concluded that violence in schools was a serious problem. The startling statistics were as follows: one-fifth of the males carried a weapon to school in the previous 30 days; one-tenth of boys had been knocked unconscious during a fight;

approximately the same amount reported having been shot or stabbed; two out of five young people thought about hurting or killing another person, and one in six did not think they would live to age 25 years.

Other Caribbean literature has suggested that a combination of factors influenced the behaviour of young people in the school environment. In Belize, Gayle and Mortis (2010) found that at school, boys formed groups to pool their financial resources and protect themselves against groups from other neighbourhoods, which in the process left them vulnerable to criminal gang formation and recruitment. Teachers supported the finding and reported that there was active gang recruitment at the schools, with senior gang members leading the recruitment, and gang leaders being viewed by the young men as role models. Violence would occasionally occur at the school due to pupils who were members of gangs or senior members of the gangs getting involved and entering schools to attack pupils. The UNDP (2012), likewise, found that the spill-over of gang and neighbourhood conflict into the secondary school environment of Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago contributed to young men forming delinquent groups and gangs, including the use of guns, during ongoing neighbourhood gang conflict.

Research by Gentle-Genitty et al. (2017) with a sample of 512 secondary school pupils between the ages 11 and 19 from five Caribbean countries (St. Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Antigua and Barbuda) suggested that male and older pupils were significantly more likely to engage in violence than female and younger pupils but were less likely to report violence to adult school personnel than female pupils. A violent school environment was the most prevalent school risk factor for engaging in violence, which was experienced more by males. Plummer and Geofroy (2010, p. 10) suggested a process of learned behaviour based on masculine gender identity formation. They theorised that in Trinidad and Tobago a process of "rolling peer pressure" in which cultural codes and traditions were passed down from older boys to younger boys during the transition from primary to secondary school. During this period, boys were trying to negotiate peer-group politics, usually through violence, since they tried to avoid being physically targeted by a group, while also seeking to be accepted by peers, belonging to a peer group, and gaining the protection of a group. As the peer group emerged as a powerful influence on boys that acted as a reference of approval or disapproval, crime and violence may not be perceived as an antisocial threat, but rather the fulfilment of manhood that galvanised the peer group.

Findings regarding school-aged youth involvement in gangs were provided in a regional study that explored the prevalence of gang membership across the Caribbean. Ohene et al. (2005) collected self-reported data from 15,695 school-aged young people in nine countries (Antigua and Barbuda, the

Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia) and concluded that up to 24 percent of males and 16 percent of females reported that they were involved in gangs at some point. In a similar study that was limited to a sample of 2,292 young people attending school in urban Trinidad and Tobago, Katz et al. (2010) noted that 12.5 percent of the young people reported that they had been in gangs.

The World Bank (2003) used an ecological framework to examine the link between risk and protective factors of youth behaviours, youth outcomes, and adult outcomes in the Caribbean and concluded that a fifth of the males carried weapons to school in the month before the survey and about the same amount had engaged in fights with weapons. Also troubling, gang violence was prevalent since one in five young men and one in eight young women attending school reported that at some time, they were part of a gang. Katz and Fox (2010) examined data from the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Survey of 2,206 pupils between the ages of 11 to 19 years enrolled in 22 high-risk, urban schools. Respondents who were exposed to a high number of risk factors were more likely to be involved in gangs. One significant risk factor associated with gang involvement in the school domain was a low commitment to the school.

Research in Jamaica has also shed light on the pupil perspective of violence experienced in schools at the hand of teachers and school administrators. Fernald and Meeks-Gardner (2003) explored violence in Jamaican schools through the experiences of 123 children between the ages of eight and 10 years old. While almost half the children reported experiences as witnesses or victims of violence, aggression, beating, shooting, killing, and punishment in the neighbourhoods, they also reported experiencing violence within their schools. Punishment for getting into trouble was issued by teachers and school principals in the form of beating, being placed in a dark room and beaten, having to stand outside in the hot sun with their hands on their heads, or being beaten in front of peers. Likewise, a study commissioned in Jamaica by the Child Development Agency, UNICEF (2015) investigated the prevalence and impact of bullying on children and found that teachers also perpetuated bullying at school as perpetrators or ignored reported cases.

School Exclusion as a Disciplinary Practice

While no study in Belize has focused solely on school exclusion as a policy or disciplinary practice, Young et al. (2017) in an Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) study interviewed 69 participants from the Ministry of Education and other organisations that serve children and young people in Belize, including teachers, school principals, school counselors, parents and pupils who were at risk of or had dropped out of 46 primary and secondary schools. In exploring the barriers to education, they noted

that disciplinary school policies in Belize were not standardised; therefore, schools seemed to have their disciplinary practices, and pupils, particularly those who move from one school to another, may not be fully aware of rules and disciplinary system of each school. Importantly, the use of the demerit system aimed at addressing school policy infractions was considered by some participants to be used punitively and resulted in the fixed-term and permanent school exclusion of difficult pupils, which could influence the chance of placement in another school. The lack of uniformity meant that in one school, teachers could apply up to two demerits for a single infraction with five demerits resulting in detention, five detentions resulting in a fixed-term exclusion, and two fixed-term exclusions leading to permanent school exclusion. On the other hand, in another school, teachers could apply both merits and demerits, whereas, five merits can remove a demerit, five demerits led to detention, and 20 demerits or four detentions resulted in an in-school fixed-term exclusion.

Similarly, in a report to the Ministry of Education in Belize on a proposed increase of the age of compulsory education from 14 to 16, Edward (2021) conducted online focus group sessions and a survey with Ministry officials and agencies, the school managers and proprietors, and school principals to identify their concerns. Only a few participants suggested that school policies that allowed schools to exclude difficult children at the age of 14 needed to change to allow permanent school exclusion only when the school demonstrated that it had explored all options to retain the pupil. Importantly, the use of the demerit system based on school policy infractions (e.g., incomplete homework, not bringing a book to school, or wearing an appropriate shirt to school) to fixed-term or permanently exclude pupils after 25 demerits were considered a system that mostly affected pupils from poorer families.

Other studies in the Caribbean have referred to fixed-term and permanent school exclusion but have not empirically studied it. One such qualitative research by Chambers (2009) that examined the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of adolescents aged 10 to 14 years in six Caribbean countries (Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) only emphasised the need to further explore the impact of fixed-term and permanent school exclusion on school completion but did not explore it. The study suggested that the frequency of disciplinary actions at the school was one of the reasons young people were not in school since their dismissal harmed their educational experiences.

Most of the literature on school exclusion found for this review was from the UK, though I opine that there is some applicability to Belize and the Caribbean. The process of school exclusion in the UK was suggested to be influenced by internal factors of the school such as behaviour management policies (Hatton, 2013), school ethos (Munn et al., 2001; Head, 2005), as well as external factors related to the

personal and behaviour characteristics (Jull, 2008) of the pupil and the pupil's environment (Parsons, 2005).

The effectiveness of school exclusion has been challenged in managing the behaviour of pupils. McCluskey (2005) in a qualitative study presented the views of 17 urban secondary school pupils in the UK and suggested that school exclusion was ineffective and counterproductive. Power and Taylor (2020), on the other hand, focused on the perspective of headteachers of 12 secondary schools located in Wales but likewise found that school exclusion was considered ineffective. Headteachers expressed their reluctance to exclude pupils because of the long-term damage to pupils and their recognition that to some extent it was a failure on their part.

In the US where the 'Zero Tolerance' policy was adopted, there were several findings that questioned its effectiveness. Skiba and Knesting (2002) examined cases of fixed-term and permanent school exclusion due to zero-tolerance from 1998 to 2001 and found that fixed-term and permanent school exclusion were the central features of the Zero Tolerance policy, whereby, major and minor incidents at school were treated with severity to set an example. Likewise, Skiba et al. (2006) as a part of a Zero Tolerance Task Force commissioned by the American Psychological Association to examine evidence concerning the effects of zero-tolerance policies in the US found that the policy did not increase the consistency of school discipline across schools and school districts. Schools with higher rates of fixed-term and permanent school exclusion had less satisfactory ratings of school climate and school governance structures, spent a significant amount of time on disciplinary issues, harmed school-wide academic achievement, and instead of deterring, produced higher rates of misbehaviour among pupils.

Reasons for School Exclusion

In a study on gangs in Belize City prepared for the Inter-American Development Bank, Young (2019) utilised the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Comprehensive Gang Model: A Guide to Assessing your Community's Youth Gang Problem to explore the perception and experience of 45 gang-affiliated individuals aged 16 to 41 through interviews; 316 young people aged 12 to 22 through focus group and survey; 472 Belize City residents in a community resident survey; and survey with 98 participants from agencies and schools. The most common reason for fixed-term or permanent school exclusion among young men who eventually offended or became gang-involved in Belize was fighting. Most school exclusions occurred between the last year of primary school (Standard 6) and the second year of secondary school (Form 2), and most unlikely returned to school.

The most cited reason for both fixed and permanent school exclusion in the UK has been reported as persistent disruptive behaviour (O'Regan, 2010; Daniel, 2011). Persistent disruptive behaviour referred to a range of behaviours including distracting other pupils, calling out in class, general attention-seeking, and aggressive actions. Other common reasons for fixed-term and permanent school exclusion include different forms of misconduct, physical or verbal violence (Sellman et al. 2002), and difficult or aggressive behaviour toward peers (Maguire et al., 2003).

Differential Rates of School Exclusion

Gender plays an important role in the differential rates of school exclusion. There is limited data to support a conclusion on the differential rates of school exclusion in Belize; however, Gayle and Mortis (2010) suggested that teachers reported that the proportion of fixed-term excluded male pupils would be higher if the exclusion process was less complicated. We can also take into consideration the gender disparity in the dropout rate at the secondary level in which young men have higher dropout rates (5.6 percent) compared to young women (4.3 percent) (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2020). There is likewise a sparsity of literature in the Caribbean on differential rates of school exclusion based on school policy. Knight (2019) used data from the Out-of-School-Children Initiative that was conducted in seven Eastern Caribbean countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, and the Turks and Caicos Islands) to emphasise exclusion from education as being out of school and not necessarily a policy of exclusion by the school. Nevertheless, he found that the educational exclusion of pupils between the ages of four to 14 increased with each educational level, starting from kindergarten, with males being twice as likely to be excluded than female pupils.

Given the sparsity of literature in Belize and the Caribbean on the differential rates of school exclusion, literature from the UK provides important details on gendered outcomes. Evidence from several studies (Maguire et al., 2003; Daniel, 2011; Hatton, 2013) in the UK suggests that a disproportionately higher number of males are permanently excluded than females. Other studies (Grant and Brooks, 1998; Daniels and Cole, 2010; Daniel, 2011) on the ethno-demographics of permanent school exclusion in the UK suggested an over-representation of ethnic minority pupils. Though many of the studies (Blair, 2001; Skiba et al., 2003) were from countries with a predominantly White population, it was always the Black pupils who were disproportionately school-excluded. Skiba et al. (2003) analysed and merged data on discipline from the US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights 2000 Elementary and Secondary School Survey with juvenile incarceration data from the National Corrections Reporting Program on children and young people ages 10 to 17 across 37 states and concluded that African American fixed-term and permanent school exclusion rates exceeded that of

the population in almost every state examined. Blair (2001) in the UK suggested that explanations for disproportionality ranged from cultural differences that led to mistaken interpretations of body language, dress, and personality traits of Black pupils by White teachers, negative stereotyping of Black pupils, and resistance by Black pupils toward teachers. Bowling and Phillips (2006) in the UK similarly proposed that underachievement in school was fed by higher rates of exclusion among Black young people than any other groups, which was suggested to be caused in part by discrimination, and different discipline for Black pupils and White pupils.

The role of school ethos has been explored to explain how schools have differential rates of school exclusion. In schools where there was a positive ethos within the disciplinary policy context in which learning behaviour became the primary feature of classroom interactions, there was less requirement to remove difficult pupils (Head, 2005). Munn et al. (2001) posited that lower excluding schools in the UK had flexible systems informed by staff, involved parents, and provided pastoral support, while higher excluding schools utilised tariff systems that resulted in automatic exclusion, expected unquestioned parental support and pastoral support was aimed at the removal of pupils during difficulty. The relationship between school exclusion rates because of the school ethos and the rates among minority groups was similarly uncovered by Parsons (2010) using secondary data from the Strategic Alternatives to Exclusion from School project in the UK in 2005. He focused on three low and five high-excluding local authorities and concluded that local authorities had a powerful influence on the levels of permanent school exclusion, especially since the disproportionate application of the exclusion to lower socioeconomic groups, some ethnic groups, and vulnerable special needs pupils, raised social justice issues.

The effect of school ethos on school dropout in Belize, not school exclusion, has been studied by Arzu (2012). He compared the perceived factors that contributed to school dropout in a qualitative sample of six teachers and six former pupils between the ages of 18 and 30 who had dropped out in two secondary schools in the southern districts of Belize. He observed that one school was a "rigid role and rule-bound corporate school" that heavily relied on discipline and punishment, which provided a structure for some pupils but effectively pushed out non-compliant pupils (p. 99). The hierarchical structure of authority at the school resulted in the perception of pupils that they could not receive adequate recourse, so many of them rebelled and dropped out. On the other hand, the other school possessed less organisational structure with loose rules and regulations that challenged the planning and enactment of policies to address dropout. Notably, the statistics used in the study were from a decade before the completion of the study and were from a period when the southern districts had the highest dropout rate.

Like in Belize, the widespread use of disciplinary measures has been shown to have detrimental effects on school dropout rates in the Eastern Caribbean. Knight and Ogunkola (2016) in the 2016 Out-of-School Initiative (OOSCI) study of countries in the Eastern Caribbean sub-region concluded that harsh disciplinary practices by schools contributed to inconsistent school attendance, poor performance, and school dropout among pupils with chronic behavioural problems. These disciplinary practices helped to push out children who were already disadvantaged, and pupils who were disruptive or misbehaved were subject to fixed-term and permanent school exclusion.

Challenges Associated with the School Exclusion Process

The literature so far suggests that the school exclusion process is not a seamless enforcement of established school policies, but also an exercise of authority that contributes to a power imbalance between the school and excluded pupils. McDonald and Thomas (2003), for example, espoused that the power relationship between the school and the pupil or parents during the exclusion process reflected a hierarchy in UK schools in which pupils who were at greatest risk of school exclusion were on the lowest stratum with the least voice. Meanwhile, teachers possessed dominance over the interpretation of events. In addition, the school controlled the "dominant discourse" resulting in an unfair competition of reality in which the school determined the parameters of acceptable behaviour (p. 116). Similarly, McCluskey (2005) postulated that the relationship between parents and the school is imbalanced from the initiation of exclusion through to the informing of parents via official letter, to the process of re-admission to school was based on a time scale prescribed by the school, with the school as the venue, and the terms, including a written contract between the pupil and school being determined by the school management.

The appeal process has also been noted to be an uneven process. Croydon (2003) suggested that in the UK the lack of knowledge of the right to appeal against permanent school exclusion may result in young people remaining out of education. Moreover, in cases when parents were advised to move their child before permanent school exclusion was issued and a record was avoided, parents may have trouble finding a replacement school, which resulted in mostly parents who were confident in navigating the bureaucratic processes to find and persuade another school to accept their child.

The power imbalance between the school and excluded pupils or their parents always seems to be in favour of the former. Power and Taylor (2020) suggested that schools were able to manipulate formal school exclusion records through managed moves. Formal records of school exclusion were found to be avoided by managing moves between schools or relocating pupils within the school, also known as

internal exclusions, that allowed for a new start without a record of school exclusion; however, delays and problems in finding schools to take pupils did occur.

Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot (2007) in England added that the power dynamic was further challenged when families with unstable parents or chaotic backgrounds did not proactively respond to school exclusion or behaviour of the child, which was exacerbated when the family had to prioritise needs; hence, family social capital was crucial to the interface between the school and the parents and the reactions to the challenging behaviour of the child.

Issues of fairness have also emerged as an important consideration in the disciplinary process. Browne et al. (2001) examined racial disparities in school discipline and laws against discrimination and legal challenges to zero-tolerance policies in the US and found that although zero-tolerance policies relying on fixed-term and permanent school exclusions were supposed to reduce discretion in the application of discipline and provide a framework for the unbiased application, school officials continued to retain discretion, which resulted in ethnic minority pupils disproportionately receiving harsh punishment. Munn and Lloyd (2005) similarly suggested that in Scotland, some teachers inconsistently applied school practices when they "operate a construct of worthiness in relation to disruptive pupils" (p. 213), which was supported by many school-excluded pupils who felt that they were unfairly treated by the school compared to their peers or unfairly treated due to an unfairly acquired reputation based on the behaviour of siblings or other family members who attended the school or even the local area they were from.

School Exclusion and Social Exclusion

The burgeoning literature (Henry et al., 2001; Munn and Lloyd, 2005; Van Lier et al., 2007; Pirrie et al., 2009) on the importance of education and the adverse role that school exclusion plays on the life chances of young people were concentrated in OECD countries.

The literature has identified several forms of social exclusion associated with low educational attainment or permanent school exclusion. Regarding permanent school exclusion, the UK literature suggested that for many young people, the effects of permanent school exclusion were far-reaching and may include periods without education, reduced employment opportunities, social isolation and inaccessibility to social resources, entry into crime (Sellman et al., 2002) and poor physical and mental health (Berridge et al., 2001; Daniels et al., 2003). The detailed consequences of social exclusion as a result of permanent school exclusion, especially its intergenerational effects on children and families, included high levels of family stress, family disruption and poor relationships with parents, teachers, and other pupils, impairment to the acquisition of basic skills, limited aspirations, and significantly

increased risk of homelessness, the entry in social services care (McCrystal et al., 2007), and long-term impaired ability to engage in decision-making and contribution to the local community (Hatton 2013). In the Caribbean, the social exclusion associated with limited education has included fewer employment opportunities that have been noted to contribute to the rise in criminal activity among young people (De Albuquerque and McElroy, 1999).

The theoretical debates on social exclusion are explored in the next chapter of this thesis. Nevertheless, I draw on the sociological work of Levitas et al. (2007) that distinguishes between 'social exclusion' and 'deep exclusion' to guide the literature discussed in this section. For Levitas et al. (2007, social exclusion refers to a complex and multi-dimensional process that involves either the lack of or denial of participation in normal relationships and activities that are available to most people. On the other hand, deep exclusion refers to exclusion across more than one domain (e.g., education, income, employment, health, etc.) that can negatively influence the quality of life or future life chances of a person.

This section is divided into four sections related to Levitas et al. (2007): Employment and Income Prospects; Education or Training; Social Networks and Peer Association; and Offending Behaviour and Gang Involvement.

<u>Employment and Income Prospects</u>

Since there is insufficient literature on the relationship between permanent school exclusion and employment prospects in Belize and the Caribbean, research related to educational achievement and dropouts provided a certain context to this review. However, there is literature that has emphasised that in Latin America and the Caribbean, youth unemployment was a significant problem for young people who were neither working nor going to school in most countries (Cunningham et al., 2008). The link between employment and educational achievement was also made by Lashley et al. (2015) in Trinidad and Tobago where persons with at least a secondary education with passes in five Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) Examination subjects had unemployment rates below the national average of 4.2 percent compared to others who had no formal education with 10 percent unemployment rates. Similarly, Brathwaite (2009) explored the perspective of 250 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 from Trinidad, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago and concluded that protective factors among young people were generated through the attainment of a level of education and that would likely make them complete school with skills and transition into the labour market, gain financial independence and stability in their lives.

The challenges associated with the school-to-work transition were also noted by Alam and de Diego (2019) in a UNICEF-commissioned study on the transition based on a desk review and synthesis of findings from over 150 reports, studies, and documents. They concluded that in low-income countries, the age at which the transition to work started was lower than in other regions due to low education attainment, poverty, and a lack of social protection that reduced the chances of finding quality employment and may contribute to social and economic exclusion. As a result, almost four in 10 young people between the ages of 25 and 29 had not transitioned into stable employment.

Young people between the ages of 15 and 18 who dropped out of school in the Caribbean according to Cunningham et al. (2008) would have lower earnings over their lifetime, with each person forfeiting approximately 14 percent of per capita GDP over their working life. Likewise, Kambon and Busby (2000) noted that persons with education are more likely to be employed than others with little education and basic education in the Caribbean provides low-income returns, so those with the highest levels of education tend to receive higher incomes. Similar findings were reported by the National Research Council and Committee on Population (2005) that in developing countries the high economic returns associated with schooling at the secondary and tertiary levels manifested in a growing gap between higher and lower levels of schooling. This gap increased the advantages for young people with secondary or tertiary level schooling in the labour market compared to their less-educated peers.

Issues of entry into the labour market were also noted in the UK (Coles et al., 2002; Wright et al., 2005; Daniel and Cole, 2010) and the US (Vuolo et al., 2014). Daniel and Cole (2010) in England found that half of the young people viewed exclusion as harmful based on the loss of educational opportunities and stigmatisation that affected job prospects. Similarly, Coles et al. (2002) reviewed the UK literature on the cost of young people who were disengaged from education, training, and employment between the ages of 16 and 18 and concluded that young people who were school-excluded were likely to be unemployed and not in education or training at the age of 18. The long-term consequences of those unemployed at the age of 18 with low or no qualifications impacted their later earnings if they obtained employment.

Wright et al. (2005) in the UK found that school exclusion hindered a successful transition into adulthood as it related to employability and career development. This was due to the lack of educational qualifications being viewed as a barrier to the competitive labour market that was dependent on higher skills and qualifications. The level of education has also been linked with the successful transition from school to work and its implications on the duration of that transition. Accordingly, Vuolo et al. (2014) suggested that young people in the US who were permanently

excluded before the completion of secondary school experienced employment problems within this stage of life that influenced job-related confidence, eroded expectations, and lowered future job prospects.

A critical finding of MacDonald (2008) in the UK was that the post-school labour market careers of young people were marked by recurrent unemployment. These experiences for young people between the ages of 16 and 25 resulted in a post-school transition based on instability, insecurity, and a lack of progression. Overall, young people experienced economic marginality as their status of poor qualification resulted in limited options. The social constraints that the young people experienced in the form of lack of opportunity for better work and proliferation of poor work, overwhelmed their individual choice to work. Accordingly, Furlong et al. (2003) suggested that as young people experience challenges within the labour market, a growing record of marginal employment or recurrent unemployment lessens the attractiveness of the individual to prospective employers over time.

Young People Not in Education or Training

Parra-Torrado (2014) compared the youth population between the ages 15 and 24 who were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in Belize (27.9 percent) and Dominican Republic (20.9 percent), the only two Caribbean countries for which the data was available and concluded that the NEET rates were significantly higher than the International Labour Organisation's average estimate for 24 developing economies. The data suggests that a significant proportion of young people in these countries were disengaged from employment, education, or training, with almost a third of the Belizean youth population being NEET.

Literature in England suggested that the post-school opportunities to return to mainstream education were challenging for permanently excluded young people. Daniels et al. (2003) looked at the career pathways of 193 young people between the ages 13 to 16 years from a study by the Department of Education and Employment before and after permanent school exclusion and concluded that re-integration into mainstream schools often failed, with only half of the permanently excluded young people remaining in education, training, or employment two years after exclusion. Furthermore, young people who were missing from education were less likely to have access to social networks or relationships that were important for entry to further education or gaining employment.

Visser et al. (2005) posited that missing or invisible children or young people in the UK were those who were missing from systems and invisible to agencies within and around education. Among those missing young people were the prominent group of permanent school-excluded young people.

Permanently school-excluded young people who were considered missing, were left without any qualifications or educational achievements which resulted in a difference in post-school opportunities. As adults, they possessed fewer choices compared to those with educational qualifications that afforded them more choices and flexibility in the employment market, as well as their social life.

Johnston et al. (2000) studied how 98 young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years from Teesside, Northeast England evolve alternative and mainstream transitions to adulthood. They found that certain transitions had ramifications for later transitions such as the inability to gain qualifications in a training scheme or reference for a job, or acquiring an early criminal record affected the acquisition of decent employment. Studies by Webster et al. (2004) and MacDonald and Marsh (2005) on young people in Northeast England similarly found that young people who participated in training schemes were likely to be engaged in short-term, part-time, or low-paid jobs as a part of cyclical transitions rather than regular employment.

Social Networks and Peer Association

The sociological study of MacDonald and Marsh (2004) suggested that for early school leavers, the school context was considered a location for making and seeing friends, but post-school experiences may be less certain, more serious, and riskier for early school leavers. Also, friendship groups that were normal to early school leavers may gradually dwindle, and opportunities for developing friendships at other training or workplaces may not be the same because there may not be enough time to establish new bonds. Likewise, Barry (2002) emphasised that permanent school exclusion may not only sever the educational opportunities of young men but also their association with peers from school.

MacDonald and Shildrick (2007, p. 341-343) introduced "leisure career" as a concept to understand the leisure time of young men outside of school or part-time jobs classified as "street-based leisure" because it was spent with peers in public places in their home estates (or neighbourhoods). This street-based leisure was unsupervised gathering in large groups and made the groups a notable feature of their home estates or neighbourhoods. This was partially due to the inability of the young men to afford other mainstream leisure activities that other young people engaged in, such as trips to the cinema or bowling, or their rejection of youth centres that are associated with younger children. For MacDonald and Shildrick, street-based leisure activities were not necessarily equated to delinquency or antisocial behaviour, though they may be treated as such by the police. However prolonged street-based leisure and persistent absence from school may explain the transition to crime based on a continued immersion and a commitment to street-based peer groups. Consequently, long-term

participation in criminal activities that resulted in some form of income and social standing among peers may further divide the outcomes between the unemployed or out-of-school young men and their peers from school. The latter was likely to advance into further education or the labour market, while the former's main form of leisure may constitute socialising in their neighbourhoods throughout their adolescence and early twenties. Consequently, the former may have been unable to develop new social networks that were socially or geographically varied, thereby rendering their friendship groups mainly limited to their immediate neighbourhood with similarly placed young men.

Other studies (Wright and Cullen, 2004; Chung and Steinberg, 2006; Van Lier et al., 2007; Plummer et al., 2008; Dong and Wiebe, 2018) have suggested that the role of peer association after permanent school exclusion potentially played a significant role in crime and delinquency during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. These studies posited that these new social networks may include older or more aggressive peers who were committed to a particular lifestyle and taught them new forms of antisocial behaviour, gang membership, and behaviours that demonstrated rebellion against adult authority.

Offending Behaviour and Gang-Involvement

The limited availability of literature specific to permanent school exclusion in Belize and the Caribbean made it difficult to explore the relationship between school exclusion and offending behaviour or gang involvement. Earlier literature in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010) and the Caribbean (UNDP, 2012) also identified disconnection from school and low educational attainment as risk factors for youth involvement in criminal or violent and other problem behaviours, such as risky sexual activity, adolescent pregnancy, substance misuse.

There have, however, been studies in Belize that have suggested a link between school dropout and gang involvement. In a recent study on gangs in Belize City, Young (2019) while not specifically focusing on a relationship between the schooling experience and offending or gang involvement, found that almost half of the gang-involved participants were not attending school and dropped out before completing secondary school, of which 76 percent had dropped out of school at least once. Seventy-five percent of gang-involved participants dropped out of school by Form 2 or the second year of secondary school. Most of the gang-involved participants joined a gang between ages 12 and 15 which coincided with the years they likely dropped out of school. Gang-involved participants reported that 47 percent had been fixed-term excluded and 41 percent had been permanently excluded.

The relationship between permanent school exclusion and gang involvement was also supported in a study in England. Pitts (2007) using surveys and key informant interviews with professionals, residents

and gang-involved or gang-affected young people in the London Borough of Waltham Forest in England examined the dynamics of youth gangs, including their emergence, structures, functions, activities, and impacts. His study found that two-thirds of active gang members interviewed had been permanently excluded from school.

Research in the UK (Parsons et al., 2001; Berridge et al., 2001; MORI, 2004; Hodgson and Webb, 2005; Daniel and Cole, 2010; Daniels, 2011) has concluded that there is a relationship between school exclusion and offending behaviour. Parsons et al. (2001) on the outcomes in secondary education for children excluded from primary school concluded that permanently excluded children were twice as likely to have offending records than children who were fixed-term excluded. Similarly, a 2004 youth survey of school-excluded and non-excluded young people aged 11 to 17 in mainstream schools in the UK concluded that school-excluded young people were more than twice likely to offend as their non-excluded counterparts (MORI, 2004). Likewise, a retrospective, mixed-method study by Berridge et al. (2001) to establish if and to what extent permanent school exclusion had an independent effect on the offending careers of 343 young people in six local authorities in England suggested a link between permanent school exclusion and offending. Of the 343 young people, 178 committed crimes at some point in their lives, of which 61 offended before permanent school exclusion, 104 offended after permanent school exclusion, and 13 committed their first criminal offence the same month of their permanent school exclusion. Interestingly, there was a time lag of a year or more for half the sample of those whose offending started after school exclusion. Therefore, Berridge et al. theorised that while the causal relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending was difficult to establish, permanent school exclusion set into motion a series of events that culminated in either the onset or uptake of offending.

Like Berridge et al. (2001), other research (Daniel and Cole, 2010; Daniel, 2011) in the UK sought to understand the independent effect of school exclusion on offending among young people. Daniel and Cole (2010) and Daniel (2011) concluded that youth offending was positively associated with school disengagement after permanent school exclusion; whereas 55 percent of the young people had or were believed to have offended by the two-year post-school exclusion mark compared to 38.5 percent before school exclusion. Most of those who had offended before school exclusion continued to offend after school exclusion and of those who had not offended before school exclusion, almost one-third started to offend after. Most young people considered school exclusion as damaging in relation to educational opportunities and job prospects.

The work of Hodgson and Webb (2005) also provided an important examination of the link between school exclusion and juvenile crime in the UK. By interviewing a sample of 56 young people, mostly

White males, of secondary school age who had experienced school exclusion, self-reported data on offending history showed that 40 (71.4 percent) of the total sample admitted to having committed a criminal offence, and 90 percent of self-reported offenders stated that the onset of their offending behaviour was before their first school exclusion. This finding contradicts other studies that have found support for a link between school exclusion and crime since most of the sample (83.9 percent) also stated that exclusion from school did not impact their likelihood of offending. Only two of the remaining nine sample members suggested that school exclusion contributed to a likelihood of offending, while seven suggested that they were less likely to commit a crime after school exclusion. Notably, 23 (92 percent) of the 25 young people who had been permanently excluded from school self-reported offending behaviour, suggesting that there is an association between self-reported offending behaviour and permanent school exclusion.

Recent exploration of the relationship between school exclusion and offending in the context of a rising trend of knife crimes in the UK was brought to the fore by the Ministry of Justice (2018) and Whitaker (2019). The Ministry of Justice (2018) examined the educational background of young knife and offensive possession offenders using 2015 data from the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Education and found that fixed and permanent exclusions from school among pupils with knife possession offences were greater than other comparison groups. However, only a small proportion of permanently excluded children who eventually committed a knife possession offence did so shortly after exclusion. Almost three-quarters were found to commit a knife possession offence more than a year later, suggesting that findings from other studies (Berridge et al., 2001; Daniel and Cole, 2010; Daniel, 2011) about the time lag between permanent school exclusion and offending is an important point of analysis.

Other research has associated offending with NEET status induced by permanent school exclusion. Coles et al. (2002) concluded that youth offending was highly correlated with school exclusion before the age of 16 and being a young offender was likely to cause and be caused by not being in education, training, and employment between the ages 16 and 18. Young people who were school-excluded were likely to be unemployed and not in education or training at the age of 18. Persistent offending between the ages of 18 and 30 was highly correlated with having been school-excluded or having no or low qualifications, which resulted in a cumulation of risk factors that led to social exclusion.

Research in the UK (Spencer and Scott, 2013; Arnez and Condry, 2021) have also examined the relationship between school exclusion and offending through the analysis of school exclusion as a risk factor of social marginalisation. Spencer and Scott (2013) in a qualitative sample of teachers and in-school African-Caribbean boys and young men in London, as well as excluded young men who were

involved in criminal activity, found that pupils who experienced either academic or behavioural problems at school were likely to be formally excluded or dropped out, resulting in unlikely odds of gaining qualifications, low employment prospects, and subsequent involvement in crime to make money. The sequence of low achievement to school exclusion to crime was influenced by a complex interplay between the family, neighbourhood, and culture in which the boys and young men found themselves. Likewise, Arnez and Condry (2021) examined school exclusion as a crucial life event and proposed that looking at school exclusion as a risk factor in the development of youth offending must consider how it intersects with other forms of structural disadvantage and discrimination.

Other studies in the UK have suggested that the pathway to the criminal justice system for young Black people is grounded in school exclusion influenced by differential discipline based on race. Bowling and Phillips (2006) in looking at young Black people's overrepresentation in the criminal justice system concluded that underachievement in school was fed by higher rates of exclusion among Black young people than any other groups, which was suggested to be caused in part by discrimination, and different discipline for Black pupils and White pupils.

Conclusion

This review of the literature discussed the link between educational outcomes, particularly permanent school exclusion, and social exclusion and offending. The literature provided the necessary foundation to inform this study, with emphasis on available international literature. However, the review acknowledged that there was no specific existing body of Belizean and Caribbean literature that explored the relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending and wider social exclusion. Most of the literature focused on school dropout and a cursory look at permanent school exclusion, but no empirical exploration of its link with offending or social exclusion. The examination of the transition of young people from permanent school exclusion to criminal offending or social exclusion will add value to the scholarly work in Belize and the Caribbean. The absence of this literature suggested that this topic was an understudied research area and therefore a gap in the empirical knowledge in Belize. The current research will seek to help fill this empirical gap and contribute to the body of work in the Caribbean.

In terms of the international literature on permanent school exclusion, most focused on the processes of school exclusion, offending, or different forms of social exclusion, but few explored the shared experience of all three processes. This empirical gap in the transition points of each of these processes will contribute to the body of international literature. Also, most of the studies on permanent school exclusion did not explore or compare the perspectives of pupils, parents, and educational staff who

were most deeply involved in the process. Most of the studies were found to focus on the views of one group over another; therefore, while this study will amplify the voices of permanently excluded young men, it also aims to gather the views and experiences of parents and educational staff as a part of the social ecology of the young men.

The next chapter provides the theoretical framework that will inform the analysis and the discussion of the findings of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The research questions present critical considerations on the role that permanent school exclusion plays in influencing the offending behaviour and social exclusion of young men in Belize City.

RQ1 What are the characteristics of young men who are permanently excluded from secondary school?

RQ2 How do the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school influence the lives of young men experiencing permanent school exclusion?

RQ3 What are the implications of permanent school exclusion on criminal offending in young men?

RQ4 How does social exclusion manifest in young men who have experienced permanent school exclusion?

This line of inquiry focuses on the interplay between young men's social environment that shaped their lives, permanent school exclusion, and the contextual factors involved in a transition to offending and wider social exclusion. This theoretical analysis, therefore, considers the long-term trend in the transition to adulthood for young men marked by permanent school exclusion as a critical life event that may serve as a risk factor for social exclusion. The core theoretical framework combines two theoretical approaches – Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion – to build an explanatory framework that accounts for individual and environmental factors that may shape patterns of offending behaviour and wider social exclusion in permanently excluded young men. The reason for the combination, as discussed later in the chapter under 'Justification for Theoretical Combination,' is to account for environmental factors and current life situations that influence their lives.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first provides an overview of the two theories. The second presents a justification for this theoretical combination based on the strengths and weaknesses of the theories. Lastly, a conclusion is presented to demonstrate the viability of the theoretical framework as an explanatory framework for the transition to offending and social exclusion after permanent school exclusion.

Overview of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development underwent various reiterations since its introduction in the early 1970s. Bronfenbrenner's theory acknowledges the relative contribution

of the agents of socialisation through the analysis of the influences of environmental factors on individuals. Bronfenbrenner's theory is particularly important to this study because it addresses early criticisms of developmental theories that claim that scientific criminological inquiry fails to adequately engage the 'human meaning' of crime, oversimplifies individual experiences, and fails to account for cultural differences and structural contexts, including macro-level social change (McAra and McVie, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's theory is explicated as a four-part model referred to as the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) that considers development as a composite of an individual's attributes, the context in which development occurs, the time at which it occurs, and the different processes the individual experiences (Lewthwaite, 2011).

Figure 3.1: Bioecological Model
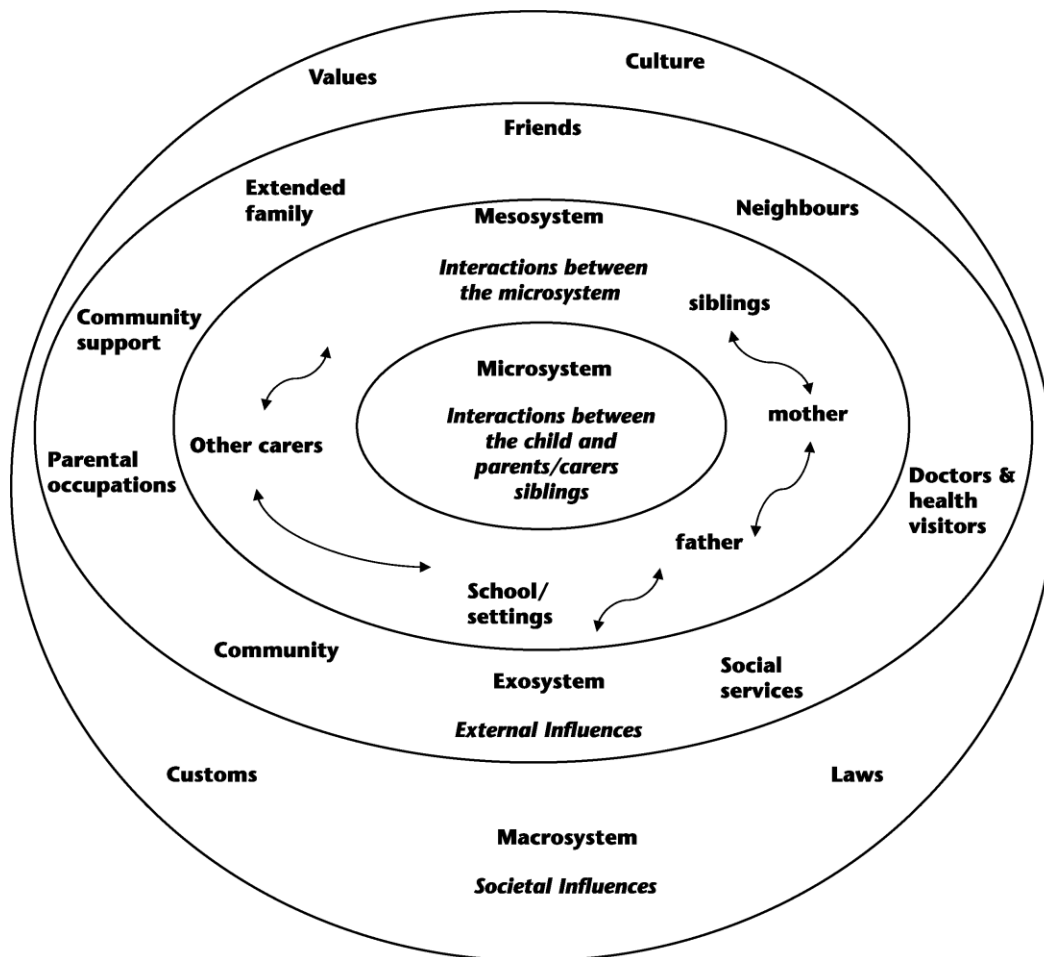
Source: Johnston and Halocha, 2010, p. 8.

<u>Person</u>

According to the model, the developing person is the central social actor. Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the biological and genetic aspects of the person (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994) but focuses more on the personal characteristics that the individual brings to a social situation. These characteristics are divided into three types: demand, resource and force. As described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) and Tudge et al. (2009), demand characteristics (age, gender, physical appearance, skin colour, etc.) are those that act as immediate stimuli that influence initial interactions between the developing person and others. Resource characteristics are not easily apparent but can sometimes be induced based on the demand characteristics, such as mental and emotional resources (skills, intelligence, past experiences, etc.) or social and material resources (educational opportunities, decent housing, and caring parents). Lastly, force characteristics relate to distinguishing traits (persistence, motivation, temperament, etc.) between individuals that can result in different developmental trajectories despite having equal resource characteristics.

<u>Process</u>

Processes are described by Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) as interactions between the developing person and their immediate environment as progressively more complex reciprocal interactions resulting in the developing person experiencing and fitting into the world while also changing it. Processes such as child-child activities, for example, pupil-to-pupil interactions, playing with a young child, group or solitary play, and learning new skills are normally occurring interactions in the lives of developing individuals (Tudge et al., 2009). These processes constitute the "engines of development" because individuals make sense of their world and their place in it by engaging in certain activities and interactions (Bronfenbrenner and Evans 2000, p. 118).

<u>Context</u>

For Bronfenbrenner, these activities and interactions occur within a context comprised of four interrelated systems that each contain roles and norms that shape development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

The Microsystem or Social Environment

In the context of this study, the microsystem is the immediate social environment (i.e., home, neighbourhood, peer group and school) in which the developing person spends most of their time engaged in a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations to produce and sustain development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Development is considered a function of transactional relations

among multiple levels of influence that include proximal and distal influences on the developing person. Influences related to the family (e.g., parenting practices, maternal depression, familial socioeconomic status, and caregiving) are more 'proximal' to young people and are more likely to have a greater impact on development. On the other hand, 'distal' influences, such as the quality of the neighbourhood (or peers and school) are presumed to have less pronounced effects on development, by possibly influencing children when, for example, it indirectly affects parents through their caregiving process (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, pp. 866; Zielinski and Bradshaw, 2006).

Family

The relations within the family are considered the most enduring interactions that provide immense influence and occur over an extended period in the developing person's life, including parenting styles and other variations within the home environment such as child-child activities (e.g., sibling relationship) and parent-child (e.g., mother and son relationship) or adult-child interaction (e.g., grandmother and grandson relationship). Particularly for this study, as explored in previous research, the role of the home is important in looking at the complex experiences of young people and parental involvement during unstable situations such as educational transitions (O'Kane, 2007; Dockett et al., 2011; O'Toole et al., 2014).

The stability of the home could lead to differential social outcomes for the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (1986) emphasised the importance of examining the role and impact that residential mobility in relation to moving has on the development of the child and the way the family functions. Likewise, Sampson and Lauritsen (1994) noted that family functioning and the quality of family life were more consistently associated with delinquency than family structure. Social factors identified in previous research that may influence the stability of the home include economic hardship that interrupts adult functioning, specifically family breakdown due to separation or divorce (Farrington et al., 2013); parental neglect (Farrington et al., 2009); family or domestic violence (Muhammed et al., 2011; Molina and Levell, 2020); family composition (Dermott and Pomati, 2016); poor parent-child relationships; lone parenting (Paton et al., 2009); low levels of parental knowledge related to awareness of activities with peers after school and during free time; and high levels of parental-adolescent conflict (Cutrín et al., 2017).

Studies in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010), Trinidad and Tobago (Gayle et al., 2012), and the UK (Bowling and Phillips, 2006) have also suggested that the absence or disengagement of fathers or positive male role models in the home, and single-parent households based on family breakdown

were suggested to be linked to the involvement of young Black people in gangs or other criminal youth groups.

Earlier sociological works in the US (Moynihan, 1965; West, 1994) have considered the intersection of race, social class, and socio-historical factors and their influence on offending by examining the 'negro family.' Moynihan's (1965) sociological work on the 'negro family' in the US provided important historical context to social disadvantage from the impact of slavery on the family, including discrimination and poverty. He suggested that the deterioration of the Negro society was the deterioration of the Negro family. West (1994), similarly, supported the need to recognise the role of structure but also added that structure was not inseparable from behaviour because people's behaviour and lifestyles are shaped by institutions and values. For West, structures are not limited to economic and political dynamics, but should also include culture. A part of this culture was what he felt was a "despair and dread that now flood the streets of lack America" that contributed to a "collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human (especially black) life and property" that serves as a nihilistic threat (p. 19).

Neighbourhood

In the neighbourhood, interactions include variations of adult-child relations, such as neighbour-child, peer-child, adult-adult, police-child, police-neighbourhood, social agencies-child, and social agencies-neighbourhood. Deutsch et al. (2012) used the ecological theory to examine the pathways to delinquency among African American and European American young people living in high and low-risk neighbourhoods and concluded that for both groups, low parental control influenced their delinquency through its effect on deviant peer affiliation. Other previous studies explored the nature of neighbourhood disadvantage, including overall neighbourhood socioeconomic status (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000); poor child and adolescent outcomes in neighbourhoods of concentrated disadvantage (Sampson et al., 2002), and disorders such as graffiti and public disorder that might serve as invitations to more serious crimes (Gladwell, 2006).

Exposure to neighbourhood violence has been noted as a factor that influenced social outcomes worthy of examination, especially since inner-city neighbourhoods had a higher risk of exposure to violence, though even in violent communities, exposure to violence and the outcomes among individuals varied (Salzinger et al., 2011). In the Caribbean context, risk factors for young people included the level of crime and violence in the neighbourhood, lack or absence of basic infrastructure, presence of alcohol, firearms, corrupt law enforcement officers, lack of protection, and neighbourhood drug dealers who used children in their illicit trade (World Bank, 2003; Gayle and

Mortis, 2010; Crawford-Brown, 2010). On the other hand, protective factors for young people associated with neighbourhoods included safe and secure spaces, functioning infrastructure, connectedness with organisations, a clean environment, and trustworthy law enforcement officers (World Bank 2003).

Research in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Baird, 2019) and Trinidad and Tobago (Gayle et al., 2012) have sought to address social violence and masculinity in neighbourhoods from a different lens. Gayle and Mortis (2010) and Gayle et al. (2012) advanced the notion that a feud was an endless violent relationship between two groups located within reach of each other in a setting of scarce resources and poor central political authority, including ineffective policing and judiciary, where individuals compete to meet their economic and social needs. Consequently, young men living in harsh neighbourhood environments increase their chances of survival by organising themselves into social units that can have an advantage over others. On the other hand, for Baird (2019) masculinity is not positioned as a pathological attribute of the Southside, rather, he recognises that the impacts of exclusion are gendered, which creates masculine vulnerability among young men to the transnational Blood and Crip culture. He, therefore, considers the transnational Blood and Crip culture as an "aspirational site of identity formation" (p. 2).

Similar neighbourhood-level considerations on gang formation in the UK (Bowling and Phillips, 2006; Pitts, 2007) and the US (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994) have also suggested that the formation of gangs and local street-corner groups among young Black people occur in urban, lower-income, heterogenous neighbourhoods where structural disorganisation are conducive to the emergence of cultural value systems and attitudes that legitimise or tolerate violence.

Others in the US (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994; Day et al., 2020) have suggested a relationship between a lifestyle of persistent offending behaviour and the amount of time spent outside of the home environment and 'on the street' in proximity to other offenders and criminal events within the neighbourhood setting. More importantly, a pattern of disrupted education and difficult family homes explained why the young people spent great periods on the street with like-minded peers also out of education, and subsequently a lifestyle of offending behaviour, and in many instances, the carrying of weapons.

The notion of a street code has also been advanced to explain social interactions within the neighbourhood context. Anderson (1999) in the US and Brookman et al. (2011) in the UK advanced the concept of the 'code of the street' based on the notion of 'respect' which is important social capital that provides status to the person who bears it and serves as a protection against future violence or

victimisation. This code is considered a part of a broader street culture that values honour and respect and demands that disrespect is met with a willingness to defend one's status through violence.

Others (Pitts, 2016; Berg et al., 2020) have also considered a code or adherence to behaviours within the neighbourhood context, but with consideration of changes to the environment. Pitts (2016) focused on the adherence to behaviours among gang-affiliated young people in toxic social fields or neighbourhoods, which influences the agency of individual agents as evidence that actors within the social field, can move away from toxic social fields, and therefore, move away from criminal careers or gang affiliation. Berg et al. (2020) likewise suggested that the street code was malleable and fluctuated according to changes in the demoralising social conditions; hence, as the social conditions changed, so did the adherence to the street code.

Beyond propositions about an overarching code of the streets or cultural value systems, other authors in the US (Wikstron and Loeber, 2000) and the UK (Wikstrom and Treiber, 2016) have comparatively examined disadvantaged and advantaged neighbourhoods, with the former suggesting significant differences in prevalence and age of onset of serious juvenile offending by neighbourhood socioeconomic context. In contrast, Wikstrom and Treiber (2016) suggested that differences in crime involvement by disadvantaged groups were based on more people who grew up and lived in disadvantaged circumstances developing a high crime propensity and were more frequently exposed to criminogenic settings.

Notably, Rodger (2008) acknowledged a structural influence based on an overarching attempt to manage interaction and protocols of behaviour in a neighbourhood by 'criminalising social policy' using civil law as a control mechanism to target anti-social behaviour while simultaneously identifying behaviours of incivility as a social problem. Consequently, the "dysfunctional family" (p.8) has been targeted by a range of policy initiatives to address antisocial behaviour in children, such as early childhood development, education, youth behaviour, and employment.

Peer Group

Age proves to be an important consideration in the proximity of influences to children as other contexts, like peer groups, increase in importance (Zielinski and Bradshaw, 2006; Dong and Weibe, 2018). Salzinger et al. (2011) suggested that as young men entered secondary school, they sought and were often given further independence from their parents, which allowed them to broaden their peer network which increased the relative influence that friends had and the type of support they depended on.

Studies in the Caribbean considered the role of masculinity in peer relationships and its implications on risky behaviour (Barker, 1997; Francis, 1999; Jackson, 2003; Plummer and Geofroy, 2010). The male peer group has been noted to contribute to anti-school behaviour that was supported and reciprocated by the other members (Evans, 1999). The authority of the peer group often competed with and at times exceeded the authority of adults in the lives of adolescent young men, with young men embracing symbolism of masculine strength such as aggression and anger (Plummer et al., 2008). Other risk factors included peers who participated in deviant culture and were perceived as threats by peers, while protective factors included having peers who provided connectedness, possessed, or fostered prosocial norms, and treated each other fairly (World Bank, 2003).

Earlier literature on masculinities in Australia (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997) and the UK (Barker, 1997; Francis, 1999; Jackson, 2003) has sought to explain violence among peers within the school context. Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) looked at violence in school within the interactions between male-to-male and male-to-female physical and sexual violence and suggest that in the school context of Australia, boys display characteristics that are associated with hegemonic masculinity as a part of being a lad while rebuffing characteristics considered feminine. Francis (1999) and Jackson (2003), on the other hand, while similarly referencing a culture of 'laddishness' or 'macho' behaviour among predominantly White pupils in London, sought to explain lower educational performances in boys compared to girls. For them, laddish behaviour was a desire to impress or maintain acceptance among males driven by peer pressure to engage in disruptive behaviour that adversely affected their educational performance. These behaviours included alcohol consumption, objectifying women, going out or 'hanging around' with mates, not being seen to work hard at schoolwork, and interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine.

Similar observations were made in the Caribbean context around the same period. Evans (1999) showed that the male peer group in Jamaica contributes to anti-school behaviour based on a masculine culture linked with 'crew' or gang membership that results in situations where members of the group demonstrate negative behaviour in the classroom that is supported and reciprocated by the other members. Likewise, Le Franc, Bailey and Branche (1998) found that boys in three Caribbean countries were socialised to be rough and tough so that as early as 10 years old they realised that physical strength, toughness, and sexual dominance were expected of them. By accepting physical domination as their nature, boys were also to be exposed to harsher physical punishment, which was reinforced in the school environment where boys viewed as rebellious and tougher were excluded from important roles, while girls were perceived as socially responsible. This unfairness was accepted

by boys as they conceded that they were difficult to control, and eventually, educational motivation and achievement were associated with effeminacy.

Research in Jamaica (Chevannes, 1999; 2001) on culture, socialisation and gender identity in inner-city working-class neighbourhoods has shown different ways in which young men are socialised among peers after educational disengagement. Chevannes (1999) postulated that in Jamaica when boys are forced to leave school for work during financial hardship in the family while their sisters can attend school, they are exposed to peers who socialised them into street culture and survival methods as early as age 10. As such, young men are found gambling, playing sports, stealing, and acting as couriers and messengers for drug dealers. Other research in eight Caribbean countries (Plummer et al., 2008) also supported Chevannes' postulations regarding peer socialisation among boys as early as age 10. Plummer et al. (2008) linked boys' peer groups with the reinforcement of aggressive and risky behaviour through hegemonic masculinity in inner-city communities where the display of weaknesses was discouraged.

School

In school, interactions may include teacher-child, classmate-child, peer-child, staff-child, and parent-staff. Schools as a social context bring large groups of young people of the same age to an environment where there is a significant disparity in the ratio of adults to young people (Plummer and Geofroy, 2010). It also acts as a dominant space for friendship formation or maintenance of peer groups formed during or before school (Anderson, 2002). Crooks et al. (2007) postulated that the school was the most important contextual factor for adolescents because peer groups had a growing influence as that of the family waned, and it was also more proximal than the neighbourhood.

School characteristics that promote positive interactions and pupil involvement have been suggested to be important protective factors (O'Brien et al., 2013). Microsystems like that of the school where there was a positive relationship between pupils and teachers were purported to significantly influence educational attainment (Stivaro, 2007). Similarly, other studies have suggested that young people with a low connection or commitment to school and low positive interactions with teachers were more vulnerable to developing bonds with other alienated young people that may have reinforced negative social cues that were learned in life, including the "efficacy of the use of violence and poor conflict resolution" (Crooks et al., 2007, p. 270) or gang involvement (Blum and Ireland, 2004; Katz and Fox, 2010; Williams, 2013).

The Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner proposes that the mesosystem is the interrelationship between the different microsystems that include processes occurring between multiple settings in which the developing person finds themselves, such as the relations between the home and school through parental involvement in the child's schooling (Ashiabi and O'Neal, 2015); between the child's family and neighbourhood (Estevez et al., 2009); between peers, school and neighbourhood interaction and experiences (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013); or how the neighbourhood may influence the school environment through its sociodemographic composition (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Development is enabled when there are meaningful linkages between the different microsystems. What occurs in one microsystem will influence and be influenced by what happens in other microsystems; therefore, the number and quality of the links between two or more microsystems will determine a rich or impoverished mesosystem (Stivaro, 2007). A mesosystem where there is a positive or negative interaction between the microsystems is beneficial or detrimental to the developing person. For example, Caribbean studies (Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Knight and Ogunkola, 2016) suggested that limited communication between the parents and school or peers was more likely to occur at the secondary school level in which links between the home, school, and peer groups were considered less strong than at the primary school level (Tobbell, 2003). More importantly, a strong corresponding value system between different microsystems provides a supportive link for the individual's development, but divergent values can develop tensions and adversely affect their development. For example, a shared value in education or academic success between peers and the home can have a positive impact on the developing individual (Stivaro 2007).

The significance of Bronfenbrenner's proposition on the mesosystem in this study is that we can examine how the nested social structures of the family, neighbourhood, peers, and school impact the development of young people. As espoused by Chung and Steinberg (2006), the focus on one microsystem provides an overly simplistic model in looking at developmental outcomes, including the risks for adolescent offending. As such, in this study, I will examine if a change in one microsystem influences a change in other microsystems. For example, parental effects have been shown to have varying interactions with other influences of the individual that are outside the family such as the neighbourhood that the family resides in (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994; Collins et al., 2000). Previous research by Howard and Johnson (2000) using Bronfenbrenner's theory has also shown the application of the mesosystem when children and teachers considered the family and neighbourhood to play a significant role in promoting resilient behaviour among children who experienced a difficult life.

The Exosystem

The exosystem refers to contexts in which the developing individual is not directly situated but it has an indirect influence on development. The development of young people is influenced by the exosystem through the involvement of others (peers, teachers, family members, etc.) in their lives or through decisions made by social institutions that can affect their family, school, and neighbourhood (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This may be detrimental to young people because they do not possess decision-making power or voice within the exosystem despite its ability to either enrich or impoverish their micro or mesosystems (Stivaro, 2007). Tudge et al. (2009) provide an example of a parent's experience of stress at work that results in their irritability with the child at home: whereas the parent's work is an exosystem that the child spends no time in, yet it still has an indirect, and profound influence on the child and the quality of interaction with the parent.

Less emphasis will be placed on the exosystem in this study because the influence of home, neighbourhood, peer group, and school are the focus; however, the exploration of the microsystems will likely unearth several ways that the exosystem can influence the lives of young people. As suggested in the literature, social class, poverty, and parental employment as a part of parental advantage or disadvantage have been recognised as examples of the exosystem that can affect the quality of childhood experiences and their social development (Johnston and Halocha, 2010).

The Macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to a context that encompasses the shared belief systems or values (Tudge et al., 2009), cultural milieu (Farineau, 2016), core educational values and practices (Johnston and Halocha, 2010), "resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 25). These may include social constructs like geographic location, ideas, political and social attitudes, legislation (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), and masculinity as a gender identity that can affect the developmental outcomes of the developing person and their microsystems.

In the context of the Caribbean, the World Bank (2003) identifies the national economy, the levels of poverty and inequality, institutional framework, political landscape, cultural and historical background, media, gender, and social exclusion as macro-environmental factors. The state of the national economy acts as a primary source of opportunities for young people and their families; therefore, it may be a protective factor when it provides job opportunities and other resources for social services, and a risk factor when it fails to provide opportunities and introduces vulnerabilities or uncertainties in the lives of young people and their family, especially for small economies of the

Caribbean. Public institutions relate to education systems, health care systems, law enforcement, and judicial systems that specifically affect the lives of young people based on access and experience (World Bank, 2003).

Other macrosystem factors in the Caribbean have centred around the influence of historical events and experiences in the Caribbean, such as slavery and colonialism, on racism, family life, and institutions. Trouillot (2001) emphasised racism within the historical context of whiteness positioned at the top of the social pyramid during plantation slavery which generated a relationship between physical appearance or phenotype and position that served as a mechanism of social exclusion in which blackness was perceived as reducing social status. In terms of family life, Beckles (1996) suggested that the British slave legacy influenced modern-day family structures through maternal and paternal roles in child-raising since fathers served only as biological fathers because fatherhood served no social nor economic interest to slaveholders; therefore, fathers were marginalised and alienated from fatherhood. Additionally, the legacy of British colonialism in many Caribbean countries was associated with weak and exclusionary public institutions, such as the education system (Trouillot, 2001), that did not provide equal service to many and excluded a significant proportion of the youth population (World Bank, 2003).

Time

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) divided time into three categories: micro-time, meso-time, and macro-time or chronosystem. Micro-time refers to occurrences during a specific activity or interaction (e.g., permanent school exclusion). Meso-time refers to the extent to which interactions or activities occur with consistency in the environment of the developing individual (e.g., childhood abuse). Macro-time refers to varying developmental processes based on specific historical events that occur during different ages of the developing individual. The historical context or period in which the young people in this study exist is important to analyse the events that may influence policies and legislation that affect their lives (Farineau, 2016). For example, the advantage or disadvantage of neighbourhoods (within Belize City) is represented within a historical process and context (Webster et al., 2006).

However, the application of Bronfenbrenner's theory in this study is mainly to provide a theoretical lens of the social environment as examined through the experiences in and across the interactions of the microsystems. Therefore, less emphasis will be placed on the Time dimension of Bronfenbrenner's theory because the Life Course Theory, which is presented in the following section, provides a better theoretical lens for the relationship between time and social outcomes of young people.

Concepts/Definitions/Theories of Social Exclusion

There is a further important area of theoretical approach that I need to discuss – social exclusion. There are a plethora of definitions of social exclusion and different theories underpinning it (Room, 1995; Gordon et al., 2000; Burchardt et al., 2002; Estivill, 2003; Silver, 2007). These definitions consider the processes, structures, and characteristics of society and the experiences of the person within the society. They also emphasise concerns about choice and capability relating to a person's choice to participate and the presence of external forces that hinder their participation (Levitas et al., 2007). This underscores the nature of social exclusion as being influenced by differential power relations that can define and constrain the choices and capabilities of individuals (Miliband, 2006).

Social Exclusion

This study draws on Levitas et al. (2007) who advocated that the concept of social exclusion offers an understanding of the multidimensional and complex nature of disadvantage, and the process of discrimination, denial of rights, and impoverishment, and Fahmy's (2008; 2017) more specific research on young people. As such, the definition from Levitas et al. (2007, p. 25) is as follows:

> Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

By using social exclusion as advocated by Levitas et al and Fahmy, I can enhance my understanding of how young people's experiences of larger structural and institutional processes after permanent school exclusion impact their and their families' lives more broadly and possibly contribute to their offending.

Levitas et al. (2007, p. 24) suggested that the interactional process of social exclusion means that the dimensions of social exclusion can be "simultaneously exclusionary outcomes and causal factors for other dimensions of exclusion" in varying strength and direction. Therefore, depending on the length of time and points in the life course that different forms of disadvantage are experienced, the consequences may vary. In that regard, the authors proposed that an experience of poverty over five years, for example, may have different consequences between the ages of seven and 12 than that of ages 27 and 32.

Social exclusion is described as multidimensional, dynamic, relational, and structural. Silver (2007, p. 1) emphasised the multidimensional and dynamic process of social exclusion that results in the "rupturing of the social bond" in relation to social relations, institutions, and identities that are attributed to social cohesion, integration, or solidarity. This rupture of the social bond can be manifested in diverse ways, including marginalisation, discrimination, segregation, abandonment, and elimination (Ravaud and Stiker, 2001).

The multidimensional nature of social exclusion includes social and economic aspects of disadvantage that are inherently connected. The economic dimensions are not limited to monetary poverty or lack of income, but may also include exclusion from the labour market, food, land, assets, and other areas that can be influenced by ethnic and gender differences (Silver, 2007). Importantly, the multidimensionality of social exclusion means that the relationship among different dimensions of disadvantage is such that they may reinforce and cushion the impact of one another. For example, a person who is excluded from social protection of the state or family support can experience long-term unemployment that can lead to income poverty, and in turn, income poverty can disrupt their social relations.

Social exclusion is also a dynamic or processual process, which means that a person may in one moment be on a trajectory toward inclusion and in another toward exclusion. Therefore, a path to social inclusion can be followed by another path to multiple exclusions or social rupture (Silver and Miller, 2003; Silver, 2007).

Social exclusion is also relational because it involves an experience of social isolation, rejection, loss of status, lack of recognition, humiliation, denial of participation, and a lack of networks for social support (Silver and Miller, 2003; Silver, 2007). This experience may mean different things depending on the context or the definitions of inclusion. Therefore, social exclusion refers to horizontal relations of belonging, not vertical; therefore, it emphasises a person's state of being in or out, not up or down (Silver, 2007).

Social exclusion is also a structural process of social isolation that can deprive a person of multiple dimensions of social involvement. Levitas et al.'s (2007) definition explores the structural characteristics that drive social exclusion and helps to shift the focus away from the behaviour of the excluded which is often used to blame them for their exclusion (this is unlike some other approaches to social exclusion which are rooted in underclass theories). Silver (2007, p. 2) characterised this process as an "active relationship" between the excluders and the excluded, whereas the excluders act as "agents" who use "mechanisms" to push out and deny others of access to resources and social

relations. Excluders may include institutions and policies. Therefore, while the excluded may appear to be intentionally withdrawing from society, it may be in response to the action of the excluder.

Several authors (Gordan et al., 2000; Silver and Miller, 2003; Levitas et al., 2007; Fahmy, 2017; Bailey, 2017) have suggested different dimensions or domains of social exclusion. For this section, I present several of these dimensions, starting with those articulated by Levitas et al. (2007, p. 10) in the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM) which consists of 10 dimensions or domains of social exclusion divided into three categories:

Resources: material/economic resources; access to public and private services; social resources.

Participation: economic participation; social participation; culture, education and skills; political and civic participation.

Quality of life: health and well-being; living environment; crime, harm and criminalisation.

Other contributions to understanding multidimensional disadvantage that can influence social exclusion include Gordan et al.'s (2000) four dimensions of social exclusion: poverty, labour market exclusion, service exclusion, and exclusion from social relations in the Poverty and Social Exclusion survey in the UK. Barnes et al. (2002) and Barnes (2005) suggested areas of education, health, housing, social participation, social relations, psychological well-being, and personal finances. Silver and Miller (2003) suggested consideration of other social and political dimensions of social exclusion that refer to the quality of future prospects, participation in civic life, or customary family and community activities. Bradshaw et al. (2004) added neighbourhood, and crime; Atkinson et al. (2005) referred to access to the labour market regarding employment and unemployment; the educational system in relation to early school leaving; health in terms of life expectancy. Miliband (2006) added consideration on skills, and Fahmy (2006) emphasised the importance of the types of personal networks and resources that young people have access to that can facilitate their civic engagement.

A more recent examination of dimensions of social exclusion has included the works of Fahmy (2017) and Bailey (2017). Fahmy (2017) identified the nature and manifestation of wider social exclusion that young people experience, albeit based on UK data, that can theoretically be applied in relation to the shared social needs and roles in the life course of young people. Hence, young people were more at risk of multidimensional exclusion, such as financial difficulties, lacking physical assets like homeownership, having broader friendships and familial contact but not necessarily stronger social support, being more vulnerable to employment exclusion like unemployment, less likely to participate in political action on local or national issues, poor housing, and far more likely to be vulnerable to

harassment and discrimination. Fahmy also suggested a relationship between educational attainment and 'cultural capital' (education, tastes, and social sensibilities) that tends to be lacking among socially marginalised populations. Bailey (2017) examined the extent to which individuals who experienced employment exclusion, referring to the exclusion that arose based on the individual's labour market situation, were excluded in other domains: health and well-being; social networks and participation; and housing and neighbourhood environment.

<u>Deep Exclusion</u>

In recognition of the multidimensionality of social exclusion, Miliband (2006, p. 4) introduced the notion of "deep exclusion" to distinguish between three forms of social exclusion: wide, deep, and concentrated. Accordingly, 'wide exclusion' refers to individuals who experience deprivation in one indicator. 'Deep exclusion' refers to individuals who experience deprivation in multiple indicators, and "concentrated exclusion" refers to a concentration of problems based on the geographical area. Examples provided by Miliband included: a person having no basic skills and experiencing long-term unemployment or a person who is homeless, without family, homeless, no skills, and on drugs. Consequently, Levitas et al. (2007) derived that social exclusion and deep exclusion are not qualitatively distinct, rather if social exclusion refers to multiple disadvantages, then deep exclusion refers to the degree of social exclusion and is, therefore, an extreme manifestation of social exclusion. Their definition of deep exclusion to address multiple and severe disadvantages is as follows:

> Deep exclusion refers to exclusion across more than one domain or dimension of disadvantage, resulting in severe negative consequences for quality of life, well-being and future life chances (p. 29).

More specifically, research in the UK has linked permanent school exclusion and the extent to which it acts as a precursor to social exclusion and possible deep exclusion, with the following outcomes: a sense of overwhelming rejection or injustice by the school, exclusion from friendship groups, stigmatisation within neighbourhoods, and the depriving of normal family life and relationships, including conflict with parents at home (Cullen et al., 2000; Munn and Lloyd, 2005); leaving without any qualifications or educational achievements, inflexibility in the employment market and social life (Visser et al., 2005); loss of educational opportunities and stigmatisation that affected job prospects (Daniel and Cole, 2010); living in social isolation or in a socially isolated group (or community) cut access to networks that were important to obtaining jobs (Barry, 2002); training and employment careers characterised by economic marginality (Webster et al., 2004); inaccessibility to social resources, (Coles et al., 2002; Sellman et al., 2002); problematic drug use (Buchanan, 2004); poor

physical and mental health (Berridge et al., 2001; Daniels et al., 2003; Coles et al., 2008); high levels of family stress, limits aspirations, and significantly increases risk of homelessness, falling in the care of social services (McCrystal et al., 2007); entry into crime (Daniel and Cole, 2010; Hatton, 2013); and overrepresentation of young Black people in the criminal justice system (Bowling and Phillips, 2006). Additionally, research in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010) and Latin America and the Caribbean (Rodgers, 1999; Seelke, 2014) has argued that exclusion from education as a form of social exclusion may lead to young men who are excluded from school entering youth or drug gangs, become socially disruptive in urban settings, and change the human ecology to a violent one.

Youth Transitions

Researchers (Coles, 1995; 2000; Johnston et al., 2000; Webster et al., 2004; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005) have advanced theorisations on youth transitions by which to examine social exclusion. This has largely been done by conceptualising youth as a life phase when a transition between childhood and full adult status is made. Coles (1995; 2000) identified three interrelated dimensions that characterise youth transition. The first is the 'school-to-work careers' based on a transition from full-time education or training to a full-time job. The second is the 'family careers' based on a transition from the family of origin to relative independence, and the third is the 'housing careers' based on a transition from residence with parents to living away. MacDonald and Marsh (2005) broadened the scope of the transitions by adding 'criminal careers', 'drug-using careers', and 'leisure careers'. Importantly, Johnston et al. (2000) suggest that critical to youth transitions is the young person's agency in being able to create paths of transition compared to constraints on choice and decision-making imposed by social structures. Webster et al. (2004) further the discussion by theorising an extended youth transition based on the effects of globalisation and de-industrialisation, which have provided alternatives to the traditional move from school to work through longer training and education.

Critical Life Events and Agency

In closing, Levitas et al. (2007) emphasised the collection and analysis of critical life events that may serve as risk factors of social exclusion, such as changes in personal relationship status, divorce, bereavement, changes in employment status, retirement, and institutionalisation. A life event is a significant occurrence that is characterised by a relatively abrupt change that can produce long-term effects and is solely based on the occurrence and not the future transition (Settersten, 2003; Hutchison, 2011). For example, Webster et al. (2006) suggested that certain life events and experiences (i.e., bereavement, parental separation, ill health, etc.) influence the nature, direction, and outcomes of a young person's transition to adulthood. These life events that serve as critical

moments in the lives of young people influence different transitions among excluded young people who may share similar social and economic experiences. Likewise, Johnston et al. (2000) suggested that life events can produce positive or negative outcomes based on the circumstances in which it occurs, such as the separation or divorce of parents, or bereavement may contribute to criminality, other factors such as employment can also contribute to desistance from crime.

The choices and control that individuals have over their decision-making may also shape their perceptions of life events and transitions and the subsequent outcomes. This sense of control or the number of personal choices may result in differential impacts of the same life events (Rönkä et al. 2003). The idea of human agency is, therefore, important in the study of social exclusion. 'Agency' is considered by Shanahan (2000) as an active process of choosing particular individual actions, which in the context of this study may include committing to or desisting from the pursuit of education, employment, offending behaviour, or gang involvement.

This sense that an individual is actively taking a particular action and possesses the ability to describe the motives and reasons for such action draws on what Giddens (1984 pp. 290-291) calls "discursive consciousness." In this regard, young people as knowledgeable agents reproduce the structural properties of society through individual action and exercise of agency but are simultaneously limited by structural constraints. Therefore, in examining the agency in the life course of young people in this study, their social outcomes can be viewed as products of the interplay between the individual and society, as both, inseparable, help to reproduce the other.

For Hunt (2016), stressful life events have implications on structure and agency. An example used was the death of a family member having an impact on family relationships because it could lead to vulnerability, stress, or on the other hand, family morale. The personality characteristics of individual family members could influence their functioning, coping styles, and overall well-being. Likewise, individual family members may organise their own lives through planning for the future or anticipating live events, which may contribute to conflict or tension within the family as the individual goals differ from that of the family as a collective unit. Individuals often develop novel adaptations from their customary behaviour to stressful life events as a way of dealing with their options to gain control over their environment (Elder 1985).

This thesis will explore the link between permanent school exclusion as a critical life event and wider social exclusion. This is particularly significant because previous research studies (Miliband, 2006; Daly, 2006; McCrystal et al., 2007; Daniels and Cole, 2010; Daniels, 2011; Sutherland, 2011; Hatton, 2013) have suggested a link between permanent school exclusion and wider social exclusion.

Justification for Theoretical Combination

The application of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development as an effective analytical tool to the study of social development, particularly education, antisocial behaviour, delinquency, adolescent aggression, and violence is well-documented (Beyers et al., 2001; Kirk, 2009; McBride Murry et al., 2011; Benson and Buehler, 2012). Social Exclusion, to some extent, has also been used to attempt to explain social violence among inner-city young people in the Caribbean (Gayle, 1996; Levy et al., 2001). However, the researcher has not found any study that combined the Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion to explain the relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending behaviour and social exclusion.

The significance of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development is the explanation it provides for why some young people are placed at risk while others are not. It shifts the blame of the circumstances away from the young people and locates the source of risk within the wider social environment (Garbarino and Abramowitz, 1992). For Bronfenbrenner (1979), young people who are at the centre of nested systems are affected by the changes that occur within the environments that surround them, since each change in one system results in a reaction and interaction with other systems. Based on Bronfenbrenner's microsystems or social environments, young people are placed at risk when there is an accumulation of negative influences (Rutter 1987). Bronfenbrenner (1979) has emphasised the importance of understanding adaptations by individuals within an ecological framework by looking at the different social contexts in which the individual functions. The opportunity to explore the social context (i.e., home, neighbourhood peer group, and school) in which young men interact and experience processes as they developed during their childhood to account for earlier developmental factors, while also introducing their present situation post-school exclusion, through an ecosystem review of developmental outcomes is the reason the Bioecological Theory of Human Development was selected for this study. However, I find that the Bioecological Theory of Human Development does not adequately address critical life events as a risk of social exclusion and the multidimensional and complex nature of disadvantage, nor the exclusionary outcomes that may emerge as a result of permanent school exclusion.

The social exclusion approach provides a lens to examine the choice and capabilities of young men when faced with power relations that can constrain and define their choices and capabilities, and the nature and manifestation of wider social exclusion that young people experience. By drawing on Levitas et al.'s (2007) definition of social exclusion, the multidimensional process of social exclusion in relation to the denial of rights, services, and participation comes into sharp focus.

Admittedly, a limitation of this theoretical framework may be that some parts of each theory are emphasised and applied more than others. Nevertheless, the core of both theories is applied to this thesis and does not compromise their original theoretical propositions.

Conclusion

The core theoretical framework of this study combines two theoretical approaches – Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion – to build an explanatory framework to help understand individual and environmental factors (i.e. family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school) that may shape and influence the offending behaviour and social exclusion of young men who experienced permanent school exclusion. For this study, I examine how young men's experiences of larger structural and institutional processes after permanent school exclusion impact their and their families' lives, the dimensions or domains of social exclusion, and the role that their social environment plays in their offending behaviour and experiences of wider social exclusion.

The absence of any known study that combines the Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion to explain the relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending behaviour and social exclusion lends to the importance of this theoretical framework.

The next chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methodology, ethical considerations, and fieldwork experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter discusses the key methodological considerations in researching permanently excluded young men who offended and may have also experienced wider social exclusion. The chapter describes the research design and its philosophical underpinning, sampling, data collection and fieldwork experience, ethical considerations, and analysis and interpretation.

Aim of Study

This study aimed to examine the influence of permanent school exclusion from secondary school on the offending behaviour and experience of wider forms of social exclusion among young men within the context of the social environments of the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school in Belize City.

Research Design

Four research questions were initially proposed for this study that reflected a mixed-method research design (see Appendix 1). These research questions were formulated to represent quantitative and qualitative inquiries based on the need to acquire descriptive data on the characteristics of the permanently excluded young men, followed by in-depth interviews of their lived experiences before and after permanent school exclusion. The first question represented a quantitative inquiry while the others were qualitative. The challenges in accessing secondary schools as recruitment sites to collect exclusion data made it impossible to successfully address RQ1 – What are the characteristics of young men who are permanently excluded from secondary school? This eliminated the quantitative inquiry and rendered the inquiries qualitative, and also changed the sampling and recruitment approach, thereby changing the research design from an initial mixed-method to finally a wholly qualitative study.

The study presented in this thesis was of a qualitative design that responded to research questions that examined the contextual factors and processes associated with criminal offending and wider social exclusion in young men who were permanently excluded from secondary school in Belize City, with a focus on the role of the home, neighbourhood, peers, and school on their lives. The qualitative design was used because it considered the data at both the surface and depth levels to explain the phenomenon.

The following section outlines the research questions, sample frame, sample design, and the sample of the project.

Research Questions

RQ1 How do the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school influence the lives of young men experiencing permanent school exclusion?

RQ2 What are the implications of permanent school exclusion on criminal offending in young men?

RQ3 How does social exclusion manifest in young men who have experienced permanent school exclusion?

Sample Frame

Belize City was selected as the target site of the study because it is the largest urban centre in Belize with approximately 17 percent of the country's total population (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2016). It is characterised by significant social and economic challenges that can negatively influence the developmental outcomes of young people, including crime and violence (Gayle and Mortis, 2010). In addition, it had the largest distribution (13) of urban secondary schools (Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, 2016), which allowed for a good analysis of permanent school exclusion.

The target sex of the study was male because the crisis in education in Belize, as it relates to school dropouts, repetition, and completion rates, affected males more than females (Policy, Planning, Research, and Evaluation Unit, 2016). More specifically, the literature suggested that permanent school exclusion (Daniels and Cole, 2010; Stamou et al., 2014) and rates of crime and antisocial behaviour (Piotrowska et al., 2015) are notably higher for males than females.

The target education level was secondary school because the academic challenges of males in Belize were more pronounced at this level (Policy, Planning, Research, and Evaluation Unit 2016). Accordingly, the timeline of four years was selected because there were four Forms/Classes at the secondary level and young men may experience permanent school exclusion at different Form/Class levels.

Sample Design

Criterion Sampling informed the selection of the qualitative sample through the identification of a pool of potential participants based on a predetermined "criterion of importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 238), which is that they had to be young men in Belize City who within the last four years were permanently excluded from secondary school and criminally charged (Crowe et al., 2011). Parents

(mothers) were recruited and included in the study after the selection of the young men to serve as additional data sources and add further depth to data collection (Yin, 2014) on the interaction between the social environments. They also provided necessary insight into the young men's behaviours before and after the permanent school exclusion, the process and appeal of the school exclusion, and the navigation of social life after school exclusion.

Two secondary schools and five youth-based organisations served as recruitment sites for the final sample of the study. Firstly, the sampling design of the study considered secondary schools that had male sub-populations as recruitment sites. There was a total of 13 secondary schools identified in Belize City, with 11 being co-educational. Of those 11 secondary schools, seven were selected to be included in the study based on two important contexts: Managing Authorities (MAs) and geographic location. There were seven MAs (as described in Chapter 1, page 77) under which secondary schools were administered in Belize City, so the sample had to consider participants from the schools of each MA. Of the 11 schools, five were on the Northside and six were on the Southside. This distinction was made because of the socioeconomic boundaries, higher rates of poverty, a concentration of criminal gangs, and other issues (Gayle and Mortis, 2010) described in Chapter 1 (page 13). This consideration was critical to the study given the theoretical proposition that the social environments of the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school influenced the lives of young men. Therefore, the combination criteria of MAs and geographic location reduced the school sample to seven secondary schools – see Table 4.1. The final sample of schools to provide school exclusion data and agree to facilitate access to potential participants was only two from the intended seven schools.

Table 4.1: Sample of Secondary Schools by Geographical Location and MA*

Secondary School	Geographic Location	Management Authority
School A	Southside	MA 1
School B	Southside	MA 2
School C	Southside	MA 3
School D	Northside	MA 4
School E	Northside	MA 5
School F	Northside	MA 6
School G	Northside	MA 7

Consequently, nine youth-based organisations in Belize City were recruited to provide supplementary data to the two schools to increase the qualitative sample. These organisations provided a range of services including youth clubs, youth programmes, custodial care, mediation services, and skills

development programmes. Five of the nine youth-based organisations provided personal data on young men who they believed experienced some form of school exclusion. The collated data between the two schools and five organisations yielded 264 names of young men who were excluded from secondary school. The qualitative sample was derived from the linking of two datasets of the exclusion data from schools and youth-based organisations and the offending data from the Belize Police Department which created a new dataset of 110 young men (42 percent of 264). One of the youth-based organisations was a custodial institution, so four other names were added since they were already criminally charged. In total there were 114 shortlisted names of young men for potential recruitment.

<u>The Sample</u>

The final study sample was six young men. All six young men were Black of Creole or Garifuna ethnicity from the Southside of Belize City. The interviews with the young men ranged between 40 and 80 minutes with an average (median) of 59 minutes. This composition was a result of the study involving 'hard to reach' populations (Abram, 2010) and the difficulties in data collection that required me to use available participants, which is discussed below in the 'Data Collection' section. This proved to be important since, despite my strong efforts to recruit schools, the collection of data was out of my control, but following Creswell (2007), the minimum sample size of three to five participants was considered to be necessary to provide for the identification of themes and the conducting of thematic analysis was achieved.

The identities of the young men and their mothers were anonymised with pseudonyms, as well as the details of their interviews were separated to ensure internal confidentiality (Tolich 2004). All the young men in this study self-reported involvement in gang activity and were criminally charged with serious offences, including murder, attempted murder, robbery, keeping a firearm without a gun license, and aggravated assault.

Table 4.2: Pseudonyms and Ages of the Young Men

Participants (Young Men)	Age at Interview	Length of Interview
Anthony	17	68 minutes
Daniel	17	40 minutes
Dante	17	78 minutes
Marco	19	80 minutes
Matthew	23	54 minutes
Sonny	23	46 minutes

Five mothers were selected as additional sources of information to complete the data obtained from interviews with the young men. The mothers were recruited after the selection of the young men on the basis that they could provide in-depth interviews on the school exclusion and offending experiences of the young men.

Table 4.3: Details of Interviews with Mothers

Participants (Mothers)	Length of Interview
Andrea	40 minutes
Cassandra	81 minutes
Gina	43 minutes
Nessa	45 minutes
Shantel[3]	29 minutes

Operationalisation of Key Concepts

There were four key concepts included in this study: permanent school exclusion, offending, social exclusion, and young people.

'Permanent school exclusion' was described as 'expulsion from school' in the Belize Education and Training Act, 2010. It was defined as a practice "in case of gross and repeated misbehaviour or infractions of the school policies and rules for behaviour which interfere with the general running or undermines the discipline of a school, the Managing Authority may expel a registered pupil from the school" (Government of Belize, 2010, p. 173). However, during the fieldwork phase an unwritten practice of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' was described by school principals and vice-principals to refer to the incidence of informal or unofficial exclusion. This practice, similarly, defined in UK literature as informal or unofficial exclusion (Brodie, 2001; Daniels and Cole, 2010; Evans, 2010) encouraged parents to 'voluntarily' withdraw the pupil, so as not to have permanent school exclusion reflected in the pupil file, which could limit the chances of attending another school. Therefore, permanent school exclusion refers to both expulsion and withdrawal from school.

'Offending' was operationalised as self-reported and official criminal acts as defined by administrative records. Administrative records of criminal charges by the Belize Police Department as 'official' incidences of offending rather than convictions were used in this thesis because Belize's low conviction

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[3] Shantel's son was not interviewed due to safety concerns that limited his accessibility.

rate (American Bar Association, 2011) would not provide a more reliable measure than criminal charges. For this reason, the criminal charge represented an intended prosecution and was a more reliable measure despite a presumption of innocence until proven guilty in a criminal court.

Self-reported data were included because criminal charges or convictions as measures of offending do not consistently coincide with self-reported offending careers (McAra and McVie, 2010). In Latin America and the Caribbean (as well as in the UK) there was a cause to believe that many crimes were not reported and in high-crime areas reporting rates were the lowest (UNODC, 2007). Therefore, self-reporting can provide a greater range of offending and undetected offences and the prevalence of gang involvement (Hodgson and Webb, 2005; Obaro, 2012; Katz, 2015).

'Social exclusion' as discussed in Chapter 3 may refer to social exclusion at the individual level, in the relations between young men and other individuals, groups, or institutions, and at the wider societal level (Estivill, 2003). These may include unemployment or low job prospects, exclusion from friendship groups and normal family life, lower income, substance misuse, long periods without education if not entirely, social isolation, inaccessibility to social resources, and entry into crime (Sellman et al., 2002; Barry, 2002; Behrman et al., 2003; Buchanan, 2004; Munn and Lloyd, 2005).

'Young people' was based on the World Bank (2003) and World Health Organisation definition of youth from 10 to 24, which was treated as interchangeable with 'adolescents,' to represent the transition from childhood to adulthood. It also constitutes the legal definition of a young person in Belize under The Labour Act, Chapter 297 of the laws of Belize, which defines a young person as being 14 years and under 18 (Government of Belize, 2000), as well as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 138, of an economically active person below the age of 18.

This definition supported also supports the ecological approach to identify influences on youth behaviour that started as early as age 10. Additionally, it is supported by academic authors who use a variation of nomenclatures and sub-stages to describe this period of development (Arnett, 2000; Steinberg, 2002, 2014).

Philosophical Underpinning and Justification

To understand the conditions and complexities of the real-life situation of young men after permanent school exclusion in terms of criminal offending and wider social exclusion, the opportunity that a qualitative study provided extended beyond quantitative statistical results captured through survey research (Zainal, 2007). In survey design, for example, respondents would select from pre-determined answers that would challenge the complexity of the responses that young men in this study may offer (Becker et al., 2012).

The qualitative approach provided an opportunity to derive rich and contextual interpretations of the phenomena in comparison with most other research methods (Bryman, 2004). It also facilitated the unearthing of a variety of social, cultural, and political factors that may not have been known about the lives of the young men in this study (Bhattacherjee, 2012). By revisiting the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of the young men and their mothers, I was able to conduct a temporal analysis of events based on an exploration of the sequential "unfolding of events" before, during, and after permanent school exclusion with a focus on the nature and influence of the home, neighbourhood, peers, and school (Castro et al., 2010, p. 346). This undoubtedly brought into perspective my role as an outsider as I entered the homes and neighbourhoods of participants and helped in my understanding of some of the context of their lives.

The multiple realities and variations in the contexts of the lives of the young men, though possibly resulting in similar offending and social exclusion outcomes, may have different explanations; therefore, the qualitative approach was used to understand the similarities and differences among the young men (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Epistemologically, these multiple realities were best captured through the direct personal experience of each young man because meaning and knowledge were constructed through their conscious experience and interaction with their reality (Grix, 2004). As a researcher and a co-constructor of that reality, I had to use a methodology that would allow me to understand their meanings, reality, and lived experiences through the capturing and inclusion of their words and voices to present their different perspectives (Petty et al., 2012). This was important because the views of excluded young people can often be different from other social actors involved in the school exclusion process (Sellman et al., 2002).

Data Collection

Access and Recruitment of Schools

As described on page 77, the combination criteria of MAs and geographic location reduced the school sample to seven secondary schools. Therefore, the first step in my fieldwork was to visit the seven sample schools. The school visits aimed to open the negotiation of entry by introducing myself, providing a basic description of the study, and identifying and collecting contact information of the gatekeepers at the school who can approve the school's participation in the study (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Participation in the study was to involve the facilitation of access to interviews with teachers, pupils, and their parents. The school principals or vice-principals were identified as responsible for these administrative matters. I emailed the recruitment letters, (see Appendix 2) to all the schools and Managing Authorities, requested a formal meeting with the school principals or vice-

principals, and reiterated the information provided during the school visits so that they could make an informed choice about participation (Crowe et al., 2011). I also assured the schools that the study aimed to understand the experience of young people who were permanently excluded and not to adversely represent or appraise the school as an organisation or management (Shenton and Hayter, 2004).

Five of the seven schools responded favourably to a meeting to discuss the research study, while the other two schools proved to be inaccessible throughout the fieldwork. The first meeting with the schools was instructive in that the schools were interested in the study and considered it to be a necessity to inform their policies and practices. The five schools emphasised the importance of an endorsement letter from the Ministry of Education for the study before approval and access could be provided. Therefore, a written request (see Appendix 3) for endorsement was sent to the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Education. Upon receipt of the endorsement letter (see Appendix 4), it was sent to all the schools, which resulted in all five schools approving access to their site and data. I provided the schools with copies of research documents (i.e., recruitment letter, Participant Information Sheet, consent form, Interview Protocol, and Debriefing Statement and Support) for the education staff and potential participants who would participate in the study.

The differences in the management and storage of information at each school resulted in variations in the extent and quality of data they possessed (Bryman, 2008). In the meetings with the school principals or vice-principals, most indicated that school exclusion data was either not recorded or stored because it was not a statistical category that the Ministry of Education required. Therefore, the collation of the school exclusion data would be a manual process that would require the consulting of various teachers and administrators for memory recall. In addition, in the cases where there were new administrators, they could not assure the accurate recollection of the names of excluded pupils. Most schools used physical logbooks rather than digital systems to store their data. Also, because of natural disasters, including rain, flooding, and hurricanes, some records were damaged. Records were also lost or misplaced when the school relocated or stored them. Other data-related issues included a lack of disaggregated data by sex, inaccuracies in pupil information and contact details, and incomplete records of excluded pupils, such as the date of school exclusion or the destination after school exclusion.

In the early stage of the fieldwork, it was reported and confirmed by several school principals and vice-principals that there was an unwritten but accepted practice of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice (WP)' among the school principals of the Belize Association of Principals of Secondary Schools. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this practice of informal or unofficial exclusion was reportedly based on the

encouragement of the parents of a young person by the school's administrators from returning to school by 'voluntarily' withdrawing the pupil. If the parent refused, the case was taken to the Board of Directors for approval of permanent school exclusion.

Upon learning about 'Withdrawal without Prejudice,' I informed my supervisors that this practice shared similarities with permanent school exclusion because the school was the initiator of the exclusion process of the pupil, which, as a "grey" area may explain why some schools suggested that there were few or no permanent school exclusions (Daniels et al., 2003). Subsequently, I informed the schools of the inclusion of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' in the study. Initially, none of the schools disagreed with this inclusion; however, most of the schools eventually found different ways to not participate after this change. I experienced delays, no responses to emails, telephone calls, or messages, inaccessibility during scheduled visits, and the delegation of meeting responsibilities of the school principals or vice-principals to less senior school personnel. Despite my perseverance for several months, including seeking meetings with the school principals or vice-principals who were still willing to discuss the implications of the study and soliciting the intervention of the Chief Executive Officer in the Ministry of Education (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003), I was unable to secure the cooperation of the remaining schools. Consequently, only two of the remaining five schools that previously agreed to participate in the study provided school exclusion data.

Access and Recruitment of Youth-based Organisations

Youth-based organisations in Belize City were selected as recruitment sites to supplement data from the two schools that agreed to participate in the study to increase the sample. These youth-based organisations would be able to help in the identification and recruitment process because they were either designed to support vulnerable or 'hard to reach' populations or to provide alternative education services (de Laine, 2000; Eide and Allen, 2005). I initially identified nine youth-based organisations and sent them recruitment emails (see Appendix 5) requesting to meet with their relevant administrators to introduce myself and explain the study.

Eight of the nine youth-based organisations responded favourably to my request and scheduled meetings, with one nonresponse. A prevailing theme in the meetings with the youth-based organisations was that since they did not feel complicit in the permanent school exclusion of young men, the study did not pose any reputational risk to their organisations (Jeffords, 2007). However, like the schools, none of these youth-based organisations recorded data on permanent school exclusion. Nevertheless, based on the nature of their work, the workers were aware informally of some young men who accessed their services that had experienced some form of school exclusion.

There was a concern on my part that the sample would represent only participants connected to social service organisations (Abrams, 2010) or that the gatekeepers may refer to the most accessible young men or those with whom they had positive interactions or outcomes (Blee, 2009), thereby inadvertently influencing the results. I addressed this by selecting a wide range of youth-based organisations. Like the schools, eventually, the cooperation waned for some youth-based organisations, and only five of the nine provided data on young men who they believed experienced some form of school exclusion. The collated data between the two schools and five organisations were 264 names of young men who were excluded from secondary school.

Access to Official Crime Data

I emailed a recruitment letter to the Chief Executive Officer in the Ministry of National Security (see Appendix 6) for approval and access to offending data to cross-reference with the school exclusion data. The Commissioner of Police subsequently invited me to a meeting to discuss the study and the data request, and the approval was granted. We agreed that I would liaise with only one police officer to prevent sharing of the school's exclusion data and the offending data.

I created and provided the Belize Police Department with a cumulative list of 264 names of young men of whom the Belize Police Department identified 110 young men (42 percent) who had been criminally charged for various offences. Since one of the youth-based organisations was a custodial institution, four other names were added since they were already criminally charged. In total there were 114 (43 percent) shortlisted names of young men for potential recruitment for qualitative interview who had experienced some form of school exclusion and had been previously criminally charged.

Recruitment of Participants

From the shortlisted names of young men from the crime data, a total of 114 recruitment letters and Participant Information Sheets were sent by the schools and youth-based organisations to the postal addresses of each young man inviting him and a parent or guardian to participate in the study (see Appendices 7, 8, 9 and 10). The potential participants were asked to contact me directly rather than the schools or organisations, to preserve their anonymity. After two weeks of no responses to the letters, I became concerned that the recruitment letters were either not received or participation was declined. Some of the postal addresses might have been inaccurate. It was also possible that the letter was not sensitive to the literacy of the potential participants (although written in straightforward language) who were native Creole speakers and had been excluded from secondary school. Also, the letter was written on the University's letterhead which was suggestive of authority (Shenton and

Hayter, 2004) and may have been met with suspicion and reluctance, since any previous adverse experiences with the criminal justice system, could influence the perception of a study on offending.

To address these recruitment difficulties, the youth-based organisations were enlisted to help with recruitment by directly contacting the young men and informing them of the study. Subsequently, the youth-based organisations and I contacted the young men from the list because they were not easy to physically locate (Given, 2008).

Many of the contact numbers did not work, which suggested that the young men or their parents either changed their numbers or did not consistently have access to mobile telephones. In some instances, the numbers provided were for a friend or family member of the young men. In many instances when the contact numbers were operational, my call was quickly greeted with suspicion because the number was not recognised. Some people chose to ask questions about my identity or how I knew whose contact number it was, or who I received the contact number from. In the cases when parents answered the calls, they were suspicious of my motive because their sons had already experienced the criminal justice system and they feared that I was a member of the Belize Police Department. I became aware that young people who were disenfranchised from school or had experienced the criminal justice system were difficult to locate or persuade given the sensitive topic that I was studying (Daniels and Cole, 2010).

Several young men accepted to meet so I could provide more information and have their consent, but upon the day of the meeting, they either refused to meet, suggested another day, or did not respond to telephone calls. A few times I met with young men who were on the list, but they did not fit the eligibility criteria of being permanently excluded or the timeframe of the past four years. During the early stages of recruitment, 12 young men signed consent forms but were ineligible, so only seven proceeded to the interview stage. One young man was inaccessible at the last minute because of safety concerns when he was released from prison. As explained earlier, the study required parents to participate, so seven parents signed consent forms, but only five proceeded to the interview stage because of availability. Of note, the mother of the young man who could not be interviewed still participated to provide an additional perspective.

Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interview with Young Men

In total six young men were interviewed over three months. The method of data collection was the semi-structured interview because it provided the participants an opportunity to give voice to their thoughts, experiences, and interpretations on sensitive topics and the exploration of complex ideas and concepts (Elam and Fenton, 2003; Brewer, 2004; Hassan, 2016), as well as questions by me that

were suggested by the literature. An Interview Protocol (see Appendices 11 and 12) was developed with topics and general questions formulated under theoretically pre-determined themes that could be reworded or issued in any sequence to allow for the generation of probing questions based on the narrative of the participants (Johnson and Turner, 2003; Noor, 2008). The Interview Protocol was initially designed to be covered in two interviews. It was split to account for events leading up to permanent school exclusion and subsequently, the exploration of life after permanent school exclusion. Also, splitting the interviews in two was a part of the trust-building process since the questions in the first interview were mostly based on issues related to interactions within the social environments. The second interview addressed more sensitive issues around offending and social exclusion. Questions were phrased in straightforward language and were adjusted to suit the cultural and linguistic context of Belize, more specifically, the Creole dialect, which I speak.

Interview dates were arranged by telephone or during the first meeting when they signed the consent forms. As expected, there were several instances when interviews were rescheduled due to participants being busy or forgetting. A part of the rapport and the trust-building process was to have the participants decide where the interview was held. When they chose their homes as the venue for the interviews, it gave them more power in the research process (Reeves, 2010).

Pilot Interviews

The first two interviews were used as pilot interviews, as major alterations were not required, and included in the study. By pre-testing the Interview Protocol, I was provided with useful information that informed my approach to the other interviews for the young men and the parents. The pilot interviews informed the adjustment of the language of the interview to the colloquial Creole dialect that was predominantly spoken by the participants. I slightly adjusted the way I asked the questions so as not to enhance my status as an outsider because at times the participants asked me to clarify the question or suggested a meaning based on their inference. Therefore, the pilot interviews provided an early indication that the Interview Protocol was in parts too complicated or a little inappropriate in the cultural context of Belize (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). It also showed that it was unnecessary to proceed with two separate interviews because both participants were comfortable completing the full interview in one sitting. In this way, I minimised the concern of renegotiating consent for a second interview, and I also reduced the disruption to the lives of the young men (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012).

Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interview with Mothers

In total there were five mothers interviewed over three months. All the parents chosen by the young men to invite to participate were mothers. An Interview Protocol was developed for the parents (see Appendix 13) prior to the selection of mothers. The semi-structured interview allowed me to complement the accounts of the young men (Edwards and Holland, 2013) while not divulging what their sons said. However, I was mindful and noted during the interviews of the mothers, as well as the young men, that some of their retrospective accounts based on the knowledge that their sons had committed an offence may be biased or incomplete, including inaccurate recollection of major events and risk factors (Loeber et al., 2005).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol based on the initial research design (see Appendices 14 and 15). However, issues related to access based on school gatekeepers challenged the completion of the initial research design in its entirety and during the fieldwork, which extended to 11 months rather than the expected 5 months, I had to seek re-approval from the REC two additional times because of changes to the research design. The first was to include youth-based organisations in Belize City as recruitment sites to supplement the data received from the schools (see Appendix 16). The second was to have the youth-based organisations help with recruitment by directly contacting the young men and informing them of the study (see Appendix 17). The following are the ethical considerations of this study in accordance with the Economic and Social Research Council Framework for Research Ethics (2015).

Data Linking

There was no other plausible way of acquiring a dataset of young men who were excluded from school and criminally charged without linking the school exclusion and offending datasets. The data request explicitly involved the authorisation of access to school exclusion and offending data that were specific to my research and not the wider databases of the schools, youth-based organisations, or the Belize Police Department. In this way, all institutions were aware of the data linking and I was not exposed to information that was irrelevant to my research (Chamberlayne et al., 1998).

The collection of data from the schools, organisations, and the Belize Police Department was based on an awareness and agreement that they and I had a duty to protect the identities and privacy of the potential young people involved in the study (Becker et al., 2012). I was mindful that young men who

may have either consented or were mandated to have their data collected for school or police databases may not have consented to the secondary use of their data or the aggregation of such data for matters unrelated to the original purpose of collection (Karp et al., 2008). The obtaining of this information was therefore grounded in a negotiation process that involved me providing the schools, youth-based organisations, and the Belize Police Department with full disclosure of what the research entailed, assurances of confidentiality (Stiles and Boothroyd, 2015), limit exposure to the wider public through proper data and analysis management (Karp et al., 2008), and provide copies of relevant research documents such as the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Forms, recruitment letters, and endorsement letters.

Recruitment Protocol

There were several concerns about increasing the role of youth-based organisations, chief among them was the apprehension that some young men may feel obligated to participate due to past or desired future assistance (Ashe et al., 2009). Therefore, a Recruitment Protocol (see Appendix 18) was developed to sensitise the youth-based organisations to their role as recruitment support.

Interviewer Safety

During the recruitment phase, I took early steps to improve the recruitment opportunity and my safety. These were outlined in the Research Safety Guidelines as a part of ethical approval (see Appendix 19). One of the main safety measures I utilised was to ensure reliable transportation to visit each of the homes of the young men. Based on my knowledge of the social and gang landscape of Belize City, I was informed about my dress code, so I did not wear colours or symbols that could be associated with any gang. I wore clothing that could cover my tattoos because In Belize tattoos may represent certain associations. This was noted a few times when my tattoos were exposed due to movement and the parents, out of concern for their sons, paid attention to them. When I observed their concern, I addressed it with them directly.

Consent

I provided each of the young men with a Participation Information Sheet and consent form (see Appendix 20). I discussed the purpose and nature of the study, its methodology, and implications from the publication of the findings. I explained each point on the consent form and asked if they had questions or concerns so I could address them before they agreed to participate. I also discussed their role and informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time or their refusal to respond to questions that made them uncomfortable (Houghton et al., 2010). Upon agreeing to

participate, each participant was asked to sign and date the consent form. The consent form for the young men who were under the age of 18 required the approval and signature of a parent; however, I had all of them approved by parents before I started the interviews because I was uncertain of their ages at the time. The parents who participated in the study also signed their consent forms (see Appendix 21).

Before the start of each interview, I reiterated the discussion of confidentiality, the choice to withdraw, and the audio recording. The participants did not have any objections to audio recording, so I recorded the interviews with a digital recorder. The importance of audio recording the interviews was beneficial to securing the most accurate account of the interview without an unnecessary focus on writing the participants' responses (Noor, 2008). The use of the digital recorder also allowed the participants and me to have access to raw data that they can listen to in the event of a challenge to interpretations or presentations in the data analysis (Petrova et al., 2014).

Anonymity

The decision to anonymise at the individual, organisational, or geographic level was grounded in my overriding desire to cause no harm (Guenther, 2009). The high-priority concern of anonymity was especially because the study involved offending, which in the case of Belize City, may include criminal gang activity. As a result, the potential participants of the study were first asked to contact me directly if they were interested to participate in the study rather than the schools or organisations that mailed them the recruitment letters. Secondly, the final list of participants was only available to the researcher. Thirdly, the identities of the young men and their mothers were anonymised with pseudonyms, as well as the details of their interviews were separated to ensure internal confidentiality. Fourthly, all identification markers related to the participants, including former schools, teachers, locations, gangs, and neighbourhoods, were anonymised using pseudonyms.

Next, the interviews in this study were conducted at the homes or a place of the participants' choosing to ensure their safety and to preserve their anonymity beyond the use of pseudonyms (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

Also, an important discussion with the participants concerned the audio recordings. This was important due to the challenges of anonymising voices (Creswell et al., 2011). The recordings were voluntary, and the Participation Information Sheet and consent form discussed the conditions for data preservation. The audio recordings and transcripts were stored in an encrypted and anonymised data folder to prevent the identification of the participants. An important part of the transcription process

was the anonymisation of the data to ensure confidentiality (Becker et al., 2012). This was supported by the researcher being the sole transcriber of the interviews to reduce harm to the participants given the legal and social implications of their divulged information. Throughout the interviews, the participants were very descriptive and specific about situations, locations, and individuals. I extensively developed appropriate pseudonyms to assign to each participant, group, school, organisation, and neighbourhood, as well as withholding key markers that could result in the uncovering of the identities (Crowe et al., 2011).

Lastly, during the interviews, a large amount of information about the participant's life was gathered, which could endanger him/her; therefore, I explained how I would protect their identities and manage the data, including obscuring and omitting specific details (Berridge et al., 2001; Widdowson, 2011). The presentation of the data in the thesis was carefully done to ensure that the identity of the participants was protected at all costs. This included case-specific situations that would likely result in the uncovering of identities.

Confidentiality

The sensitive nature of offending and the implications to privacy, confidentiality, and legal status were a cause for concern to the participants and me, especially in the instances of potential self-reporting of offences for which the participants had not been arrested, charged, or convicted (Robson, 2011). Therefore, from the onset, the schools and youth-based organisations were asked to send recruitment letters to the young men on my behalf.

A Confidentiality Protocol (see Appendix 22) was established before the start of fieldwork to describe how I would address the protection of the identities of the participants and the limits of confidentiality, such as the divulgence of information that suggested the risk of serious harm to the participant or others (Hennink et al., 2011). I approached the discussion on breaching confidentiality with caution because I did not want to risk my claim to independence from the schools, organisations, and the Belize Police Department. Instead, I briefly discussed it but was more proactive in my anticipation of possible information that could be divulged by participants that may be harmful during the interviews (Creswell, 2014). I was also aware that interviewing the parents might result in unanticipated revelations, so I informed them of my commitment to internal confidentiality to ensure the data from each participant would not be linked to each other in a way that exposed the content of each (Tolich, 2004).

<u>Participant Considerations</u>

Interviewing the young men (and separately their mothers) at their homes or a place of their choosing provided several opportunities and shortcomings. In terms of opportunities, all the young men felt safer at the venues chosen since they preserved their privacy and anonymity because of their association with gangs (Elmir et al., 2011). They also did not have to travel or incur any financial expenses because of the interviews or were in between rest and work so the convenient time at their home meant they did not have to go anywhere else. In terms of shortcomings, in one instance, one of the young men was not as vocal, which was likely because the interview was held at his wooden house near other residences, and in other instances, we had to be aware of the presence of other family members.

The concerns associated with the young men were also extended to the parents, with a slight de-emphasis on security. In terms of the benefits of being interviewed at home or a venue of choice, some of the mothers were able to juggle their roles during the interviews, such as taking care of young children or synchronising the date of the interview with errands.

I developed and provided each participant a Debriefing Statement and Support sheet (see Appendices 23 and 24) with a list of professional services if they felt they needed professional support for any issues arising from the interviews (Oliver, 2003). Two of the mothers cried during the interviews when they recalled how permanent school exclusion altered the lives of their sons. During one of the interviews, a mother recalled that another of her sons was killed.

<u>The Role of Axiology</u>

In completing this study, I was aware of the role I played in entering the lives of participants and the possible influence that my presence can cause. Axiology relates to ethical considerations and our philosophical viewpoints (Dillon and Wals, 2006), and the value we attribute to different aspects of the research, including the participants, the data we collect, and the audience to whom we report the findings. I aimed to minimise any risk or harm that may occur because of my study.

During the fieldwork, I realised that my positionality in terms of my 'insider'/'outsider' status contributed to how I was viewed. Social similarities and differences (i.e., ethnicity, gender, age, and education) between the participants and I may have played a role in the interaction, access, and the accounts I received from the participants in the interviews (Miller and Glassner, 2016). I am Belizean, Black (i.e., Garifuna), and male as are the young men, but different in age. My role as a researcher based on the ages of the young men resulted in less challenging access to some of the young men but also raised suspicion in others. For the parents, I was also Black but different in gender and age. In

terms of interviewing parents and asking intimate questions about their lives and that of their children, I was reminded about my age since some mothers declared that they had sons who were around my age. I was also reminded of my perceived social status in several interviews when, for example, one of the young men referred to my education and how he could have been like me if he were not permanently excluded from school; or when a parent asked me if I was from Belize because I was doing a job that she perceived foreigners to do. This informed my approach to the interviews as being 'outside' enough for the participants to open up, yet 'inside' enough to understand (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008).

As an outsider entering the social world of the participants, my awareness that they created and maintained meaningful worlds outside of my interviews was important to how I approached the research process (Miller and Glassner, 2016), including the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data. The participants experienced issues of identity, age, disenfranchisement, the criminal justice system, and influences from their homes and neighbourhoods. This understanding helped me appreciate my role as a co-constructor of their meaning, understanding the effect of my presence and how my experiences and subjectivity may influence interpretation, and enhancing my appreciation of my ethical responsibility (Petty et al., 2012).

The beliefs of researchers are asserted when they select their research focus, research topics, research design and methods, as well as interpreting the data (Robson, 2011; Creswell, 2014). Since this subjectivity played such an important role in the decisions I made, I shall briefly refer to my life and experiences. I was raised in a lone-parent household on the Southside, where many social problems including poverty, gangs, crime, and violence were concentrated. My secondary school and Junior College (Associate Degree level) experiences were characterised by consistent disciplinary challenges, including fixed-term exclusion from Junior College. My peer group was mostly from the same neighbourhood and had similar experiences. During our youth, we were all either affiliated or involved in gang and criminal activity, including experiences with the criminal justice system. I subsequently attended the University of the West Indies in the Caribbean. These experiences influenced my choice of research focus.

Lastly, having lived in similar neighbourhoods as the young men and having been offended as well, I was able to approach the recruitment and the interviews as an 'insider' because I had a foundational understanding of some of the experiences they may have faced. However, I was also cognisant not to assume that because I grew up in similar neighbourhoods as the young men or that I was a relatively young researcher, I fully understood their current youth culture (Miller and Glassner, 2016). This awareness also informed my views on fieldwork in relation to safety for myself and the participants.

<u>The Role of Reflexivity</u>

The sensitive nature of the research topic affected my conduct within the field and the data I collected (Becker et al., 2012). During my direct engagement with the study participants, I may have impacted them through the questions I asked and their divulgence of sensitive information or revisiting of serious past incidents. This was evident when several young men at the end of the interviews suggested that they were putting their fate in my hands because of the self-reported offending they divulged.

Similarly, the research participants, in turn, had an impact on me based on the information they revealed about their lives and the interview situations in which I found myself. For example, I had to manage the way I influenced or interacted with the participants during the recruitment and interview process. I ensured that the roles were not blurred, including when a few of the young men requested to be added to my social media platforms. After each interview, I wrote down my observations as a cathartic way of addressing the issues discussed as a critical self-awareness of the reflexivity in my research interactions (O'Gorman et al., 2014). An important part of my coping was facilitated by my supervisors who consistently checked on me through emails and engaged in regular Skype calls to discuss my fieldwork experience.

Data Analysis

<u>Transcription of Interviews</u>

The interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word and later transferred to Microsoft Excel for qualitative analysis. Verbatim transcription was used because as a qualitative study, it explored values, meanings, and experiences with significance attributed to nonverbal behaviour as well (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006), so the gestures and expressions were also included, and in some instances presented in the extracts in the results chapters.

I was the sole transcriber of the interviews because I could not seek assistance in the transcription for two reasons. Firstly, the participants trusted in my confidentiality since certain information may have legal and social implications for their lives. Secondly, all the participants were native Creole speakers who responded to the questions in the Creole dialect and asked for clarification in Creole as well. This also influenced the transcription process since the language in which it was transcribed (Creole) was not the same language in which the meaning was translated (English); therefore, I was best suited as a native Creole speaker to transcribe and do the cross-language data analysis (Temple and Young,

2004). The tone, structure, and nuance of the Creole dialect, in the absence of a standard grammatical guide, resulted in a very lengthy transcription process.

<u>Thematic Analysis</u>

Thematic analysis was selected as the analytical strategy because it was considered a theoretically flexible analytical approach that was not constrained by theory, epistemology, or explanatory framework and allowed for searching across a data set (interviews) to find patterns of meaning. Thematic analysis was also useful as a method to respond to the research questions about the young men and their mothers' experiences or understandings of offending and social exclusion (Clarke and Braun, 2013).

The themes and patterns identified in this study were based on a theoretical thematic analysis that was driven by my theoretical framework, familiarity with the literature, and opportunities for new emerging themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data was analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis: 1.) Familiarisation with the data; 2.) Coding; 3.) Searching for themes; 4.) Reviewing themes; 5.) Defining and naming themes, and 6.) Writing up.

As the sole transcriber of the qualitative data, I became intimately familiar with the data by listening to the audio recording and transcribing. I also read and re-read the data numerous times to note my initial analytic observations on important areas of analysis related to the interactions between the social environments of the home, neighbourhood, peers, and school in relation to the young men's offending and social exclusion.

Coding

I developed some predefined codes from the literature to inform the interview protocol and subsequently guide the analysis. This a priori approach was based on my previous theoretical understanding that ensured the data on critical areas of the phenomenon was captured (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). However, I considered codes from the data that may conflict with my initial assumptions (King, 2004). I was able to identify codes during the transcription phase as I transcribed the recorded interviews for each participant. After the transcription of the interviews, I read and familiarised myself with the data and started to organise the data along the predefined codes and into groups that reflected similar meanings and patterns to create coded data (Tuckett, 2005). This was done by highlighting text that I thought could become codes, tagging different sections of the text, and inserting comments in the margins of the Microsoft Word transcript. The developed codes reduced and managed the data to allow for the emergence of new themes alongside the a priori

themes. After this process was completed, the data was migrated to Microsoft Excel (Bree and Gallagher, 2016). During the coding phase, I identified different sections of the text and labelled them to show how they related to a theme.

Themes

After the codes were developed, where applicable I sorted them into a priori themes that had been developed as a part of the interview protocol and potential themes that emerged from the data. I was, therefore, able to look for commonalities and differences in the data in developing themes. I read and reread the data extracts that formed the themes to ensure that they represented a coherent pattern. Where there was insufficient data to satisfy a theme across the interviews or did not properly fit into themes from other interviews, I revisited or removed them. When I was satisfied with the themes that were developed, I defined the themes by establishing what specific aspects of the data each theme represented. Subsequently, I reviewed the themes to ensure that they connected with certain coded extracts and other themes, which resulted in some themes being either collapsed with others, split, or in some instances, discarded altogether.

Interpretation

The themes that were predefined or emerged from the data based on the theoretical framework were the categories for analysis that were described and interpreted for meaning (Roberts et al., 2019). Using the themes that represented important aspects of my research questions, they were interpreted across the interviews to explore the experiences of the young men and identify thematic patterns across the data (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). This involved the drafting of the analytic narrative along with the data extracts or quotes to ensure its coherency in keeping with the overarching themes and existing literature.

Rigour and Trustworthiness

There were several ways that rigour and generalisation were addressed in this study, including theoretical sampling and transparency throughout the research process (Crowe et al., 2011).

Thematic analysis was linked to a theoretical proposition using previously developed theory (i.e., Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion) served to compare and identify consistent results across the interviews. Therefore, the analytical generalisation was based on theory rather than populations as is in the case of statistical generalisation (Bryman, 2004). Analyses across the interviews in terms of the young men's experiences with permanent school exclusion and social outcomes relating to offending and wider social exclusion ensured that the

conclusions drawn were robust in a qualitative design. Also, the use of rich, thick descriptions and interview extracts in the results chapters empowered readers to identify transferability from specific interviews and across interviews (Potter et al., 2010; Creswell, 2014), which added to the trustworthiness of the research and limited the influence I had on the data analysis (Darke et al., 1998).

Transparency was achieved by describing in detail the steps I took in selecting the participants, collecting the data, the reasons for choosing the research design, my analysis plan, and my involvement in the interpretation of the data (Crowe et al., 2011). Throughout this chapter, I detailed the selection criteria and sampling of the participants. I also explained the changes resulting from a mixed-method research design to a qualitative study, along with a justification for the use of the qualitative approach. In addition, I detailed my axiology in relation to my values, experiences, and motivation for the research focus area. Lastly, I described my level of involvement in the data collection based on reflexivity.

Conclusion

The study was conducted as a qualitative study. This chapter explained the research design, data collection, and analysis, and reflected on the ethical dilemmas and challenges of researching sensitive topics with a 'hard to reach' sample. The young men were recruited from schools and youth organisations based on having been permanently excluded from secondary school within the past four years. A cross-reference with offending data from the Belize Police Department identified young men who had also been criminally charged at some point before or after permanent school exclusion. The offending typology among the young men suggested that they were all criminally charged for serious offences, with varying charges for moderate and minor offences being represented. As a result, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six young men and five mothers.

The findings of this study are now divided into three chapters representing the critical subsections of the topic. Chapter 5 is the longest since it is drawn upon in all the subsequent chapters and outlines the views of the young men and mothers on their experiences within their social environments (i.e., family or homes, neighbourhood, peers, and school) and the influences they have on their lives (see Theoretical Framework). Chapter 6 outlines the implications of permanent school exclusion on their offending behaviour, and Chapter 7 presents their experiences of wider social exclusion after permanent school exclusion. Chapter 8 discusses important findings with emphasis on the voices of the participants with respect to the existing body of empirical and theoretical literature. The conclusion provides a final analysis and the implications of the study findings to policy and practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 5: EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG MEN IN THEIR SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

The analysis in all three findings chapters (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) is based on a thematic analytical approach drawing upon data collected from the interviews with a) young men who had been excluded from school within the last four years and had also been charged with a criminal offence and b) mothers of these young men or young men who were in this situation. Each of the young men is introduced in this chapter with a profile description and background, followed by a thematic analysis of the accounts of the young men and their mothers. As described in Chapter 4, identification markers such as names, ages, schools, and other personal details have been anonymised and replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identities of the young men and mothers taking part in the study.

The extracts in the three finding chapters are presented in the Creole dialect, but round brackets are used to translate some words and expressions, and square brackets are used to enclose words added to clarify the text, for ease of following. Table 5.1 presents the young men's pseudonyms, ages at the time of the interview, and ages and Forms when they experienced permanent school exclusion (PSE) or 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' (WP). All six young men were Black of Creole or Garifuna ethnicity, from Southside, and involved in gang activity.

It is important to emphasise, as described in the previous chapter, that this study did not intentionally recruit young men who were demographically similar or geographically placed (i.e., Black or from Southside). The fact that this profile of young men emerged in the study suggests that this outcome supports literature on the disproportionate experience of permanent school exclusion and offending among ethnic-minority groups.

Table 5.1: Profile of Young Men in the Study

Name	Age at Interview	Form	Age at PSE
Anthony	17	Form 1	14 and 15
Daniel	17	Form 1	15
Dante	17	Form 1	14 (WP) and 16
Marco	19	Form 2	15
Matthew	23	Form 1	16
Sonny	23	Form 2	17

Anthony, 17

Anthony grew up in a sole-parent household with his mother, older brother, and six sisters. He was enrolled and permanently excluded from Preston High School in Form 1 at the age of 14. He was

permanently excluded because he was arrested and charged with the possession of a firearm in an incident unrelated to the school.

Anthony was unemployed, a member of a gang, and had been previously criminally charged with murder and possession of an unlicensed firearm.

Daniel, 17

Daniel grew up in a lone-parent household with his mother, sister, and aunt. He was enrolled and attended St. James High School and Buckley High School but was permanently excluded from both schools in Form 1 at the age of 15. He was permanently excluded from St. James High School for damaging classroom property and from Buckley High School for carrying a knife to school.

Daniel was unemployed, a member of a gang, and had been previously criminally charged with robbery for which he was on bail at the time of the interview.

Dante, 17

Dante grew up with his mother, stepfather, and three siblings. He was enrolled and 'withdrawn without prejudice' from Northridge High School at the age of 14 in Form 1 and permanently excluded from Buckley High School at age 16 in Form 1. Both the withdrawal and permanent school exclusion were because of physical fighting.

Dante was unemployed, a member of a gang, and had been previously criminally charged with aggravated assault.

Marco, 19

Marco grew up with his mother, father, and younger brothers. He was enrolled and permanently excluded from Preston High School in Form 2 at the age of 15. He is uncertain of the reason for his permanent school exclusion because, according to him, none was provided by the school.

Marco was unemployed, a member of a gang, and had been previously criminally charged with several crimes, including attempted murder, robbery, assault, and possession of controlled drugs. He was on bail for his attempted murder and robbery charges at the time of the interview.

Matthew, 23

Matthew grew up intermittently living between his mother's and grandmother's homes with his younger brother and sister. He was enrolled and permanently excluded from St. James High School in Form 1 at the age of 16. He was permanently excluded for persistent academic failure.

He was employed at the time of the interview, a member of a gang, and had been criminally charged with robbery and traffic violations.

Sonny, 23

Sonny grew up with his mother, stepfather, two brothers, and a sister. He was enrolled and permanently excluded from St. Teresa Primary School in Form 2 at the age of 17 for allegedly smoking marijuana on the school compound.

Sonny had 2 children and was employed. He suggested gang involvement but would not confirm membership. He had been previously criminally charged for possession of a prohibited firearm and was on bail at the time of the interview.

Parent 5: Shantel

Shantel is introduced here as a lone parent of six children whose son was not interviewed due to the dangers associated with his release from prison at the time of the interview.

Shantel's son was a 17-year-old young man who grew up in the Southside. He was enrolled and permanently excluded from Buckley High School in Form 1 at the age of 14 for an accusation of being in a gang and engaging in a physical fight against a rival gang at a public event.

He was unemployed, a member of a gang, and was recently released on bail after being remanded on a criminal charge of murder.

The Social Environment of the Home and Family

Parental Support and Relationship

The experiences young men had within their families impacted their lives in complex ways. In terms of the family structure, most of the homes of the young men were characterised as lone-parent households headed by mothers, with no biological father or a father figure present. Most mothers were spoken of highly by the young men, particularly as providers and nurturers for them and their siblings. The mother was considered the most consistent parent in all the cases, except in one instance when the mother's financial instability impinged on her role as a primary caregiver. Notwithstanding the unique situation of that young man, for the most part, the families were described as cohesive family units with positive relationships between the maternal parent and the children. The main

challenge experienced by all the households was periods of financial instability that were attributed to the lack of financial support for the lone parent.

> *Matthew: They mi got (there was) wa point a di time where inna never raise me, you get the sense. I never really grow up with my ma. I mi grow up with my granny. Mi aright with everything, work hard fi deal with me, get what I want. That mi easier. My ma never had it easy at first and thing. And I nuh know weh part fi she head mi deh.*

The absence of fathers or father figures was so palpable in the households of the young men in this study that only one household had both biological parents living together. Some of the young men had contact with their biological fathers and paternal family, but a couple had no relationship with their biological fathers or their paternal family. Half of the young men had father figures in the form of stepfathers at some point in their lives, though in two of those instances, their stepfathers died during their early adolescent years. At the time of the interview, only two young men had a father and stepfather living in the household.

The data clearly shows that as the young men grew older, they internalised and refused to talk to their mothers about the problems they experienced or the trouble that they got into. While it cannot be established that the absence of fathers or father figures and the presence of only the mothers contributed to this internalisation, the young men, for their part, suggested that their eventual involvement in gangs helped to shape the relationship with their families. It made them physically and emotionally distant and as a result, making it difficult for their mothers to establish open relationships to discuss any problem or trouble that they were involved in. None of the young men openly discussed their problems with their parents. There was a concerted attempt to not provide information to their families in a bid to protect them. Overwhelmingly, the young men suggested that their reservations were grounded in fear and concern for the safety of their families. This often resulted in the parents learning about their troubles from other neighbourhood residents.

In one instance, the physical distance was achieved by a young man by moving in with a partner rather than living with his family, despite still being under the age of 18 and a legal minor in Belize. For others, an emotional distance was achieved by limiting the communication of their problems, including the prospect of their harm or murder, to their family due to fears that they may worry or that any divulged information may be detrimental to the family's safety, or could influence how they viewed them. Therefore, most of the young men were resolute in keeping much of their experiences to themselves, so discussions about gang-related activities were strictly avoided.

Dante: *I nuh know, to me, once if something suppose to happen to me or come my way, I wa take it by myself. I nuh want put nobody inna my problem or nothing. That's why I nuh really fool with people or tell they weh di happen or anything. End of the day, I nuh really want tell they nothing because I nuh want they worry or have to thing [get involved] because if I fi dead today or tomorrow, I nuh want nobody worry bout me.*

Matthew: *Up to today day if I get inna problem. My ma know wa one and two things now. They da one and two things weh I tell she weh I get inna. She trip because they one and two things da some major problems. So she have to trip. My granny nuh wa know that cause she old and I nuh want put she through that when it come to me.*

The mothers supported the claims of their sons that they did not discuss their problems or the trouble that they got into. Likewise, all the mothers suggested that they usually found out about the problems that their sons were having or the trouble that they were in from a third-party source. Nevertheless, the mothers lamented this seeming distrust or reservation by their sons despite their desire to have a positive and open relationship with them. Some of the mothers found it difficult to articulate reasons for this emotional distance in their relationship. For example, Cassandra attributed it to her son's negative experience with school and his subsequent permanent school exclusion. On the other hand, Gina felt it was because her son was mindful of her medical condition, so he only mentioned his problems in little detail when he was in trouble and the consequences of the situation were imminent, such as an impending arrest by the police. It suggested that his reason for informing her was to ensure that he had her support as he navigated his interactions with the police and the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, since all the young men had criminal charges, Gina and all the other mothers expressed support for their sons and hoped that their support would translate to improved futures for their sons.

Gina: *If something happen out deh, ih wa come say "ma, police wa come such and such" or maybe "I mi di ride up-stop and police tell me come off [bicycle] and ah come off but by the time I reach up suh I jump back pon the bike and police say they wa come after me."*

Nessa described her son's approach to discussing his problems as avoidance until he was overwhelmed at which point, he would spurt anger then quickly calm down and refuse to engage her. He would simply allude that he was experiencing some problems yet withhold information. She contended that this approach was compounded by his refusal to placate authority or rules outlined in the home.

Nessa: *[Son] woulda start, like, fi get vex with ah and rail up (scold), da then he blow up to me, "oh, unu nuh know what I di go through and this and that." And I da like "[Son] weh (what) you di go through? You could talk to me, I da your ma, you could tell me anything. I nuh wa tell nobody. Da between me and you." But ih still nuh tell me nothing.*

Interestingly, some of the mothers also acknowledged that the young men preferred to discuss problems with their siblings, rather than talk to them.

Gina: *And like I tell ah, "nuh hide nothing from me because me da yuh ma." And maybe ih nuh tell me certain thing because ih know I sick with asthma. Them time she (referring to daughter) wa come, "mommy, somebody di threaten my bredda. My bredda say well he wa make ih friend they and ih wa happen." He nuh tell me, but ih wa tell she.*

Shantel: *Nuh really. Ih woulda mostly talk with his brother.*

Parental Supervision

Most of the young men described moments in their childhood when they were unsupervised for prolonged periods. As mentioned earlier, most of the homes were lone-parent, female-headed households. Consequently, in most homes, supervision was a shared responsibility among mothers, older siblings, and other extended family members like sisters, aunts, and cousins. The homes that did have the presence of a father or stepfather reportedly had stronger parental supervision. The stepfathers, especially those who eventually died, were emphasised for their role in providing a disciplined structure and supervision of the activities of the home, including limiting the socialising of the young men with the neighbourhood children. In cases when the stepfathers died during the childhood or early adolescence of the young men, the disciplined environment that they provided was lost, and the young men reported starting to socialise more frequently in the neighbourhood. After parental separation or death, family members tried to maintain a certain level of supervision as existed before, but there was an incontrovertible increase in interaction with school friends, the neighbourhood children, and older men from the neighbourhood who were already in gangs. As the supervision decreased and a commensurate increase in neighbourhood socialising occurred, many of the young men eventually found themselves occupying street corners in their neighbourhoods.

Anthony: *Grow up inna di house to, like you wa see all they pickney di play, all they pickney downstairs di play and we can't come outa the house because he da real strict man. Real ignorant man, you get the sense. So dah suh I grow up, then when he gone [died] my ma make I free up, make I start go play down da the yard and thing. Right after that I start follow friends, you friends from school, start hang with bigger friends and links, you dig*

102

Several young men reported that during their upbringing their parents discouraged their socialising with the neighbourhood boys and young men because of their negative influence on them, but in many ways, they were still allowed to do so at times. For example, almost all the young men reported that on weekdays after school, many of the parents limited their interaction with neighbourhood friends, but as they grew older, they were provided with more freedom to do what they wanted after school. On the other hand, on the weekends they had more free time to engage in different activities, including socialising with older male cousins or neighbourhood young men who were already members of the neighbourhood gang.

> Dante*: Me mi could do lotta things, but they [parents] never does really want I come out come hang out cause they done know that when I come out come hang out they one, like want, they other bwai (boys) wa set up you go do fool, go ride bout. And when you go ride bout, but then you get inna trouble.*

> Daniel: *I does do weh I want. Anything, anything weh I want do. Go play ball, and hang out. Hang out, pon the lane or so.*

Notwithstanding the similarities in the reported quality of parental supervision and eventual transition to hanging out with neighbourhood friends, Sonny was the only young man who asserted that throughout his childhood and early adolescence, his activities on weekdays and weekends focused on drumming and sports. He maintained that he did not socialise often with neighbourhood friends.

> Sonny: *My hang out was drumming, basketball or football. Like weh I tell you, I da wa sport athlete and I stay with my sports. Once I nuh di do sports, I deh home.*

For the most part, the mothers admitted that on the weekdays there were lapses in the supervision of their sons' activities because of their work schedules. These gaps in supervision provided more opportunities for their exposure to neighbourhood influences on weekdays when they were to be focusing on school. At times, upon their return from work, their sons would not be at home but somewhere else in the neighbourhood socialising.

> Andrea: *Most of the time I wouldn't deh home till late inna di evening. Sometimes I come home morning, nuh even find he home. But I know ih nuh deh to far, but sometimes he deh right inna the neighbourhood. Every Saturday he want hang out, hang out. Hang out da night.*

Not every mother felt that their sons were unsupervised while growing up or that their sons had unbridled access to neighbourhood friends. Cassandra maintained that while her son was granted permission to attend events or activities with friends with an enforced curfew, her son's reclusive

personality did not result in such requests. Instead, he preferred to remain at home with the conveniences provided to him, such as his phone and television. Much of this preference to stay at home changed after his permanent school exclusion where he spent significant time outside with his neighbourhood friends.

> Cassandra: *They [children] had they freedom, they had they tv, they had they phone, they had they basic stuff. If they ask fi go somewhere, they go, once they come back within time weh they suppose to come back. So da nuh like I had they prisoner from school to home and you lock up, no. But he wasn't a child to go nowhere.*

Others, like Gina and Shantel, felt that they were unable to control all their sons' activities as the only caregiver by locking them away. Instead, they preferred to know what they were doing, so Gina allowed her son to socialise in the neighbourhood, smoke marijuana with his friends, and have a partner who was older than him. This compromise of sorts that characterised her parenting style, suggested that Gina accepted the entrapments of the neighbourhood and preferred to have her son closer to home than exposed to danger elsewhere. Likewise, Shantel occasionally allowed her son to play basketball in the neighbourhood where his school friends resided. Unfortunately, Shantel would later learn that her son's school friends would eventually influence him to join their neighbourhood gang.

> Gina: *Hang out, right out deh. Hang out deh deh fi wa lee time, but he da nuh bad bwai (boy). Nobody ever complain ih (he) disrespect nobody, da just ih hang out. I can't stop ah from hang out, I can't lock up ah inna house.*

> Shantel: *When ih come home I does tell him pick up a book and read, do your homework, and sometimes he go da the ball court da St. Leonard Primary School. Go and play ball and come back home…Most a di time they does go play ball, basketball.*

Only one mother insisted that she implemented a structured approach to supervision of her son on weekdays when he was in primary school that consisted of after-school tutorials until he was picked up to go home. However, there was a significant shift in secondary school in both his interests and her supervision because he refused to go to the tutor, and he was increasingly unsupervised in the evenings because of her work schedule.

> Nessa: *I mi di work then, so probably when ih done they mi di go da wa tutorer…when they get home da because da fi bed, eat and they watch the tv till da time fi go sleep. That happen to he till Standard Six. Graduate from Standard Six, up to first form ih never mi di go back da the tutorer...So I nuh know weh ih do when time I nuh di deh.*

Despite the effort of the mothers, all the young men in this study were eventually forced to leave their families at some point before they were of the legal adult age of 18. Two young men lived away from their families for short periods during their adolescence, The first was sent away to a rural district to limit his involvement in the gang and upon his return to Belize City, his continued involvement in the gang and ongoing rivalry with another neighbourhood gang made him live with his partner. The other young man experienced recurrent residential changes between his grandmother and mother. All the other young men were incarcerated in their late adolescence. Some of them lived away from their family upon release from prison because of fear for their family and their lives.

<u>Family Socioeconomic Status</u>

The young men's subjective evaluation of their families' living standards suggested that financial hardship was a key feature of the family experience for most of them while growing up. Growing up in mostly lone-parent households headed by mothers meant that at times they were unable to get all the material amenities they wanted. However, their basic needs such as food and shelter were always provided, and their schooling was never interrupted by unmet needs like school fees, school uniforms, and stationeries. The reported financial circumstance of some mothers as lone parents, due to unemployment or job instability, combined with low financial support, caused financial strains to the households. A euphemism for financial hardship used by a young man to suggest his family's low-income status was a local Belizean biscuit colloquially called "hard time biscuit" due to its durability and affordability.

> Sonny: *Never easy, and ih still nuh easy (laughs). Nobody nuh wa know it because everybody go through a different state. But, this world ya rocky and ih still rocky. Ye, we know bout real hard time. Like di biscuit.*

This financial hardship that translated to periods of low supply of food and amenities was ameliorated by the support of the extended family, especially grandmothers, and aunts, who served as a safety net and assisted in supporting the family by contributing food.

> Matthew: *My ma never mi di work. My granny mi always di work, so one spell my granny mi di work three jobs fi deal with we suh sometimes my granny used to send beans, rice and thing da my ma.*

The perception of some of the young men about the financial status of their families appeared to be grounded in their masculine gender formation as they grew up. This was particularly noteworthy after the death of a paternal parent or figure who financially supported the household. This masculinity manifested in a variety of ways. For some, it meant that they should not question their mother's ability

to provide for the family because they implicitly understood that no other male was there to support them. For others, they limited their requests of their mothers or practiced frugality in their spending because they knew their mothers could not provide it. For others, like Anthony, it hastened his self-reliance and search to contribute to the household at a young age. He rationalised that growing up in a low-income neighbourhood where food was at times unavailable, equipped him from a young age to be resilient and self-reliant by carrying out errands for neighbours and other people to earn some money to contribute financially to the household.

> Anthony: *I grow up inna the streets. We grow up inna the garrison. Say like my ma nuh have it, say like once my ma nuh have it, like maybe she woulda want eat, like you know how a mother woulda do it, a mother woulda like starve fi feed they pickney (children), you get the sense. But, me, from I young I got my, I too kinda, street smart and I educated, cause from I young I guh hunting (hustling), I know fi live, you get the sense.*

On the other hand, for Daniel, it served as an early entry into crime because his form of self-reliance was to become a "hustle[r]" who from an early age learned to get what he wanted by stealing or "tax people" which is a euphemism for financial extortion.

> Daniel: *If you want wa lee tennis [shoes], you have to get it if they nuh want push it out. All different kinda way. Hustle, sometimes thief. Hustle. Tax people. *Laughs* I nuh really know how fi explain that. Like people weh yuh straight and you know, and they work and thing, when they get wa lee thing, you could go check they fi wa lee thing.*

It was noteworthy that the only young man, Marco, who grew up with the presence and support of both parents suggested that the difference in financial support provided to him compared to his friends was a privilege and an important lesson that was emphasised by his parents. Paternal presence and support were a critical distinction made between him and his friends in their low-income neighbourhood. Marco highlighted his father's perseverance in his work to provide for the family, and as a result, Marco was never in need of food, school fees, uniform, or any other necessities while growing up.

> Marco: *Cause nearly all my friends they just live with their ma. They nuh live with they pa. I live with my net family, you dig. I live with both my ma and pa…But I could never complain because I never need nothing, you dig. Everything I need, they people (parents) provide all a that.*

Most of the mothers conceded that they experienced financial hardship while raising their children. This was caused by two main reasons: job instability and a lack of support from a counterpart parent.

The lack of financial support from another parent, for the most part, played a significant role in the financial hardship experienced by the mothers and their families since three mothers did not have a counterpart parent in the household to address their daily needs. Shantel's struggle as a single parent to maintain a household of five children was described as a difficult act of juggling priorities between groceries, rent, and school fees. Nevertheless, this "hand to mouth" experience renewed her vigour that school was a priority that was not to be undercut by her financial circumstance even if it meant her own needs were sacrificed.

> Shantel: *Yes, some days mi rough, but I pull through. Some days mi really rough. Then when you work you pay go hand to mouth. Like when you get pay you have to di pay school fees, pinch fi buy groceries, pay the house rent…Once they at school, I give my all fi school. I even leff out myself to make sure that they have di best fi get da school.*

Likewise, most of the mothers suggested that employment instability was an important factor, with one mother having to sell items from her home. Gina was open about the financial circumstances without steady employment in which she had to raise her children. Her focus in the interview was that her role as a sole parent with seven children was to ensure that her children had access to education even when food was scarce. She would occasionally sell items, such as bottled water, sodas, cigarettes, and tobacco, from her home to provide for the children. By operating in the informal economy without a valid permit or licence, she would occasionally come into contact with the police. The financial woes of the home were worsened because she had a chronic health condition that required frequent visits to the doctor, expensive medication, and at times a costly ambulance service.

> Gina: *Some days they gone da school with nothing fi eat and they learn. And I guarantee you when they come school ih hot they fi eat and when people does ask they if they want eat and they say they done eat they food, them time they hungry.*

Regardless of these hardships, each mother sacrificed and ensured that their son's schooling was not disrupted or that their basic needs were provided. Cassandra, for example, suggested that as a lone parent during the period her son was attending school, there were times when she was unemployed, and it was very difficult for the family. These periods of unemployment were characterised by highs and lows of happiness, but she always paid his school fees and provided what he needed for school, while also ensuring that they had food to eat, shelter, and utilities.

> Cassandra: *Sometimes everything happy and sometimes, like I tell you, for a period of time I wasn't working, so. At that time it was kinda difficult to provide but, uhm, they ate every day, thank God for that. They still get their meals one way or the other. Maybe they nuh get what*

they want but they still get something to eat. And they still always had a roof over their head, light, water, so yeah.

Parental and Family Criminality

In the face of households deprived of positive male role models and parental figures for the growing young men, half of the young men were directly exposed to male family members (i.e., brothers, cousins, uncles, and a father) who were engaged in criminality, being investigated or have been arrested by the police or convicted for different crimes. Family members were described as leaders of rival gangs or senior members of the gangs the young men eventually joined. In these cases, their family experiences had a direct bearing on their eventual involvement in gangs and by extension criminality. Therefore, the role that family criminality played in the outcomes of some of the young men suggests that socialisation within the family context, especially in gender identity formation, is important to the social outcomes of the young men. The involvement of male family members in criminal activities suggested an environment that was reported to have contributed to the normalisation of criminality and gang involvement among some of the young men.

> Anthony: *All my people they da like blue, my peoples they da Crips and thing. All my people they... All they bally da my uncle they, you get the sense… And then da whole Granville [neighbourhood] my uncle they run back deh and thing…Well, to be honest, right now the police they di pick they inna lotta thing.*

> Dante: *My cousin they, and my uncle they. But that da when we deh da my granny yard, the family yard. My uncle deh da States (US). He deh da jail long. He call me everyday and talk to me…I think ih mi gone shoot up da wa club because ih ketch inna fight or something.*

Marco, for example, shared that his older brother was involved in a gang and committed bank robberies and murders. He was killed when Marco was 10 years old. Marco held his brother in high regard but contended that despite his brother being killed when he was young, one of the reasons he became involved in a gang was because his deceased brother's rivals held Marco accountable for his past actions. This was further complicated by the gang involvement of some of his other family members.

> Marco: *When he pass away, I mi bout 10. Bank, murders and dem deh…They da my peoples, that is why I di go through what I di go through right now to because right now I never into no gang bang life, you dig. Certain man di shot at a me because certain man inna the streets da my family and thing.*

Some of the young men also reported witnessing violence among male family members as a part of their socialisation while growing up. While this does not specifically refer to the formal encounter with the criminal justice system or gang involvement, it does suggest that even the family environment of some of the young men normalised violence and likely influenced their gender identity formation.

> Dante: *Like, I watch my uncle and cousin they mi di fight and my cousin stab my uncle. Then when they get drunk and thing front a the yard, they want di stone each other with pint, start to quarrel with each other. Or one spell you mi see my uncle and ih 'boom bally' (bestfriend) mi di fight front deh sake a wa gyal.*

Understanding the Role of Women as Sources of Social Support

The analysis of the family environment has shown the critically important role of men in the gender socialisation of the young men. However, another important area of analysis was the role women played in the lives of the young men as sources of social support. It has already been demonstrated that mothers play an inextricably important role in their lives, but other women help to occupy key areas of the young men's lives as well. For example, Dante suggested that he did not like to stay with his family because of concerns for their safety due to his gang involvement. As a result, though he is only 17 years old and below the legal adult age, he lived with his partner outside of Belize City at the time of the interview. Similarly, Matthew and Sonny were living with their partners at the time of the interview. Both suggested that their partners contributed to their attempt at desistance from crime or gang involvement. In the case of Sonny, as the only young man with children as well as a partner, his family circumstance played a major role in his desistance. However, for the young men (Sonny, Dante, Matthew, and Anthony) in intimate relationships, the interviews suggested that a stable relationship was critically important for social support.

> Sonny: *I barely deh inna my neighbourhood. Once I nuh di work, I deh with my 2 daughters. Once I nuh deh with my 2 daughters, I di do some sporting activity or some music activity. Once I nuh di sleep, dah di only thing you could di ketch me di do, or di eat.*

Women played an important role in Anthony's life as confidantes, supporters, and providers. He admitted that while he doesn't talk about his problems often, he occasionally divulged information to his mother and his partner. He also suggested that his partner who was much older than he was, despite him not being of legal adult age, supported him financially. He further suggested that his partner was a popular woman who the researcher should be acquainted with, but I prevented him from revealing her identity. Anthony's mother also shared her admiration of his partner for having disputed her own family to be with her son and protecting him by taking him only to safe places to

socialise. The relationship between Anthony's mother and his partner, as detailed by the mother, provided insight into how they relied on each other as a network of support for Anthony. Interestingly, despite the recognition of the age difference and the legality of their relationship, neither Anthony nor his mother considered it to be important. Anthony's concern was to showcase the older woman to the researcher, which suggested that his understanding of the legality of their relationship was secondary to his masculine achievement. Notwithstanding any concerns about legality, Anthony's situation demonstrated the role that a stable relationship had on social support.

> Anthony: *Nuh fi say it like that, but my gyal look out fi me, you get the sense. I got wa big woman. My gyal look out fi me and thing. I think you wa know my woman to mein. You have to know my woman. She di call me right now.*

> Mother: *Ih find this young lady and this young lady say "Miss, me take the load". Everything I used to have to buy fi he, I buy no more. She take ah over. She tell ah that "how I do so much thing, I nuh want you hang out," so, ya da the farthest ih hang out. When ih go da [location] da because they deh inna vehicle. He watch all ih enemies di pass, but he deh inna vehicle, they nuh see he.*

Anthony, as the youngest child in his family, also grew up with several older sisters whose responsibilities included supervising him. According to his mother, this responsibility evolved into a close relationship between him and his sisters, with each sister and the mother ensuring that his wants and needs were taken care of.

> Mother: *she da one deh from round suh weh when time ih want wa lee beer, buy something if ih need fi eat. If I move da curtain deh, they wa have 7 bag and 7 tennis (trainers) from ih sister they.*

However, the support that young women provided to the young men in this study varied and, in some instances, also facilitated their involvement in criminal and violent acts against other young men. Dante, for example, detailed an altercation he had at age 12 with some young men from a rival neighbourhood who threatened to shoot him. He explained that he and his male friends had a young woman, who at the time was the daughter of a reputed gang leader, accompany them so she can hold the firearm. The utility of the young woman, in this regard, was likely to avert attention from them as a group of young men and to avoid the detection of an unlicensed firearm since police were more likely to search only the young men.

> Dante: *The bwai they holla "oh, if you really love your life you wa stop school and nuh go back da school cause tomorrow when you pass ya suh, we wa shot up you." So I tell they, "aight*

then". But the same evening, I just gone hail some a my friend they and we gone back atta they. And da gyal, the, ehm, used to be boss a Cooper Street daughter, we carry she fi hold the gun. Dah when I mi 12.

For Matthew, as a pupil who was older than the expected school age for Form 1 before permanent school exclusion, he was sexually active and attributed his involvement with a partner to his distraction from school and truancy. According to him, it also contributed to his eventual fixed-term school exclusion after repeatedly going to school with hickeys or 'love bites.'

Matthew: *One spell I mi di miss school. I nuh know, I just never mi di go da school. One spell, girlfriend come inna it, make it worse. Make it worse that, hmmm, then one spell I di get suspend every minute fi go da school with vamp (hickey).*

Critical Life Events

As suggested by Levitas et al (2007), the collection and analysis of critical life events that may serve as risk factors for social exclusion were important to this study. A common theme that emerged in the interviews was the experience of personal loss by the young men, whether it was based on bereavement from the loss of a parental figure, family member, or friend, or the incarceration of family or friends. In all these instances of loss, the young men were very clear that those life events affected their lives immensely, with the loss of parental figures featuring prominently.

Of the three young men who lost a parent or parental figure, Dante was an infant, so he was unable to describe the impact it had on his life. However, the death of a paternal figure in the form of a stepfather was a major life event that changed the way of life of the families of a couple of the young men. This life event was life-changing because in both cases the stepfathers were the main breadwinners who also provided a disciplined family environment. The loss of their stepfathers also represented the departure of structure and discipline that positively guided their interactions with and protected them from the influence of their peers within their neighbourhoods when they were younger. The stepfathers were considered a stabilising force that kept them on a disciplined path. Their deaths during the young men's early adolescence served as a significant adverse life event and were viewed as a turning point in their lives because it changed the nature of discipline in the home and the guidance they received. Gina, for instance, lamented about the death of her son's stepfather who had influenced his aspirational outlook toward education when he was living. Her perception suggested that she felt that his presence would have resulted in her son's higher education, which may have insulated him from the neighbourhood effects and subsequent criminal record.

Gina: *…the man weh I mi live from ya dead. And if he mi living, nuh wa day police mi wa carry he (son), he mi wa done school. Oh when he (stepfather) mi di living, [son], 8:30 fi come in during the week and 9 o'clock weekend. We nuh tell you 1 past 9..But I always say I nuh know why God always take the good one cause I di tell you, [son] mi wa done graduate and di go da 6th Form…So if he mi deh living, my baby never mi wa got no record, no nothing.*

In addition, the loss of a parental figure who was a breadwinner directly influenced the quality of life of the family, especially when the other parent was unemployed. More specifically, for one young man, his stepfather owned the house they lived in. After his death, he and his family had to relocate and his mother had to assume the financial responsibility to provide for the family, which at times affected how well she could supervise him. This change in supervision was reported to have contributed to his eventual involvement in the neighbourhood gang as his supervision and guidance waned and he began to further socialise with his neighbourhood peers.

Anthony: *Grow up inna di house to, like you wa see all they pickney di play, all they pickney downstairs di play and we can't come outa the house because he da real strict man. Real ignorant man, you get the sense. So dah suh I grow up, then when he gone my ma make I free up, make I start go play down da the yard and thing. Right after that I start follow friends, you friends from school, start hang with bigger friends and links, you dig.*

On the other hand, Sonny directly attributed his current circumstances to the loss of his stepfather because when he was alive, Sonny embraced his guidance. He believed that if his stepfather was still alive, he would be a successful banker or would be doing my job as a researcher. He emphasised that the role his stepfather played was severely missed after his death and that his family, up to the time of the interview, was still traumatised by the loss.

Sonny: *That kinda change whole thing to. Cause if he mi deh ya to, maybe I mi wa be a bank[er] or I mi wa di come do what you di do. And I call my pa, my stepfather, because dah the person I know weh take care a me, weh do everything wa pa mi need fi do.*

The death of family members also served to complicate the lives of other young men like Marco. Marco described his older brother's gang-related murder as a critical event in his and his family's life. It traumatised his mother and he had to watch her cope with the loss throughout the years. He was of the view that his older brother would have been an influential part of his life decisions because he would have dissuaded his gang involvement and encouraged his pursuit of education. Interestingly, while Marco attributed some of his current woes in gang life to his brother's past actions, he also maintained that his brother would have been a protector who would deal with Marco's rivals.

Marco: It just left my ma a lee traumatised, wa lee shock. Because that da her first son, you dig. Her oldest son. So ih always feel it. That definitely affect me. Cause if my bredda mi deh bout, I nuh go through half weh (what) I mi di go through right now. He mi wa got me di chase (pursue) school. And who mi di play with me, that mi wa be fi he dirty work, but I nuh think I mi wah di pree (focus on) streets to mein.

Other young men indicated that the death of an important family member created tension and contributed to the erosion of familial bonds through a protracted family dispute. For Dante, the family dispute after the death of his grandmother who was the matriarch of the family, followed by his grandmother, the extended family no longer interacted with each other. This diminished support system was cited as an adverse family event because he no longer had an extended family to rely on for support and care. This would eventually have an influence on the future when Dante eventually had an altercation with a family member who insisted on pursuing criminal charges against him.

Strikingly, all the young men had stories of friends who were murdered or incarcerated. Many of the accounts suggested a slow but painful premature loss of childhood neighbourhood friends. Dante, for example, recalled in detail the murder of four neighbourhood friends and the loss of another friend to HIV/AIDS.

Dante: *He mi dead out a Dangriga. Bragga. He mi dead out a Dangriga. Ih lee bredda still alive right now though. Then, ehm, I forgot how da other bwai name. Oh, Len. The one weh mi dead pon Cosmos. And then you mi got the lee, well, I nuh know how fi say it, but we mi know, everybody done know ih mi sick, just that he never really mi come bout. Ih mi got HIV.*

Likewise, Anthony described two friends who he considers to be very close friends, one of whom was killed during a failed robbery the year before our interview. The death of his close friends represented a significant disruption to his peer social network that he relied on for socialising and social support.

Anthony: *You see the one weh just come ask me fi weed, my nigga that (friend who interrupted interview) …Cause da we 3 does hang. Me, he and Johnson. Johnson dead off a robbery and thing. Suh only me and he leff now.*

For Marco, his friends have been arrested or criminally charged for several crimes, including armed robberies and murder.

Marco: *The worsest a crime you could think bout. Mostly robbery though. Robbery with firearm and dem deh. Right now they di look fi one a my lee bwai fi, watchya anuh nothing bout no*

boast, you get di sense. Like fi say I heng with these type of people but da just peoples. That da one a my friend, right now they di look for he for da double murder weh just happen

Interestingly, only one parent identified a life event other than permanent school exclusion that she perceived to have adversely influenced the life of her son. She identified the loss of a parental figure as a changing moment in the life of the family and her son. Importantly, the data suggest that the young men and their mothers, as mentioned earlier, do not discuss their problems.

The Social Environment of the Neighbourhood

<u>Neighbourhood Characteristics and Gang Presence</u>

All the young men in this study were from neighbourhoods in the Southside of Belize City. They all described their neighbourhoods as gang areas characterised by conflict, mistrust, low social cohesion, limited job opportunities, high rates of poverty, and a prevalence of violence. The descriptors ranged from "gang areas", "deadliest gang areas", and "garrisons" to "hood" which characterises a myriad of social issues related to poverty, poor infrastructure, and serious crime and violence including murders, theft, and robbery. All the neighbourhoods were described as lacking essential support since critical social service providers were absent. These neighbourhoods are also reported to have an absence of resources and opportunities, including jobs, available to the neighbourhood residents who, as Anthony suggests, are paradoxically asked by society to be productive members. Specifically for Anthony, he felt that the shortage of jobs partly due to his and some of his neighbourhood friends' permanent school exclusion relegated them to either commit robberies or engage gang leaders who he referred to as the "big man" for assistance.

> Anthony: *We di hang pon the lane and thing, they nuh want give we no job then because they di talk bout we get expel from school and thing, you get the sense. So they nuh really want give we no job and pay, even construction hard fi get right now…And now, they nuh want give you no job and expect you nuh fi rob or something like that. How you wa get money?*

A common theme across the interviews was that there was a gang in every neighbourhood. The young men referred to gangs in the neighbourhood as Bloods or Crips (see Introduction chapter, section 'Background Description of Southside', p. 16). More importantly, the characterisation of the neighbourhoods as gang areas was not arbitrary. They have ascribed this descriptor based on the residents and the type of activities that occurred in the neighbourhood, such as gun-related violence and physical fights.

Daniel: *Bloods. A gang area. People weh (who) live round ya. Things weh (that) happen round ya.*

The volatility associated with the presence of gangs and gang life resulted in a decline in neighbourhood safety, cohesion, and solidarity among its members. Issues related to cohesion and solidarity were evident when there were occasions of intra-gang rivalry that resulted in the fragmentation of the gangs and instability of the neighbourhoods. The splintering of the gangs reportedly exacerbated the level of danger within the neighbourhood because friends attacked other friends. As a result of this instability and internal conflict that compromise the safety of gang members, it makes interaction and socialising in the neighbourhood very difficult.

Dante: *Like, this one ya nuh talk to this one ya, this one ya nuh talk to this one ya. Down suh part off, ya suh part off, down suh part off. Like, it bruk into four different crowd...Like, da lone different parts weh da lone friends does be one big crowd, like, one out a the crowd start fight up with each other then they say, "oh, if you want hang with me, you haffi stop hang with this one."*

Inter-gang rivalry within the same neighbourhood also occurs when there is an influx of young men from rival gangs who move into a neighbourhood and make the neighbourhood violent due to their ongoing conflict. This conflict transforms the neighbourhood environment into an active conflict zone that often causes some young men to stay away from their family homes. Marco was one of those young men who found himself embroiled in a violent feud between two gangs in his neighbourhood as a part of a larger neighbourhood turf rivalry over the localised drug market for marijuana sales. The rivalry had serious adverse effects on the neighbourhood since it resulted in the murder of a child, and subsequently a series of reprisal killings and attacks that culminated in Marco almost being killed.

Marco: *I love my neighbourhood, but right now, they lotta bwai weh just come live back ya feel like they cold, you dig. They da some just come, they nuh know nothing about back ya. And they feel like they cold and di come play with man weh da fa back ya from 19 how long.*

Violence was normalised in the neighbourhood of all the young men during their childhood and early adolescence. Most of the young men grew up during the years when the homicide rate of Belize was extremely high, and their neighbourhood gangs conflicted with several other neighbourhood gangs, which resulted in robberies, assaults, persistent shootings, and people being murdered frequently, including friends. Some of the young men spoke about having to engage in acts of violence when they grew older, adopting illegitimate forms of income earning like marijuana selling, and adopting a

selective approach to friendship groups, including cutting ties with outsiders including school friends who were deemed rivals.

> Matthew: *Shooting, robbing, man di pull man offa bike, tek weh they bike, chain, money, normal crime and violence weh you see inna Belize in a whole. Normal. You own friend deh front a you dead, can't do nothing. All you could do da just cry, that's all. Man di come pass inna car, AK [47] di shot man, di kill man, normal thing. Back then ih mi rough. Especially like 2011, 2012. Mada fella, every minute somebody dead.*

Most of the mothers provided a bleak description of the neighbourhood that their sons grew up in as a violent environment that was unsafe for children and young people because of gang warfare and marauding gunmen that resulted in many murders, shootings, repercussions for snitching or cooperating with the police, and police raids. Other social ills manifested through high unemployment, incapacitated parents, poverty, subsidised housing, unsupervised children, and children being raised in households with few rules where robberies were encouraged, and the spoils shared within the household.

> Gina: *The whole neighbourhood bad because majority a they grow up inna wa house weh the pickney (children) they bad and nuh follow rules. Then they go rob and they ma (mother) make they come in and they give they weh (what) they want.*

There was immense fear from mothers like Cassandra and Gina about the inconspicuous activities that some residents engage in outside of the neighbourhood that result in rivals following them to the neighbourhood in retaliation. In addition, the proximity of the neighbourhood to its rivals rendered it vulnerable and susceptible to attacks, so residents were always on high alert. This alert also restricted the movement of its residents, particularly the young men like her son, who according to Gina, was only able to go from home to the neighbourhood store on his own, but no further. Gina also expressed concern about gang members who may turn against each other or misconstrue her son's lack of involvement in the neighbourhood gang as a lack of allegiance which can result in harm. However, her example was too specific to be included in this study.

> Gina: *Cause remember any time unu do fool they come back fi the family. You nuh hear when I pass you hear the man say "anytime you can't ketch Harry you ketch ih shirt." But I never know da weh that and I da big woman over 50. Da when I come back and I di tell cause ih look like couple a they bwai mi park pon the street and come through ya and shoot atta the bwai…Fi he sister go da work every morning 4 o'clock dark. She one walk from ya to Growth Enterprise*

(workplace). Anything could happen. Suppose now sake a something weh unu do, they can't ketch you cause you only hang right from the shop to ya.

Cassandra: *So, you know that they say "you do good, good follow you", you know the neighbourhood nuh too good, so you nuh know weh day what wa happen or who wa follow they. So, like, you always have that fear inna you that anytime anything could happen. So if I coulda move and carry my family, yes, I would do it. Without hesitation.*

Interestingly, while some mothers recognised the dangerous reality of close neighbourhood rivals, Gina acknowledged it by providing an unrestrained response that had become an unfortunate reality of urban warfare in Belize, which is the use of military grenades. She further details a previous situation that because of the proximity could have had an outcome like a fire tragedy in the 1990s that destroyed a large section near the downtown area of Belize City dubbed "Little Melchor" after a makeshift shopping area that resembled a popular shopping centre in Melchor de Mencos, Guatemala.

Gina: .*Ok, we live right ya and Galant (gang) da right ya. You know weh the police check point deh right deh pon, dah Galant. Now if I throw wa grenade right cross the fence ya, so much house burn up and they nuh gree (friendly) with we. They nuh gree because police mi come and lock up everybody when somebody look like they mi light wa bottle a gas and throw it. They ketch it good, they ketch it quick because if they mi ketch the house, ih mi wa be wa Little Melchor fire.*

There were also neighbourhood level social divisions drawn by the mothers who, as residents of the neighbourhoods, described general mistrust of other residents since neighbours were known to observe each other in order to burgle their homes in their absence. The rampant violence in the neighbourhood terrorised the lives of its residents, including women and children. To illustrate this, Shantel relayed a story of the shooting of an innocent woman who was an unintended target during a shooting between rivals.

Shantel: *Cause around here, they break in your house, they know you and they da neighbour and they bruk inna your house, they wait till you go da work fi bruk inna your house or when you leave they come and do what they want in your yard. And when you tell them anything it became a problem. They da some facey type of people. Like they sell drugs, all kinda thing*.

<u>Exposure to Neighbourhood Violence</u>

Violence in their neighbourhood was a common occurrence that the young men were exposed to as either victims, perpetrators, or witnesses. Their exposure to violence coincided with their description of the neighbourhood of prevalent gang violence, fights, shootings, murders, and other criminal activities like robberies. Depending on the amount of time they individually spent in their neighbourhoods their exposure to distressing experiences increased. These experiences included financial extortion, witnessing older gang members assault younger ones, violent fights, shootings, shootouts, and murders including the murder of close friends, and attempts on their own lives.

The murder of close friends was arguably one of the most challenging parts of the young men's interviews as they detailed their worst neighbourhood experiences. The accounts of Anthony and Marco epitomised the level of violence exposure as first told by Anthony in a story of the murder of his close friend inside his house one early morning. Anthony described that he was awakened to the sound of gunshots and saw when his friend was fatally shot in the living room by an unidentified gunman who lured his friend to open the door.

> Anthony: *The gunman bawl (shouted) fi piece a fonto (tobacco), so he say "I nuh got no fonto." Then they stop answer but the gunman look like ih the lay wait they out deh, you get the sense. So now, bally (friend) try gone fi piece a fonto da ih house. As ih open the door the first shot hit ah (him)…The gunman come fi chase he, he pon the ground ya *points*. Gunman get over he and buss bout three more shot.*

Likewise, Matthew detailed the callous killing of a friend and fellow gang member by a rival gang. According to him, the murder triggered a desire for retaliation because everybody, including him, was outraged at the killing and it served as a turning point that led to many reprisal killings at that time.

> Matthew: *When they kill bally down suh by Gutter Street. All a we mi deh mi deh pon the [basketball] court. We hear the shot they and all a we come pon the street. two, three [gun]man over he di shoot he up. Dah (that) mi di worst one (pause). That make rage reach inna everybody. Everybody! Everybody rage reach inna, and you know weh (what) that start. You just kill my homebwai (friend), so da what now. Da one wa go do that, da one wa go do that. Right deh suh, Belize City get hot.*

The attempts on their lives were also a common experience. Marco, for example, while having also witnessed murders, described his worst experiences when two attempts were made on his life. Both times were close range, and even when recounting the experience, he was uncertain as to how he was not killed.

Marco: *I watch man dead front a me and all kinda thing. I get shot at twice close range, from bout ya to the end a da, di end a my house right deh (there). That two times close range, only di father (God) know how I nuh get shot with a 45 and a 38 [caliber]. Only di father know how I nuh get shot still. Whiching they frighten, you dig (understand). Anytime they see me they feel like I strap (carrying a firearm).*

Similarly, Anthony detailed gunfire exchange between geographically close neighbourhood gangs that could have harmed him, but instead, killed his friend in front of him.

Anthony: *Like, gunman wa pass buss shot, you get the sense. Certain man di buss back, you get the sense. Da they thing, real thing. Like weh I try show you, I watch one a my friend get shot front a me, you get the sense. Watch he dead right in front a me.*

The violence and persistent threat of harm in the neighbourhood seemed to contribute to the gender identity formation of the young men. The construction of masculinity among the young men in the neighbourhood was suggested to be based on bravery and toughness that required them to mature quickly or "man up" as described by Dante. The colloquial expression of 'man up' for the young seemed to represent the adoption of a lifestyle grounded in localised hegemonic masculinity that was contrary to the fragility of contemporary males or femininity and was necessary for survival in their neighbourhood when confronted by rival gang members.

Anthony: *Inna wa kinda way, da like society, meaning that when other gang members see you they try feel like you associate with certain group, say Pascal. "Da same lee poke deh, go on like ih innocent, bam bam." So eventually, man outright they try block (stop) your life, di try take your life. You have to start move a different kinda way, you can't di go on like pretty bwai again or go on like no gyal and try explain and thing. You have to 'man up.'*

The gender construction of masculinity among young men in the neighbourhoods was suggested to be influenced by a need to "fit in" to the environment and among peers. The fitting in was marked by the evolution of social identities based on reputation and respect that endorsed violent acts toward rival gangs and the defence of the gang's reputation. . Matthew, for example, opined that the respect he sought and received from his peers as an active member of the neighbourhood gang was represented by the rival gang mentioning his name and viewing him as a target by sending threats to his life. He admitted that at first, the threats intimidated him, but he quickly learned to accept and ravel in his increased notoriety. This recognition by his rivals enhanced his stature within the gang and further elevated his reputation within and outside of the gang.

Matthew: *Da mi like wa fit in thing. Fi fit in. Because everybody, we mi di grow up, you got Preston [gang], you got Providence [gang], you got da school deh, you want respect, so you wa do certain things fi get da respect deh. That I mi like. Do all kinda thing. When my name start ring up that da mi wa headache. Cause then I pon da [basketball] court, man di come tell me, "bwai da one they from da area say when ih meet you ih wa kill you." You start feel wa way, you start feel frighten cause you never di hear that yet, you get the sense, man wa kill you. Now to you just start hear that 2,3, 4 time, you nuh feel no way. You get the sense.*

These threats were not limited to external forces because members of the same gang were known to plot against each other for various reasons, including suspicion of allegiance to rival gangs. The intra-gang conflicts reportedly often emerged from disagreements among the older members of the gang that trickled down and influenced the interactions among the younger members. During the physical conflict, physical harm would be inflicted, and other members would be drawn into the conflict, further widening the separation among them. The age hierarchy within the gang reportedly necessitated that older gang members punish the younger ones for infractions. Dante's account suggested that it was common practice for older gang members to physically assault younger gang members who are accused of breaching certain informal rules of the neighbourhood gang, such as interfering with drug hiding spots.

Dante: *Or you wa see, like, when they one mi di fight up with each other and friend mi di stab up friend and other friend have to jump in fi the other one. Cause da mi like one big fight with friends…Because the bigger ones nuh talk to each other to, and then some a the young one they hang with the bigger one deh and the bigger one tell you, you can't hang around da one because they nuh like each other.*

Anthony: *Well, I nuh really say, I woulda say like certain a friend and certain thing you do, like you wa hang with your friends, like say you and they could di hang and next minute inna di future like weh the Bible say, The Bible say you hang together you start to give trouble, you hang together, then you start steal from each other, you get the sense. Then you start make pickney. Then you and your friend they start go through obstacles and when big obstacle, they could feel like they could take your life... They got certain friend, you just have to be smart and just, stock up yuh thing and just protect yourself.*

As a mother, Gina has also seen first-hand the internal conflicts of the gang in her neighbourhood and the fragility of the safety of young men, including her son, when there is suspicion of disloyalty to the neighbourhood gang.

Gina: *When they look outside da cause he and my son the fight di look fi come in. Ih say "oh so you start to hang with a different gang, ih nuh hang with me, I wa kill you out ya". And bwai and when ih do suh (gestures taking out gun), my cousin faint weh.*

The perceptions of the mothers on the effects of exposure to violence in the neighbourhood often contradicted that of their sons. There was widespread fear among the mothers of victimisation of their sons by elements in and outside of the neighbourhood, though they rarely considered their sons as perpetrators of violence. For example, some felt fear for their sons and other children, so they tried their best to shield them from the violence. Cassandra recalled that when her son and his siblings were growing up shootings and murders were rampant. At that time, they frequently saw murders and gun-wielding assailants running through the streets shooting at residents, with children having to be shielded outside and covered inside until the violence subsided. She tried to shelter her children from exposure to neighbourhood violence but assumes that they were still exposed to the sounds of gunshots, prying eyes through windows, and the accounts of other neighbourhood residents.

Cassandra: *Now I think, well, right now at this present moment, it quiet, it calm down. But I'da say two, three years a back it was terrible to live because I mean we have witness people get shot and drop (died) da fi we gate, uhm, gunman di run and shot di fire, you have to di cover the children they, you know, should in case bullet come through the wall…Cause, we had a few deaths pon this street, yea so.*

For others like Nessa, while she recognised and acknowledged the neighbourhood as a "bad area," she disbelieved her son's claims about threats against him. Her disregard for his account suggested that she simply thought he made up the story and had no conflict with anybody. Paradoxically, she felt that exposure to neighbourhood violence had the most negative influence on him.

Nessa: *I nuh feel like [Son] got beef with nobody. Because when ih (he) want money, ih know fi find ih way come da ih granny. So I nuh think ih got beef with nobody. Da just, ih want got ih own way and walk when he want and walk part (where) he want.*

Others like Gina were direct about her thoughts about the adverse influence that the neighbourhood had on her son's behaviour and activities.

Gina: *Because, I mean without the friend and company inna the neighbourhood, I think he wouldn't be what he is today. So, I think yes. Cause I mean, knowing the person that I know and knowing the person he is today, I think the neighbourhood has a bad influence on him.*

The Social Environment of the Peer Group

<u>Friendship Network of School Peers</u>

The interviews suggested that the formation of friendship groups among the young men was based on the school and neighbourhood contexts. The preservation of the friendship groups hinged on their shared experiences and frequency of interactions within those social environments. Firstly, most of the young men were unable to detail their relationships with school friends because all of them were permanently school-excluded within the first two years of their secondary school education, with four of them being excluded in their first year. Nevertheless, several of them described their likeability to school friends. Matthew, for example, explained that he was liked and supported by school friends, as well as teachers and the principal. Likewise, Marco suggested that school friends liked to be around him because of his personality and his humility, which prevented him from being a bully despite his connections to the "street."

> Matthew: *Everybody mi like me. Everybody. When I touch school, yes, ih mi nice. When ih come to the teachers, principal deh, everybody. Everybody mi got my back. Everybody mi got my back, dah one thing I coulda mi say bout that.*

> Marco: *When I mi di go da Preston day school, anywhere I go right, I just got wa type of energy, where like if I meet a new person, they just check my vibes, you dig. Like my energy da them kinda energy where it could always flow. So it wa be like if I meet you, I nuh really talk too much and thing, but people just like how I carry myself and thing, so they want be round me, they want hang round me.*

The delicacy of friendship preservation was suggested by most of the young men when they reported that they had low social contact with school friends as the frequency of their interactions diminished significantly without their control when they no longer had access to the school environment. To emphasise the rapid decline in the friendship network with school peers, at the time of the interview when most of the young men had already been approximately a year removed from school, considered school friends as 'distant' based on their infrequent contact. Consequently, over time most of the young men did not maintain a friendship with pupils from their former schools, which suggested that the loss of access to the school environment also represented a loss of school friends and translated to weaker social support.

In the rare instances when friendships were maintained, albeit limited, it was only with individuals who were considered trustworthy or were school friends from the neighbourhood. Those who maintained friendships with schoolmates from other neighbourhoods, including rival

neighbourhoods, indicated that there were constraints on social contact since the frequency of interactions was limited and contingent on mutual trust. Moreover, they had to meticulously navigate the complexities of their neighbourhoods and gang dynamics to protect each other from their gangs.

> *Dante: I got friend from my neighbourhood and some a they from different areas and from school. But the ones they from different areas, I talk to they but nuh like that. But once if they straight with me, I straight with they because I got two a they weh I always talk to.*

> *Sonny: Inna di same neighbourhood I still got school friends. I just keep they close but the neighbourhood ones they da the ones weh you could say da like your friends because they deh round more than your school friends.*

> Marco: *I have friends from my neighbourhood. I got a couple friends I meet from school weh I would a trust and like they vibe and they woulda trust me and come holla at me sometimes. But da mainly people from round ya weh I grow up with da my friends.*

Nessa was the only mother who knew some of her son's school friends. It was not unusual that the mothers did not know their son's school friends given that most of the young men were permanently excluded from school in the first year of their secondary education. Notwithstanding her limited knowledge, Nessa shared that her son's school friends were good pupils who had recently graduated and lamented that her son would have graduated with them.

> Nessa: They da ok kids because they graduate. They finish school and they graduate. They graduate right ya last year. If [son] mi continue [school], [son] mi wa graduate right ya this year I mean fi say…Them deh da wa I used to tell ah, them deh da good friends because they come atta ah, like, "[son], why you never finish school" and "try go back da school" and they stuff deh.

<u>Friendship Network of Neighbourhood Peers</u>

For the most part, the friendship group that remained after expulsion from the school environment was with neighbourhood friends. Only Sonny suggested that he was able to form a friendship group after permanent school exclusion that was not limited to school or neighbourhood friends. His group consisted of working professionals, mainly from the security forces and local arts.

> Sonny: *Hmm all of my friends they da lone music or basketball or football players. Real. I da that round da circle deh. BDF, coast guard, ye, international artistes.*

For the others, outside of the family and the school, the neighbourhood remained the only critically shared environment among them and peers of their age. However, unlike the school where peer interaction is largely age-graded, in the neighbourhood, the young men interacted with friends of varying ages. The neighbourhood friends who they socialised with daily were considered close friends. So, having daily access to only neighbourhood friends influenced the nature of the activities that the young men engaged in, which mostly involved socialising and smoking marijuana in the confinement of the neighbourhood. The kind of social activities that the young men participated in and with whom were important to this study because of their potential impact on their opportunities and life chances.

> Anthony: *I got far friends and close friends. We chill. We just vibes and chill and thing. They got certain a my close friends they weh, like, smoke weed and thing, they da my close friends they weh we hang every day, like bredda, like bredda.*

> Dante: *Well, when I deh with my friends they, well, the one they I hang the most round right now, Christian and Jessie. They, I woulda go da fi they house, we woulda deh pon fi we phone di play a lee game or di watch something pon youtube, Netflix, and di smoke weed.*

Among neighbourhood friends, there were important viewpoints expressed about friendships. Firstly, there was an ambivalence toward trusting some neighbourhood friends who were in gangs because the young men were aware of their capabilities and the complexity of gang life where friends have been known to turn on, harm, and kill each other. As a result, several of the young men emphasised the need to always be ready to defend themselves or limit their access, including, for some, against older gang members known to influence the actions of young gang members.

> Matthew: *I mi just like the experience how I mi start come up when I mi stop mess with a lotta friends. If your mind nuh strong, friends wa make you do lotta things. Like right now, nobody can't come da my doorstep "bwai (boy), da (that) one di diss (disrespect)", "bwai move from front a me. You nuh hear I nuh gwein (going) do that then" and I just wa lock my door.*

Secondly, there was a distinction drawn between individuals considered friends and those whom their friends associated with. Associates of friends were often avoided since the young men were unaware of the past acts of those associates which may attract reprisal toward them. Anthony drew on real-life scenarios of individuals being accused of a crime and the loved ones of murdered victims seeking retaliation regardless of the validity of the accusations.

> Anthony: *Make I tell you how I roll, if me and you straight, me and your friend nuh straight, you get the sense. Da me and you straight. Because they days you can't trust nobody, especially offa things weh you mi get accused fa. You know da accuse, but certain people nuh*

take it as accused, certain people di say da you, you get the sense. Certain people nuh want hear no accused and certain people done bawl (mourn) fi they loved one, so they people ready fi retaliate, you get the sense.

The shared experience among friendship groups in the Southside neighbourhoods where the young men in this study came from was characterised by poverty, unemployment, low education, and significant loss and trauma. At the time of the interview, most of the young men and their neighbourhood friends were reportedly unemployed and were unable to meet their daily needs, and for some, it contributed to a sense of purposelessness. Marco, for example, suggested that this loss of purpose drove his friends' criminal intentions and fuelled their ambitious plans to rob and kill people.

Marco: *My friends they right, you have a couple a they weh di work and thing and a couple a they weh just deh bout 24 and more (all day) want a job bad, hungry, nuh sure where the next meal wa come from, nuh di work, bruk. So most of my friends they da like if you di chill with me round my friends they fi a week, di main thing you wa hear my friends they talk bout da eat food. Eat food or kill something.*

For others like Matthew, his shared experience with his neighbourhood friends was acknowledging the limitations associated with poverty among people of Black descent in Belize, which he suggested to be a result of socio-demographic inequality based on ethnicity and class. For Matthew, it did not matter what his dreams were or the guidance he received from well-intentioned older friends, he felt that they were limited by their ethnicity and experience of poverty.

Matthew: *But right now we da Black people, we nuh got funds fi do this, we nuh got funds fi do that. I talk to wa few a my friends they, well older guys and thing, cause I like hang with older people and thing, cause they bally da sense and they bally wa push you inna the right direction. That's why I like hang with older people and thing, and they bally tell me it could happen and thing, da just because me nuh got funds fi do it.*

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the young men and their neighbourhood friends also shared the unfortunate experiences of traumatic events such as the murder and death of friends, as well as incarceration. As a friendship group formed in the neighbourhood, the death of neighbourhood friends suggested a pattern of loss in their collective lives that began from an early age and were sustained to their current ages. Earlier in the chapter under the sub-section on 'Exposure to Neighbourhood Violence' (page 119) I detailed the experiences of loss for a few of the young men, including Marco and Anthony, but to show the impact it has on the peer group, I provide here the

experience of Dante. Dante recalled the murder of a close friend a year before the interview. He described the return of an electronic tablet by the forensic police that was loaned to the friend which still had residue of the blood of his murdered friend. He was traumatised to use it again, but for sentimental reasons could not discard it.

> Dante: *He dead last year round deh ya same time. Da he da di bwai weh mi di play the game and they put the gun from through the bob wire (barbed wire) thing, the thing they weh stop the fly from come in, the sieve. From through the sieve they shoot he... I mi end up di give he my tablet fi play game. He does always got my tablet. When I get back my tablet, my tablet full up a blood. Inside a it got blood. That's why I nuh play with da tablet again.*

Likewise, Daniel and several others mentioned earlier referred to the cycle of incarceration that he and his neighbourhood friends have experienced.

> Daniel: *All kinda reason. Lotta my friends deh da jail. Murder, robbery, attempt murder, gun.*

Most of the mothers acknowledge when their sons' friendship group changed from school friends to neighbourhood friends. While they were unable to say much about the school friends, which is presumed to be a combination of their sons' not being in school for a long time and not expressing themselves often, they all agreed that the neighbourhood friends were a bad influence on them. For example, Cassandra asserted that her son was not interested in socialising on the street or smoking marijuana before meeting or socialising with these neighbourhood friends.

> Cassandra: *Well, I think they [neighbourhood friends] da bad influence. Because, I mean da they, before them, uhm, he wasn't, ih never get inna problem, never interested fi hang out pon street and they thing deh, never smoke, until them. So, I think they da bad influence.*

Interestingly, despite the acknowledgment that the neighbourhood friends had a bad influence on their sons, some mothers, provided nuanced arguments that either supported their sons or the neighbourhood friends. Nessa, for example, held the view that her son did not have friends who were involved in gangs or gang activities. She felt that his only friends were the neighbourhood and school friends that encouraged him to return to school despite not knowing any details about their residence or activities.

> Nessa: *I nuh want call ih friends they bad weh ih have because I nuh know weh they do out deh, but round we and talking to them and so, I nuh see they as da type deh. But I nuh know weh (where) they live or weh they do out deh (there).*

On the other hand, Gina was acutely aware that the young men in the neighbourhood were perceived as "bad" by society, but to the mothers, including her, the young men were viewed as good friends who defended each other, their families, and their interests. The notion that they collectively supported and defended each other, even in the face of police detention, brought her and the mothers a sense of solace and collective identity. The mothers in the neighbourhood were particularly noted for their support of each other by routinely alerting each other about the detention of their sons by the police and bonding together to support and feed them during detention. The bond between the mothers, albeit for a specific cause, suggested that mothers in the neighbourhoods drew on a wider network for social support in overcoming their marginalisation.

> Gina: *They da just [Son] friends…Because you know the lady they through ya respect one another. We done know all a we da mothers and all a we son they hang out…And when they reach da [police] station, if da ma (that mother) carry chicken, da one carry steak, da one carry this, they all share it together.*

The Social Environment of the School

Perception and Positive Interaction with Teachers

The young men's evaluation of their schooling experience suggested an understanding and appreciation for school, and some considered it a place for learning with supportive teachers. Several of the young men lamented their early departure from school because they recognised the importance of school to knowledge acquisition and felt that they had a lot more to learn.

> Anthony: *Weh I mi like bout school, ih mi give lotta knowledge and thing, you get the sense. Make I learn a lot. Lot more mi deh fi learn, but at least I learn wa lot. Ih make I get fi know lotta things, you get the sense, because Math da mi my favourite subject and thing so inna wa way ih make I learn fi live out ya and thing good, you get the sense cause nobody can't thief you or anything.*

Young men like Daniel and Matthew reported that teachers and school principals who were supportive and treated the young men fairly in their aspirations or achievements were viewed positively, so they expressed admiration toward them. Their positive relationship with teachers was based on their understanding that teachers were tasked with educating pupils and the pupils were to be receptive to those lessons.

127

Daniel: *School good. They teach you. Depends pon how you act. If the teacher nuh like you, then the teacher wa deh pon yuh trail. I just mi follow friend. I just mi di give trouble and thing. They wa scold you and thing.*

Mothers like Nessa and Andrea supported the notion that their sons were treated well at school because the teachers seemed to care for them. Nessa, for example, reported that the school sought to provide her son with counselling to support his academic performance, but he was resistant to their effort. Andrea felt that whenever there was a complaint against her son it was because his outspoken personality conflicted with the disciplinary standards of the school and contributed to clashes with others.

Nessa: The teachers they try with ah, they give ah counseling and everything. [Son] nuh show up to counselling when he want.

Andrea: *Then they complain, right. I know ih provoking, ih provoking bad. The teacher would a complain bout ih behaviour da school, but, uhm, one teacher mi complain bout di disrespect, bout ih disrespect ah.*

For others like Dante, school not only helped in the positive growth of a young person but was also viewed as an environment that deterred him from getting into trouble because he was not on the street or in his neigbourhood.

Dante: *Everything mi aright da school. Cause da school help you grow up better. Cause you nuh di out ya di do no fool.*

Perception and Negative Interaction with Teachers

On the other hand, it was suggested that negative interactions with teachers or school principals helped to sully the schooling experience, especially since the power imbalance rendered the pupil's perspectives moot. For example, Sonny's perception of school was largely driven by an untenable relationship with the school principal who he suggested accused him of smoking marijuana on school premises, and as a result, attacked his character and displaced accountability from others toward them. He felt that the school principal purposely targeted him by using his love for basketball to influence how she punished him. Her position and authority reportedly allowed her to exercise more power in the situation and when any opportunity arose, such as his grades becoming low, she removed him from participating in the sport and representing the school. He felt that the school principal undermined the sporting opportunity that he believed could have propelled his athletic career.

Sonny: *Me and she end up the fall out. She mi know I could do certain things and because I could do certain things (basketball), once my grades nuh up to standard, she nuh worry bout the grade, she just remove me from certain things (basketball team) weh I coulda mi done uplift myself inna.*

Similarly, Marco felt that he was always unduly punished for the actions of other pupils. The very personality he suggested attracted other pupils to him also acted as an impediment when dealing with the school authorities. He was considered the "ringleader" by teachers and was reportedly held accountable and punished for any negative occurrences.

Marco: *The way I carry myself everybody like my energy, you dig. People always want deh round me, so like if I deh da school; I deh da day school and if I di chill and thing, I nuh know da like everybody just, they class me as the ringleader. So like if anything happen pon the school compound what have to do with first form, they come see me. They want blame me you dig.*

The complaints about teachers or principals shared by the young men to their mothers suggested that infractions of behavioural policies were usually the impetus for sanctions against the young men. However, half of the young men reportedly complained about incidents involving male teachers who antagonised them into an altercation. The accounts of the mothers and young men suggested that the male teachers went out of their way to challenge the masculinity of the young men as pupils. For example, Dante suggested an orchestration of pressure and antagonism by a male teacher who eventually initiated a physical confrontation knowing that Dante's standing at the school was comprised after returning from an out-of-school fixed-term school exclusion. Upon Dante's return to school, he was warned of impending permanent exclusion subject to any further problems, so the confrontation with the male teacher created a conundrum where the school recommended that he be sent to a custodial institution that deals with young people under the age of 16 who have engaged in criminal or delinquent behaviour. Consequently, Dante did not return to school and was subsequently excluded.

Dante: Nuh really nuh have no, only one teacher, Mr. Jameson. Cause wa day, well, I mi just come off a thing [in-school exclusion]. They mi tell me if I mi get inna any more problem then I mi wa thing [permanently excluded]. And every day he start fool with me, fool with me, then afterwards now one day I tell ah "just leff lone me" and he continue mi di fool with me and I mi have to shub (push) ah off a me and punch ah. I shub ah back way then I punch ah. *Gestures to upper shoulder*.

Similarly, in Gina's son's situation, she reported that while her son was well-liked by the female teachers at school because of his intelligence, there was one male teacher who her son complained about for picking on him. Her son tried to ignore the teacher, but the antagonistic relationship resulted in an incident in which the teacher tried to intimidate her son by suggesting that he, like Gina's son, was also connected to a gang. This resulted in a conflict between the two of them and she was called to the school. Gina's account suggested that the male teacher's reference to his gang association was meant to assert not only his dominance in the classroom space but also as a form of intimidation with implications outside of the classroom.

> Gina: *I guess ih mi di get treated by the ladies [teachers] they, but they mi got one man I think weh kinda mi, I guess wa lee stricter, right. Weh he say kinda pick, ih say, pon ah, but he nuh pay no mind. The man used to like tell ah, instead a he the ask yuh, he di tell you da suh… But, just, da nuh like say the teacher wa call me say, you know how some parents have to go da school every minute. No, da never like that.*

Likewise, Shantel's son's schooling experience was sullied by an untenable relationship with a male teacher who disrespected him and his classmates by calling them names such as "battyman", which is a colloquial euphemism for homosexual males. She intimated that each time she went to the school, the school was always supportive of the teacher and ignored the accounts of the pupils. It was further difficult to address her son's problems because of his quiet demeanour and refusal to complain.

> Shantel: *Uhm, the reason why enuh inna school is because when time they fass (harass him) with ah, he nuh go complain. Yes, ih is mi di have problem with a teacher, Mr. Carson. Call the boys they "battyman", you know, all kinda thing. Because [Son] just nuh like talk, that's why ih nuh get treated fairly.*

Exposure to School Violence

Exposure to violence in school was a staple part of the educational experience of the young men in this study. Despite their veneration of what the school had to offer them, they also reflected on the ubiquitous presence of bullying within the school space. On the school premises, this included their experiences with or observation of bullying by other pupils ranging from name-calling, financial extortion, physical assault, and physical fights. Most of the young men reported that physical fights were commonplace in school.

In some instances, some of the young men felt that the personality or reputation of the individual contributed to their victimhood. For example, Matthew identified bullying at school when older pupils

bullied younger pupils, but he maintained that his reputation as a person active in gang activity shielded him.

> Matthew: *But you done know they got guys weh deh inna higher class than you weh think, well, they run the school. But when ih come to me that mi different because I mi done di hang out already (involved in gang activity).*

Marco, similarly, held the view that weaker pupils were the victims of bullying. As a consequence of his personality, he reported that he regularly intervened to protect other pupils from bullying, but since he was not a target of bullying himself, he reported that he got into trouble with the school and other pupils on several occasions, including a situation that he cited when his jaw was fractured by other pupils.

> Marco: *They mi di bully up this young boy outa my class and I mi di check for young bwai vibes. Everyday, I does have young bwai pon my side. Young bwai does roll with me and a day after school some next first formers di abstract the man. So I get in, you dig.*

For others like Daniel, it was central to his masculine identity to distinguish himself from others who were viewed as docile when faced with bullying. The victims of bullying were considered "soft" for not being able to defend themselves, so those who exhibited the qualities of toughness deterred any possible bullying and experience of victimhood.

> Daniel: *Lotta time. People di chance people. Because they soft.*

On the other hand, not all the young men were exempted from bullying, since Sonny admitted to being bullied once at school. According to Sonny, he had "colleagues," which is a euphemism for gang members in the neighbourhood nearby when he was being bullied. At the end of the school day, his "colleagues" returned to physically harm the bully, but Sonny limited the extent and severity of their intervention because his interest was not to see the bully gravely harmed.

> Sonny: *Even me as a person, wa day, I mi get bully, and the person weh bully me never know that I have colleagues outside the school, weh mi deh right pon the bleachers and they saw what happen. And you know how the thing go da city. Once somebody see you get chance and they da your friend, they wa protect yuh. And dah weh friend do. So after school, they come protect me. But I just put it to a certain standard and certain protection that the way they mi wa protect me, I never make they protect me.*

Interestingly, while most of the young men emphasised that they were not the targets of bullying that occurred between regular pupils, they admitted that their experiences were distinctly an extension of

neighbourhood rivalries that played out in school among pupils from different neighbourhoods. The displacement of rivalries between neighbourhood gangs to the school space between pupils and groups usurped the safety of the school since the conflict was inherently present in the school daily.

> Dante: Ye, because yuh have they one from Centry Street [gang] weh mi di go deh to [school], and they one from Halibert [gang], and Galant [gang]. But all a they hang out together cause they da like from one, cause all a they da from over da side. So all a they hang out. The only one weh nuh really talk to they da Belby [gang], the first four I mi fight with.

Both the young men and their mothers provided examples of conflict at the school between rivalling groups and involving them. However, to preserve internal confidentiality, I will not present the mothers' accounts because they are too similar to their sons'. Nonetheless, Dante and Anthony detailed their experiences, with Anthony explaining that rival pupils enrolled in his school were known to sneak their phones into the school to call senior or older gang members who did not attend school to confront rival pupils and organise attacks in front of the school at the end of the school day.

> Anthony: *So once they da from Halibert, Brendell, Centry Street, they da Crip areas, and round my areas da red (Bloods), you get the sense. That's why, when we deh da school they a try hold, like, you dig. Or sometimes some a they weh wa try sneak in they phone and try make phone calls, you dig, to the bigga heads, you dig. Ye, fi try dodge you da school fi try hurt you.*

> Dante: *One time four bwai mi come after me. Then afterwards inna di evening wa crowd a them mi come fi me…Like, other people from like, weh know other ones from bout, always come drop they da school. Then they wa want play like they big and bad cause they deh with they one weh ride bout. They wa wait till fi they friends come because fi they friends always deh in front a school di wait fi deh.*

This circumvention of the safety of the school environment was simply viewed by some of the young men as exogenous to the school and was responded to without the involvement of school authorities. These situations often heightened tensions and danger of violent escalations when the young men contacted their gangs to come to the school in their defence. Based on their descriptions, it seemed that the school did not provide complete insulation from the dangers associated with outside-of-school activities. As in the case of Matthew, a large rival group assembled in front of his school waiting to attack him at the end of the school week on a Friday, so he subsequently had members of his gang escort him to school on Fridays.

> Matthew: *Then one spell, wa at least 15 man from Caledonia Street mi gone da St. James fi me, then I mi fi call my crowd. So they bally (friends) weh (who) I hang with mi come fi me every Friday*

because we used to go half day da St. James. So every Friday they bally used to come pick me up and drop me da school and thing just fi make that nuh happen.

As a further extension of the neighbourhood rivalries, and perhaps most unpredictably, were situations when some of the young men were confronted during their journey to and from school. Both Anthony and Dante, as well as their mothers, relayed their stories and suggested that the incidents contributed to affective or physical disengagement through truancy from the school or resulted in the carrying of weapons for protection in contravention of school policies. The daily commute to school posed a major risk to the safety of the young men and presented life-threatening experiences that challenged their school attendance. It also escalated the risk of retaliation when young men and their neighbourhood friends responded to perceived slights. While these situations occur outside of the school compound, they are invariably connected to their schooling experience and suggest an interrelationship between the social environments of the peer group, the neighbourhood, and the school. Dante, for example, recalled an experience when he was approached and threatened by members of a rival gang on his way from school when he was 12 years old. He was warned that if he returned to school the next day that he would be killed. As a result, he gathered some neighbourhood friends and confronted the members of the rival neighbourhood with a gun.

> Dante: *…them time deh da me one mi di walk come first from over, come from school. The bwai they holla "oh, if you really love your life you wa stop school and nuh go back da school cause tomorrow when you pass ya suh, we wa shot up you." So I tell they, "aight then". But the same evening, I just gone hail some a my friend they and we gone back atta they.*

Conclusion

The findings suggested that the home, neighbourhood, peer group, and school were important influences on the young men as they progressed through childhood and early adolescence. The interviews with the young men and their mothers provided a detailed insight into the social environments that they were embedded in, which shaped their lives before and after permanent school exclusion. Importantly, the family or home environment was suggested to have an immense influence on their lives through multiple disadvantages, such as the family structure, of which most were lone parent headed, and the financial hardship experienced during their childhood and early adolescence. Some of the young men's experiences of critical life events, such as bereavement through the loss of parental figures affected the quality of life and functioning of the household when parental supervision was hindered, or financial constraints were imposed. Other family factors that

influenced the young men's lives included their exposure to parents or family members who were involved in gangs and criminal activity.

Undoubtedly, the interviews suggest that the neighbourhood environment played an important role in the young men's exposure to crime and violence. Each Southside neighbourhood was described as sharing similar social and economic marginality, including poverty, high rates of violence, a proliferation of gangs, and stigmatisation. The ubiquitous presence of gangs that influenced the high level of violence in the neighbourhood through inter and intra-gang rivalries was often transposed into the school environment. Both the school and neighbourhood environments exposed the young men to peer groups. The peer groups tended to represent the neighbourhood and gang dynamic as the young men formed friendships to protect themselves at school and in the neighbourhood. To that end, many of the young men experienced violence within the school environment that transformed the schools into a space where gang and neighbourhood rivalries complicated their educational careers.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS OF PERMANENT SCHOOL EXCLUSION FOR OFFENDING

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on the relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending among the young men in this study. Their experience with fixed-term exclusion, 'withdrawal without prejudice,' and permanent school exclusion are explored to demonstrate the evolution of their exclusionary experience at secondary school and how they perceived their treatment within the structural and institutional processes imposed through the disciplinary practices of the school. The transition from secondary school as a pupil to being out of school is also explored as a part of their post-school exclusion experience to understand the structural roots of disadvantage that contribute to criminal offending.

Experience with Fixed-term School Exclusion

When looking at the structural factors that influenced their educational participation, fixed-term school exclusion emerges as the first phase of school exclusion for all the young men, except Sonny. The fact that only one young man out of the sample did not experience fixed-term school exclusion before permanent school exclusion suggests that the sequence of school exclusion usually involves fixed-term school exclusion as a precursor to permanent school exclusion.

The reasons for fixed-term school exclusion ranged from disruptive behaviour, including talking, playing games, throwing objects, fighting, and other disciplinary infractions. As described in the Literature Review chapter, there are two types of fixed-term school exclusion that the young men in this study experienced: in-school and out-of-school. An in-school exclusion involves disruptions that result in in-school punishments such as demerits, removal from the classroom, exemption from specific classes, and detention.

> Dante: *We does do fool nonstop. Does always, does put we out of class, but when I go inna class back I does always finish my work. Does make we, ehm, when we, once we di fool with people, they wa put we outside fi go, ehm, shovel the place. And once we mi di stone people inna di class, they nuh wa make we go fi P.E. or nothing. Only dem deh da the fool weh we does do da school. They wa give you wa lee, ehm, they wa make you stay back and clean. They wa give you a demerit, one demerit.*

On the other hand, an out-of-school exclusion is when a student is sent home for a prescribed number of days, usually between three and five days, and is allowed to return only after that time has elapsed.

Dante: *Either 3 days or 5 days. The home one you can't go pon school compound fi a week. And if you show up pon school compound, they wa give you more days.*

Matthew: *Lone bout 3 days. Ye, till it (love bite) come off.*

Daniel: *I mi bruk (break) up the class. Bruk up everything inna class. Sake a (because of) wa teacher. Kick me outa class.*

It is important to note, however, that the observation of the researcher is that the definition and seriousness attached to out-of-school and out-of-school fixed-term school exclusion by the young men may have influenced the accuracy of the reporting of the number of in-school fixed-term school exclusions. For example, several of the young men, including the earlier quote from Dante on in-school exclusion, suggested that they experienced in-school exclusion many times, but when asked about fixed-term school exclusion they focused more on out-of-school as a more serious sanction.

Marco: *So much time from Preston. A couple times, ye. Suspended? Lotta different reasons why… They got a thing weh name DNRU, right. Do Not Return Until. DNRU. Da like if you deh in a class and the teacher tell you shut up a 2, 3 times, Me and you di talk, teacher tell we shut up and we still di talk hard. Shut up. She could just pull pon we and tell unu, give unu a paper like that and tell unu 3 days DNRU sign. You have to stay home for 3 days and the third day you come back with your parents and they wa explain to your parents why they send you home and dem deh.*

The distinction between in-school and out-of-school exclusion is important to the analysis of the relationship between school exclusion and offending because the literature and the interviews in this study suggested that the young men who experienced out-of-school exclusion were less likely to receive proper parental supervision during the day while simultaneously being more exposed to neighbourhood factors. This consideration is supported by the data for this study given that only one of the mothers interviewed was able to provide evidence of her son's fixed-term school exclusion.

Nessa: *Yes, I think [son] mi get suspend from [School]. I nuh really remember da mi fi what Dante mi get da suspension fa (for).*

Half of the young men reported experiencing fixed-term school exclusion twice or more, but most were out of school. For Marco and Matthew who attended one secondary school, they experienced out-of-school fixed-term exclusion several times with the former being excluded for disruption in class (talking, playing, and throwing objects) and the latter for going to school with hickeys ("love bite"). Dante, on the other hand, attended two secondary schools and experienced both in-school and out-

of-school fixed-term exclusions from the first school for disruptive behaviour, including a fight. Daniel attended two secondary schools but was out-of-school fixed-term excluded from the first school for his association with neighbourhood friends and their disruptive activities in school. For both Daniel and Dante, fixed-term school exclusion was only a feature of their stint at their first secondary school, and not their second school because they would only spend a short time at the second school before permanent school exclusion. In contrast, Anthony did not experience fixed-term school exclusion at his first school but experienced out-of-school fixed-term school exclusion twice for fighting at this second school.

Experience with Permanent School Exclusion

As explained in the Methodology chapter, permanent school exclusion is intended to be a practice by schools to address gross and repeated misbehaviour or infractions of school policies and rules for behaviour by registered pupils from the school. The study has also acknowledged the practice of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' that serves as informal or unofficial exclusion through the encouragement of parents to 'voluntarily' withdraw the pupil, so as not to have permanent school exclusion reflected in the pupil file. As a result, both permanent school exclusion and Withdrawal without Prejudice share similar outcomes of ousting a pupil from school.

All the young men in this study experienced permanent school exclusion between the first and second years of a four-year secondary education. The reasons for the permanent school exclusion varied among the young men, including fights, damage to classroom property, possession of a weapon on the school campus, consumption of marijuana, and being criminally charged by police for the possession of an unlicensed firearm. One young man was unable to explain his permanent school exclusion because he claimed that no reason was provided to him by the school.

Of the six young men, only Anthony and Dante – attended and were school-excluded from two mainstream secondary schools. The other young men – Marco, Matthew, and Sonny – were permanently school-excluded from the only mainstream secondary schools they attended. While a minority of the young men attended two secondary schools Dante was the only young man in this study to experience 'withdrawal without prejudice.' His withdrawal from the school was at the behest of the school after an altercation with a teacher, which served as an informal exclusion or managed move as suggested in the literature on school exclusion. It is important to briefly describe their experiences with school exclusion to emphasise the precarity of their secondary school educational experience.

Anthony was permanently excluded from his first secondary school in Form 1 at the age of 14 because he was arrested and charged with the possession of an unlicensed firearm. He suggested that the likely reason the school permanently excluded him was due to concerns about its reputation because the alleged crime was reported on the national news. Though he maintained his innocence, the nature of the alleged crime was an indictable offence that resulted in his incarceration on remand for a year. Anthony would subsequently experience a gap in his educational career before his release and enrolment in another secondary school at age 15. His new enrolment was short-lived because he was permanently excluded in the same year because of a fight at school.

> Anthony: *They ketch me with a firearm. They charge me. Yes, the school expel me because that mi gone pon the news. That mi gone pon the news, "a minor has been charged."*

Dante was 'withdrawn without prejudice' from his first secondary school at the age of 14 in Form 1. He reported that after his return from the in-school exclusion for fighting, harassment from a male teacher resulted in an altercation in which the teacher was physically hit.

> Cause wa day, well, I mi just come off a thing [in-school exclusion]. They mi tell me if I mi get inna any more problem then I mi wa thing [permanently excluded]. And every day he start fool with me, fool with me, then afterwards now one day I tell ah "just leff lone me" and he continue mi di fool with me and I mi have to shub (push) ah off a me and punch ah. *Gestures to upper shoulder*.

 Dante would experience a two-year hiatus from mainstream education during which time he attended a programme for out-of-school young people. He returned to mainstream schooling at another secondary school at the age of 16 but was involved in a fight on his first day. He attributed the fight to an attack by another young man from a rival neighbourhood gang. He was permanently excluded because during the fight he produced a weapon that he carried to school because of threats he received on his way to school when walking through a rival neighbourhood.

> Dante: *I mi ketch inna fight and I mi look fi stab up wa lee bwai. He da from Brendell and I ne'em (never) mi di do he nothing. Dah the first day a school. I ne'em mi di do nothing. I just mi gwein (going) back da school after two years and he just wa stone me da my face. Then afterwards ih wa start holla thing inna my face and I nuh even know who he. Then I just run up into ah and start punch up ah. When I haul out the [weapon], the teacher come.*

Marco was permanently school-excluded at age 15 in Form 2. His experience with permanent school exclusion was troubling to him because he could not provide a reason for his exclusion since he

reportedly was not given one. He suggested that he completed the Form, but his final term report indicated that he was permanently excluded with no reason or explanation.

> Marco: *I get expelled from Preston when the school year finish. Da nuh like I get expelled middle the school year or something like that. The term done and I mi supposed to go into a different class and when I get my report card the last term da then it mark, it tick expulsion da bottom. It still nuh tell me why.*

Daniel was permanently excluded at the age of 15 in Form 1 based on behavioural or school policy breaches because of carrying a weapon to school reportedly for protection.

> Daniel: *They expel me because I mi got wa [weapon] da school [Buckley].*

Matthew was an older pupil for the Form that he was in. His permanent school exclusion at the age of 16 in Form 1 was due to poor attendance and low grades that resulted in academic failure.

> Matthew: *I just never mi di go da school like that. And, ye, they mi ask me, but I mi fail.*

Sonny described his permanent school exclusion at the age of 17 in Form 1 as an unfortunate situation characterised by an imbalance of power based on an accusation by the school principal of him smoking marijuana on the school grounds. He refuted the accusation that he smoked marijuana at school.

> Sonny: *Ih come out. I da wa smoker, I nuh wa lie. But ih never ketch (catch) me di smoke pon the campus. Dah (that's) di part. You nuh worry bout weh I do home, you worry bout what I do pon the campus.*

The interviews with some of the mothers contradicted the reasons for the permanent school exclusion of their sons. It was unclear from the data whether the accounts of the young men or the mothers represented the formal reasons given by the schools, but many mothers focused on their academic performance. However, there were several instances when their accounts of the reasons for permanent school exclusion coincided, including their need to carry weapons for protection against rivals in and outside of school who threatened and attacked because of the neighbourhood they resided in. However, the focus in this section is the young men's perspective because the individual account of the mothers cannot be shared due to internal confidentiality, which can lead to the linking of the mothers and sons if detailed.

Perception of Permanent School Exclusion

<u>Sense of Fairness in the Exclusion Process</u>

Most of the young men and mothers considered the permanent school exclusion to be unfair. There was a sense of lack of due process that was exacerbated by the insufficient opportunity for the young men to defend themselves against accusations. For example, a couple of the young men were permanently excluded because of fights with pupils from rival gangs, but they said that they were not the instigators of the fight. Anthony was of the view that the events leading up to his fight with rival pupils were not considered in the decision to permanently exclude him because the young man who initiated the fight and had a weapon on the school grounds was not also permanently excluded.

> Anthony: *Nuh really because bally pop out a knife under the gazebo atta (after) me and di talk like he cold...One a they wa walk up to me and I say "I nuh into no war but if da war unu wa deal with, do weh unu wa deal with," because I nuh into no knife war and thing, you get the sense. They still di talk and talk. I nuh tell they nothing, I just stand up deh. But ih look like one a the teacher they see, you get the sense. The evening they see me front deh (school), call police and da right deh [permanently excluded].*

In other instances, the young men reportedly carried weapons to school because of daily threats faced outside of the school, yet they were not allowed to explain their situation. Daniel felt that the school exclusion should have been fixed-term because possession of the weapon was unrelated to school since it was for protection outside of the school campus due to safety concerns.

> Daniel: *I just walk round with knife. They find it and kick me out.*

> Researcher: *Do you think that being expelled was fair? Weh (what) you think shoulda mi happen?*

> Daniel: *Suspension.*

> Researcher: *Can you describe the appeal process you went through, if any?*

> Daniel: *Ye, we mi do that, but they nuh want. They call my ma.*

In another situation, Dante as detailed in Chapter 5 under 'Perception and Negative Interaction with Teachers,' reported that he was antagonised by a male teacher into an altercation in which the teacher was physically hit. According to Dante, the power imbalance between him and the teacher allowed the school authority to discount his account of the situation, and it was subsequently suggested that his mother withdraw him before he was permanently excluded.

Mother: And from then, drop outa school. Well, the school try with ah till ih do ih only lee thing till they ask we, whiching (actually) da like expel ah, but they, like, ask we fi sign the paper fi really take ah out a the school.

This was particularly disturbing to the mothers whose sons were in conflicts initiated by other pupils who were members of rival gangs or gang elements on the way to school. According to one mother, her son was permanently school-excluded when a group of young men from a rival gang confronted him. He informed a friend about the situation and that friend went to the neighbourhood and informed other friends who showed up at the school in his support. That resulted in a large group of young men outside of the school - the rival group and his friends who were there to protect him. The mother reported that her son was held responsible for the situation and was permanently excluded because he was accused of summoning a gang to the school. The school was not amenable to his explanation and characterised his approach as a "badman move" or gangster tactic to resolve the conflict.

Mother: *Well, they say ih look like he tell all fi he friends they cause the teacher say when she look outside she see bout 20 lee bwai outside waiting. Remember wa crew mi come after me, well he just tell one through ya (neighbourhood) and the one say mussi (must have) say school wa over two o'clock fi he and when you look, 20 out deh (there). Well, they gone fi help he.*

Likewise, while another mother accepted the reason for her son's permanent school exclusion from his first school, she felt that his second permanent school exclusion was unfair because her son was not given a chance to explain why he had a weapon at school. Since it was his first infraction at the second school, permanent school exclusion was perceived as punitive and excessive. According to the mother, the school authorities decided on his permanent school exclusion without any consultation and only invited her and her son as a part of the process but were disinterested in giving him a second chance.

Mother: *Well, I think the first school I understood why he was expelled, but the second school were unfair to him because they didn't give him an opportunity to explain himself and to prove himself then. The first mistake they put ah out, so I think that was unfair to him.*

Perception of School Exclusion Appeal Process

To further impair their chances to defend themselves, the young men and their mothers reported a sense of powerlessness to challenge the decision of the school authority during the appeal process for permanent school exclusion. They described an appeal process characterised by a lack of transparency or opportunity to refute or challenge the accounts of the school or other accusers. For example, they

felt that their account was discounted compared to the teachers or other staff. The imbalance of power had the effect of marginalising their voices which was compounded by a seemingly hard-line stance by the schools, therefore, it significantly impeded the appeals process. This marginalisation led most of the young men to not challenge the school's decision or proffer any refutations because they did not believe they were capable of influencing the decisions being made about them. Most of the young men found the appeal process to be rigid and lacked a conciliatory environment to either hear their perspective or be receptive to allowing them back into school. For example, Sonny felt that the imbalance of power resulted in an ultimatum that required him to admit to wrongdoing that he strongly refuted. This was particularly concerning because he believed that the accusation that he smoked on school grounds was inaccurate and was based on a personal issue between him and the school principal.

> Sonny: *They give me my expel but they mi want I go back go talk to counselor. And I never inna di wrong so I nuh gone back gone talk to no counsellor…Because the way how they mi want I go back da school da never a right way. Like they mi di force me fi do something I nuh want do and they mi di look like I da wa culprit. I da wa smoker, I nuh wa lie. But ih never ketch me di smoke pon the campus.*

Marco, on the other hand, acquiesced to the permanent school exclusion based on a lack of awareness or understanding of the appeal process.

> Marco: *I blame myself too. Cause expelled mark pon the paper, but that nuh mean nothing because what I end up di find out after the school year mi open back again that lotta (lots of) man weh mi get expelled with me to, gone right back inna di school yard deh gone reason with [school principal] and bawl up and tell them give they a next chance and thing.*

Regardless of the situations that resulted in permanent school exclusion or withdrawal from school, many of the mothers considered the permanent school exclusion to be premature with limited exploration of alternative punishments such as counselling resources. According to Anthony, the appeal process did not appear conciliatory and did not offer any options other than permanent school exclusion because the school was not amenable to hearing his side of the situation. As a result, he resigned to the reality that his tenure at the school had come to an end and accepted his permanent school exclusion. Matthew also believed that the appeal process was futile but interestingly attributed it to poor support from his mother and scholarship donor to get him back into school or to refocus his energy toward school.

Matthew: *I just never mi di go da school like that. And, ye, they mi ask me, but I mi fail, they ask me if I want come back they next year but I tell no because my ma nuh di look out fi me, inna di street, then I mi done mess up the scholarship, then they people da Youth Peace Movement never happy with me.*

Another mother felt that the appeal process was unproductive because alternative punishments or mediation were not explored by the school. Moreover, the permanent school exclusion was based on an accusation that her son threatened a classmate with a weapon, but the testimony of his other classmates and a thorough search of the school grounds did not yield a weapon. Therefore, she assumed that the school permanently excluded her son because of strict adherence to regulations against threats without considering his account or evidence to support the accusation.

Mother: *They say they wa put ah inna second but the first week a school, [Son] just blow up atta wa lee bwai (boy) because…[Son] nuh pay ah (him) no mind, he (classmate) stone a roll of tape atta [Son]. And [Son] blow up and start threaten ah. That kick ah out of [School B]…when they say [Son], when the lee bwai report that [Son] threaten ah, and they say with a [weapon], they search everywhere fi this [weapon].*

The exclusion process was frustrating for Shantel whose son was permanently school-excluded based on an accusation made by anonymous individuals who contacted the school and reported that her son was in a gang fight with a rival gang at a public event away from the school. She felt that the school was not interested in giving her son a second chance or affording him a say in the appeal process. She suggested that the nature of the accusation required the involvement of a school counsellor who could discuss his gang involvement with him. She considered the appeal process to be unfair because the school decided to permanently exclude him without any refutation.

Shantel: *I nuh think ih mi fair. I nuh di take up fi [Son], but I believe they coulda mi give [Son] a fair chance and sit down and really talk to him, like, have a counsellor, involved with him and gang thing…As I reach da school that da weh the principal just give me the letter and tell me he is not to come back anymore.*

Not all mothers, however, felt that the fault was limited to the school. For example, a mother emphasised that the school tried with her son and that his father intended to talk to the school authorities during the appeal process to avoid their son losing his educational opportunity, but their son's disinterest after permanent school exclusion halted their effort.

Mother: *I think they mi try because ih pa (father) mi say he gwein talk to the teacher fi mi take ah back, but he never interested fi mi gone back neither. He never interested fi mi gone back.*

Perception of Life Post-School Exclusion

A broadly similar picture emerged when looking at the transition from a pupil to an out-of-school status that challenged the daily routine and structure of the lives of all the young men. The absence of school as a daily activity in the initial stages of their transition resulted in the young men reporting having additional free time that they did not have when they were full-time pupils. As a part of this transition, most of the young men experienced a dispossession of a daily weekday schedule that was ascribed to them throughout their schooling career. This transition was met with behavioural changes that the young men admitted affected their lives up to the time of the interview. Dante's transition, for example, was characterised by uncertainty due to the absence of daily structure that the school provided. He intimated that while there were risks associated with going to and from school, as well as encounters with rival pupils from different neighbourhoods, the school still provided a structure of discipline that prevented his engagement in daily risky behaviour in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, he contrasted his life in the neighbourhood after permanent school exclusion, which was characterised by constant and more dangerous fights and altercations with the more controlled conflicts in school. Consequently, the most notable change he experienced after permanent school exclusion was a change in behaviour and attitude as he adjusted to his new reality outside of the school environment.

> Dante: *To me, inna behaviour and attitude. Cause out ya different. Da school you could humble yourself but out ya you stay ketch inna fight and thing…Cause talk bout, like, if da school and thing, if you di fight with somebody afterwards you still wa have to turn round and talk back to they because da school. But out ya now, if you meet somebody from other area, you fight with they, da one a unu wa look fi get stab or shot.*

Similarly, Marco described the transition from school to staying at home and in his neighbourhood as "rough." He characterised it this way because his daily routine went from a structured one based on learning and productive work to idling, smoking marijuana, and drinking all day. Not only did his removal from the school environment affect his daily routine, but it also increased his interaction in his neighbourhood.

> Marco: *I don't know how to describe it but it rough, it rough. Because when you nuh di go da school da like you nuh have nothing fi do, you dig. Just deh bout di idle and thing. Smoke up, drink up 24 and more, nearly whole day. Lazy up yuhself, you dig. And nuh have no work, no school fi go.*

144

Marco's account of the transition from being at school to being at home or in his neighbourhood all day helped to illuminate his daily frustration in the wake of permanent school exclusion. It also provided an insightful introspection on the shift from a productive day of learning to be immersed in an environment where peer pressure and idleness resulted in him engaging in robberies.

> Marco: *Change a lot because then you wa start find yourself inna trouble and thing because like weh I tell you, when you deh da school, you deh da school from morning to evening. That da most of the day, by the time you reach home, you lazy or you going to play ball or something you like do. When you home whole day now, got nothing fi do, you find yuhself idle, you find yuhself di chill out with friends, you might smoke up, drink up and be idle. Just get idle. Unu want go rob, unu want go this, unu want go that.*

Likewise, Daniel's permanent school exclusion translated to more time in his neighbourhood socialising with his friends and eventually his involvement in gang activity because his permanent school exclusion at age 15 left him with fewer constructive opportunities. Having forgone his stated ambition to graduate from secondary school, Daniel felt that he was left without opportunities to fulfil that aspiration, so he reportedly submitted to the neighbourhood gang.

> Daniel: *I start to hang out more. Nothing else nuh deh fi do. Start to get into the streets more. Only that.*

The transition away from school did not come without its share of challenges, but some of the young men maintained a pragmatic outlook on their life chances after permanent school exclusion. Anthony exemplified this pragmatism by emphasising his capacity to navigate his daily life with the rudimentary knowledge and skills gained during his curtailed educational career. His ability to read, comprehend, write, and do maths were satisfactory skills for him to survive without being taken advantage of. To rationalise his out-of-school status, Anthony further proposed the notion of a class structure within Belizean society in which qualifications beyond secondary school, including advanced education, were pointless because the rewards were unavailable to people who were not from affluent or politically affiliated families. As such, he assured himself that he was not disadvantaged if his future outcomes were less likely to reach that ceiling in the first place.

> Anthony: *To be honest with you, I can't say like nothing wrong me because I know fi spell, I know fi read, I know fi write, get the sense…I could comprehend, I could socialise, I could do my maths, you get the sense. And I could live. But then when I really check it out, like weh I mi di tell you…get wa Bachelors degree…Belize nuh got da money fi pay yuh fi you stay and thing.*

Sonny also shared his fear that after permanent school exclusion he would not be able to get into another school and that his fate would have been tied to the current state of gang violence in Belize City. However, after a short transition period after permanent school exclusion when his behaviour had changed for the worst, the support of family members contributed to his enrolment in a vocational school.

> Sonny: *My behaviour mi look fi change at one spell because I feel like I never mi wa get accept da no more school. And, lotta thing, cause weh you mi di see because you nuh deh da school, you di see weh di happen now. So, fi a lee while, because it mi take me bout wa month, two months before I get back into [vocational] school.*

Interestingly, perhaps to rationalise their plight, Matthew and Anthony challenged the value of higher education in Belize by offering counterclaims to the notion that education and possession of qualifications would augment their future job prospects to attenuate their sense of loss of educational opportunities. Matthew, for instance, explicitly denied the relevance of educational qualifications when compared to a social network that can provide employment opportunities. On the other hand, Anthony emphasised that his socioeconomic status and ethnic group, as a young Black man, would limit his prospects even if he completed school. To him, this was not the same for people of Chinese ethnic background, which suggested that there was socio-demographic inequality in Belize based on ethnicity and class. Therefore, he felt that his education would continue informally in the "streets."

> Anthony: *Fi make you study, you have to done, your people they have to done set, assets and thing, like Chiney (Chinese) and thing. I di tell you mein, that's why it nuh make sense fi fight up yuhself. Just get weh you could get and just legit. Nuh everything I get, I know da nuh everything I get, I know me nuh know even half a it but I know I get something I could live and I wa learn, you get the sense. Because the streets got everything, out ya got everything, you get the sense. School, anything weh they teacher they teach you from school you di learn out ya. You get the sense? True or lie?*

> Matthew: *Mr. Jackson and they trip and thing but yea I never did gone back [to school]. Because I da like, I done di make money out ya. Because the way I mi take it da like, Belize da who you know because when you deh inna this Project (programme), people with Bachelors and thing, and they still di do the same Project with me, can't get wa job, you get the sense.*

The mothers were also able to describe their observations of their sons' post-exclusion. All the mothers, except one, reported that their sons openly expressed frustration about their permanent school exclusion, particularly because of a sense of the unfairness of the exclusion process. The

perceived excessiveness of permanent school exclusion and the discounting of their accounts compounded their frustration. The initial behavioural change post-school exclusion included reclusion from family and friends and daily lamentation of not being able to attend school. As the time away from school progressed, many of the mothers claimed that they were able to tell when their sons started to socialise more within the neighbourhood and with neighbourhood peers, and for some, when they transitioned into gang involvement or criminal activity. The accounts of the mothers shared a common theme, as indicated in the following examples.

For example, Cassandra reported that her son took his permanent school exclusion hard by becoming a recluse who remained in his bedroom and did not interact with anyone for months. Furthermore, her son's behaviour gradually changed when he started to socialise with young men in the neighbourhood who she deemed as "bad company." He would stay out all day and start smoking marijuana. She reported that he eventually started to get involved in criminal acts that led to frequent contact with the police who allegedly targeted him for his gang involvement.

> Cassandra: *After that ih (he) just change and start hang out with they guys and thing. Well, ih never did was one to stay out late da night but ih still hang out all day. Then I notice ih start to smoke…but ih start hang with bad company and thing like that. Well ih eventually get inna problem sake a company and police start to harass because they see ah start to hang out and thing.*

Gina described a similar frustrated response by her son to permanent school exclusion because of the perceived unfairness of the exclusion process. Gina suggested that her son lamented the loss of his educational opportunity but over time his transition away from school was marked by increased access and interaction with his neighbourhood friends. Prior to his permanent school exclusion, his neighbourhood friends were unable to interact with him during the day until the evenings after school, but because of his school exclusion, his accessibility was a harsh reminder of his new reality.

> Gina: *I think first ih mi frustrated because ih say, like, ih mi tell the teacher, 2 a they get expelled, but the teacher, ih tell the teacher, "I think ih unfair they expel because da never me start it. The lee bwai start it and now, yes unu di expel 2 a we, but why me?" So you know, da that, I guess ih get over it. But I guess ih done used to get up every morning and go da school.*

Likewise, Nessa's son was perplexed by the unfairness of the exclusion process and the excessiveness of permanent school exclusion Nessa perceived the permanent school exclusion as a point of transition into her son's involvement in gangs and socialising in the neighbourhood and on the "street." Consequently, her son had frequent encounters with the police and was eventually

147

criminally charged. She acknowledged that he was very familiar with different gangs in Belize City, but she minimised his role in the neighbourhood gang or illegal activities by attributing his gang involvement to his age and a sense of curiosity that she felt was eventually satiated.

> Nessa: *From then [exclusion], that da when [Son] deh pon the street. Ih nuh get inna no gang fight, nothing like that, just ih smoke and hang out. Police pick up ah because a di hang out and whatever…I think [Son] mi deh da wa age and wa range weh ih mi just want explore out ya because [Son] deh every, each gang corner I think [Son] done visit.*

Andrea shared a similar observation to Nessa. For Andrea, her son no longer seemed interested in school as he increased his socialising with neighbourhood friends. Her son's name became known in the neighbourhood for committing certain acts, though in her presence he did not behave in a way that supported the rumours.

> Andrea: *Well, he behave like he nuh interested, he never show no interest. Like he really care to go back. Well, I nuh really see he di act no way, but da when ih deh out with, front a we ih act innocent, but when ih deh with company then you hear different thing and when you talk to ah da like ih deny it. Ih deny whatever you talk to ah bout.*

Shantel was the only mother who admitted that she did not talk to her son about his permanent school exclusion. Her observation of him after his school exclusion led her to conclude that he did not take it particularly hard because he was not an expressive person. To her, he simply continued to socialise with his friends but his involvement in criminal acts increased.

> Shantel: *To me like he, he never feel no way. I nuh think ih mi, I nuh know because I never really sit down and talk with him bout that. He was still humble and everything and want hang out with the same guys they and the back and forth with problems.*

Drifting Towards and Entrenching of Offending Behaviours

The previous thematic sections discussed the school exclusion experience of the young men and their subsequent transition from in-school to out-of-school status. The perception of their post-exclusion life further provided the context of their shifting activities as they adjusted over time to their displacement from the school environment to the neighbourhood and their increased involvement with neighbourhood peers. The following section provides a closer examination of the relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending behaviour to understand the influences on criminal offending before and after permanent school exclusion.

<u>Offending Before Permanent School Exclusion</u>

The understanding of self-reported offending before permanent school exclusion was critically important to ascertain the level of influence that permanent school exclusion had on the nature and seriousness of offending among the young men. It is clear from the self-reporting in the interviews that all the young men engaged in different forms of offending behaviour prior to permanent school exclusion. Importantly, the self-reports of the offending young men were also clear that the offending behaviours occurred within the neighbourhood context and were inextricably linked to their neighbourhood peer group as they were growing up.

The description of the offending between most of the young men and their friends suggested that offending was perceived as a normal part of growing up within their neighbourhood and peer group. For the young men, growing up in the neighbourhoods of Southside, as described in Chapter 5 under the sub-section 'Neighbourhood Characteristics and Gang Presence,' (page 115) the early onset of offending behaviour was viewed as a natural progression and transition from socialising as children in a neighbourhood classified as a 'gang area' to eventually getting into trouble themselves as adolescents. The range of criminal offences among friends before permanent school exclusion, as shared by Dante, included visiting adult entertainment venues like clubs and bars and engaging in underage drinking, smoking marijuana, burglary, theft, physically fighting rivals in and out of school, and assaulting and robbing bystanders. Dante also provided a situation that was detailed earlier in Chapter 5 when he and his neighbourhood friends retaliated with a gun against a rival neighbourhood after they threatened to shoot him at age 12. Dante's interview, therefore, leaves no doubt of his offending behaviour prior to permanent school exclusion.

> *Dante: Then we does go by some next one [club] by Channel 5, then when we done, when we come out a the club and when we done, and di go back home, they wa holla (shout) make we jump out and whop out (knockout) two people and take weh (away) they money.*

An important point that was established in many of the interviews, and typified by Dante and Matthew, was that the young men recognised that they offended with their peers but insisted that they had agency. So, their involvement was said to be consensual, and nobody was able to coerce them into committing criminal acts despite the interviews suggesting that the influence of the peer group was strong. This was a common theme across the interviews, and it suggested that the young men tried to maintain, at least in the interview, a semblance of individual identity.

> Dante: *I get inna trouble with they but they can't set me up fi do something. I have to set myself up fi go do something. I da nuh somebody you could just tell "bwai, go do this."*

Matthew: *But when I used to go do robbery, I nuh do it simple, I do it smart because I smart da school to. Cause nobody can't come tell me, "bwai, bally got 60 grand ya, lessgo (let's go) fi that." Can't tell me that. I wa make sure he got 60 grand in deh.*

Though not all the young men self-reported that they were involved in their neighbourhood gang before permanent school exclusion, most of their accounts suggested that as neighbourhood friends they identified with each other and represented the neighbourhood as a collective social group. There were those, however, like Matthew who self-reported that he identified with and represented the neighbourhood gang before permanent school exclusion, so he engaged in acts, such as physically fighting and shooting at rivals, in furtherance of the reputation of the gang.

Matthew: *Most a di time we ketch inna fight. Look gyal. Normal thing. We di rep back ya (neighbourhood), so when you meet other man from other area, and just meet they, da one nuh like you and da one nuh like da one, da right deh suh (so) the war di start. We just used to go rob, used to go rob, heavy. Used to go shoot after man.*

Matthew also acknowledged that as one of the older young men in the sample, as well as one of the only two (along with Anthony) who were criminally charged before permanent school exclusion, peer pressure among his peer group played an important role in the acts he committed. This point was exemplified when he described how he was first criminally charged with robbery. According to Matthew, he acquiesced to peer pressure when he was challenged by members of an allied neighbourhood gang to commit a robbery because they questioned the reputation of his neighbourhood gang. He subsequently assaulted and robbed a young man of his mobile phone but was unaware that the young man was a pupil at his school, so he was identified and subsequently arrested at school. The principal indicated to him that if he was found guilty of the criminal charge, he would be permanently school-excluded, but Matthew was permanently excluded for poor academic performance before the outcome of the court proceedings.

Matthew: *Just because they say we from fi we Block like talk, I do that. Fi show they well we nuh into no talking. Not knowing young bwai (boy) di go da my school. I never know that! Police come fi me, handcuff me in front a everybody…They mi find me guilty but sake a I mi di go da school, they mi give me leniency.*

Anthony was criminally charged before permanent school exclusion. He self-reported that he was involved with the neighbourhood gang. Specifically, Anthony's first criminal charge of possession of an unlicensed firearm resulted in his first of two permanent school exclusions and subsequent incarceration. According to Anthony, a conflict between his gang and a rival gang at a sporting event

led to a fight in which a rival dropped a gun that Anthony reportedly picked up to protect himself. The responding police officers found Anthony in possession of the firearm and arrested and criminally charged him. The news story would eventually be aired on national television and the school became aware, so he was permanently excluded from school. He was subsequently incarcerated for almost a year at a young offenders' institution for young people under the age of 18.

> Anthony: *Now when they ketch (confront) with we now, they bally (guys) start to stone rock and all kinda thing…So when we run offa the bleachers now, somebody look like they drop this thing [gun], you get the sense. And me, you get the sense, gone pick up this thing fi try defend myself same time police squeeze (caught) me with this thing, you get the sense.*

Matthew and Anthony's early entry into crime and interaction with the criminal justice system set into motion a series of events that had lifelong implications, starting with their permanent school exclusion and school disengagement, and leading to stigmatisation through targeted policing, and in the case of Anthony, his first criminal record and introduction to the prison system.

For Marco, his involvement in the neighbourhood gang was said to be a result of his deceased brother's reputation which led rival gangs to target him for retaliation. Therefore, he was already engaged in offending behaviour by gang involvement before permanent school exclusion. Moreover, his early recreational smoking of marijuana eventually resulted in his arrest for possession of the drug. However, the arrest did not translate to a criminal charge or conviction, so it was not recorded in the police data.

> Marco: *I think suh. Wa possession, I nuh remember. Like I mi di tell you. I mi di smoke before I gone da school. Before I gone da high school. I think for a possession charge.*

Sonny tried to suggest that he did not engage in any offending behaviour nor have any conflict with law enforcement prior to permanent school exclusion. However, he eventually reported that he was involved in physical fights which he claimed to be in defence of his friends. He also previously reported that he smoked marijuana, which resulted in an accusation against him by the principal of the school as a basis to permanently exclude him.

> Sonny: *I think I ketch inna a couple of fights, but that da mussi what, young hood, like really teens. Dah just because I defend people weh deh round me, you dig, I nuh wa make nobody take advantage of nobody.*

Daniel also contended that he was never involved in any fights because the young men in his neighbourhood did not pressure him to join the gang or harass him when he was attending school. His

explanation provided unique insight into the neighbourhood and peer dynamic in relation to the recruitment process of young men into the gang based on a distinction between those who sought to attend school and those who wanted to be involved in the gang.

Daniel: *They leff me lone fi go da school. Ye. You choose to (go to school or join the gang).*

Nonetheless, Daniel's presence in the neighbourhood still exposed him to the gang and while he reported that he did not formally join the gang until after permanent school exclusion, he socialised with them and engaged in early offending such as stealing and financial extortion.

Daniel: *If you want wa lee tennis [shoes], you have to get it if they nuh want push it out. All different kinda way. Hustle, sometimes thief. Hustle. Tax people. *Laughs* I nuh really know how fi explain that. Like people weh yuh straight and you know, and they work and thing, when they get wa lee thing, you could go check they fi wa lee thing.*

It was unsurprising that most of the mothers were unaware of the offending behaviour of their sons in contrast to their sons' self-reports. The disparity in accounts suggested that the young men engaged in offending behaviour within the neighbourhood and peer context that were not always exposed to the family and school. Both Cassandra and Shantel's reported that their sons never got into trouble at school or with the police before their permanent school exclusion.

Cassandra: *Because, before he got expelled, uhm, like I tell you, ih never, I can't remember, I nuh think I can remember he ever being inna trouble before that. Da after that, then, ih start, I guess, react or lash out or whatever. But before that, he has never, I have never had a problem with him. No teacher call and say "Miss, you have to come da school", no police nuh pick up ah pon the street and say "yuh son mi di do this or that."*

Shantel: **Gestures no*. This da the first time [son] reach so up deh so far, cause when he mi younger he never inna no problem with nobody.*

Likewise, Gina reported that her son was not known to offend before permanent school exclusion by basing her conclusion on the positive views presented to her by her neighbours and other neighbourhood residents who felt that her son was a respectful young man.

Gina: *No neighbour never come tell me nothing bout [son]. Dah my kids they. The other day I meet wa lady right out deh, ih say "Gina, one loving lee bwai." I done know da [son]. Ih say something, I say "weh Ih do?" Ih Say "[son], everytime he pass he got wa smile, and he tell you afternoon, morning, goodnight. Ih say "never a day ih nuh disrespect me."*

The perception of Andrea suggested that she minimised the early offending behaviour of her son and his interaction with law enforcement before permanent school exclusion by rationalising that it was a minor infraction related to marijuana.

> Andrea: *Like fi police hold ah (him) and thing? No. He just start to get inna trouble when police hold ah fi ih lee smoking. Lee weed smoking.*

Understanding the Process of Entrenching Offending Behaviour

The data has shown up to this point that there is a complex interplay between the school, neighbourhood, and peer context that may have influenced the offending behaviour of the young men in this study before permanent school exclusion. The stigma of being from a neighbourhood and having to contend with threats from rival neighbourhoods on the way to school combined with the presence of other pupils from rival neighbourhoods in the school made neighbourhood conflicts an inescapable reality for most of the young men living in the Southside. Furthermore, their offending behaviour appears to have been influenced by growing up in low-income neighbourhoods characterised by violence and criminal activity where masculinity was central to the gangs and friendship groups contributing to the normalisation of early offending behaviour among the young men of this study. Therefore, further examination of offending behaviour considers the indirect impacts of permanent school exclusion in shaping the young men's coping and adaptation strategies, including their entrenchment into neighbourhood and peer groups.

Offending behaviour of varying nature, frequency, and seriousness was self-reported by all the young men, but they also suggested that permanent school exclusion further influenced their views on criminal and gang activity. This reported influence manifested through an uptake and for some a sustained involvement, in both gang involvement and offending within a short period after permanent school exclusion. The first notable change acknowledged by all the young men was an awareness that they were no longer allowed or going back to school. This awareness was not positively accepted by most of the young men, and it eventually contributed to frustration and lamentation and a gradual shift in their outlook on future aspirations and the value of education. The frustration was also visible to some of the mothers.

> Daniel: *No, ih mi better once you mi di go da school and thing. Because you, once you mi di go da school you never mi wa have time fi think bout them deh. You mi wa barely hang out like that.*

> Gina: *Well, I just say first ih mi, you coulda mi see a disappointment because ih want go da school. Because sometimes, when time, they bwai nuh used to ah. That ih deh home. I'da say*

"[Son] deh right ya", Ih say "mommy, I mi a deh da school right now and now I nuh deh da school." I guess that's why he mussi start to hang out more because da then ih start to get up and they could come holla fi ah now because then ih nuh go da school.

Andrea: *Ye, but ih pa never push it because he say he nuh interested fi go back. So he never push it.*

The frustration and lamentation proceeding permanent school exclusion were followed by a strengthening in their interaction within the neighbourhood and peer group context in place of their daily school attendance. The corresponding shift and strengthening in friendship groups from school to neighbourhood also meant that the young men were more exposed to neighbourhood gangs. Consequently, most of the young men reported that a fuller immersion in their neighbourhood and street-based networks occurred during this time. This, of course, meant that they had to engage in the activities that the neighbourhood gangs were involved in. For example, Matthew characterised his transition from school after permanent school exclusion as an immediate immersion into gang life. This transition was so immense that Matthew considered it a "different world" where his activities, such as shooting at rivals, and identity were focused on embracing gang life as his prominence and notoriety increased.

Matthew: *Straight inna gang thing my life gone. I just start wear wa whole heap a [gang] colours and do wa whole heap a fool. As they bally (guys) say, "bwai, da one deh di slip" I go so boom. Man di shoot after me, my life just gone inna the gang world. Wa total different world. Cause I never live with my ma, I never live with my granny. I mi just got wa blank connection with they.*

Likewise, Daniel who was not in the gang before permanent school exclusion reported an initiation and immersion into gang life. He suggested that being a part of the neighbourhood gang further exposed him to seasoned gang members whom he referred to as "bigger heads." These older and seasoned gang members wielded influence on the activities of the younger gang members, and acceptance within that network would eventually mean that Daniel, like others, had to "put in work" by committing murders and robberies. The colloquial expression "put in work" seemed to describe the activities that young men joining a gang had to engage in and typified their shared experiences.

Daniel: *Trouble weh I do now. Hang out. Hang out mean, like, you gangbang. Just hang out with the big (homies), hang out and put in work too. Big boys. Bigger heads. Once they tell you fi do something. Well nuh literally tell you, but once you want hang out, you have to put in work too. You have to kill and rob and them deh too.*

Along with a shifting outlook on future aspirations and criminal involvement, some young men, including Marco, Sonny, and Dante, considered that success without a school education was only possible through unconventional and illicit activity. Marco referred to his understanding of successful and powerful people in Belize who were involved in the illicit drug trade and were insulated from the day-to-day activities by having others work for them. In his reality, Marco started to sell drugs with his friends and family members who were seasoned members of the neighbourhood gang and was also introduced to guns.

> Marco: *But the only way you could become somebody da pon di dirty side. Fi become somebody positive, you need schooling. Because anybody could become rich. Da bout the money, you dig. Everybody need money but everybody could become rich. I could become rich without nuh really di deal with school, without got nothing fi do with school. Cause like what I tell you, I might got the link, they nuh got the link. I use my link fi get weights (drugs) from far.*

> Sonny: *I mi di think about it at one spell. Because, people weh nuh di go da school weh di commit crime, they di live better than some a di people they weh di go da school. And I mi di think bout it like, I deh outa school, if I do that I might live like they but my life wa get cut short.*

Dante's experience showed that his frustration increased over time when he realised that he was unable to satisfy his material desires through legitimate means because of limited employment opportunities. For him, the persistent rejection by prospective employers made him recognise the challenges associated with finding conventional and legitimate means to improve his material circumstance because of not completing his secondary education.

> Dante: *Fi di first everything mi di go aright but then afterwards things start get hard because if you nuh di do nothing out ya ih wa hard fi get somewhere. Like, you wa want buy clothes and thing, so you have to go work and thing, and them time deh when you do go look fi job, people nuh want accept you.*

For others, like Anthony who was already gang-involved, and even Daniel who was not gang-involved prior to permanent school exclusion, there was an inherent recognition that the stigma of being from a neighbourhood and not being in school increased their vulnerability. Consequently, this perspective resulted in their entrenchment into the neighbourhood gang. In Anthony's experience, this was because rivals from other neighbourhoods and other gang members from his neighbourhood were known to challenge young men in the neighbourhood if they knew they were no longer in school, yet not associated with a gang. Shantel shared a similar understanding of the increase in interaction between her son and the neighbourhood gang.

Anthony: *That change you mentality because man, like how I try tell you, you done nuh di go da school, man know you stop go da school, you nuh di hang out with nobody, man wa try play crazy.*

Shantel: *Hanging out more. Follow them guys, them bad guys.*

<u>Offending Post-School Exclusion and Gang Involvement</u>

There was an evident increase in offending behaviour after permanent school exclusion among all the young men in this study, which was unrelated to them getting older and committing more serious crimes. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, one of the criteria for participation in my study was having a criminal charge. Before permanent school exclusion they had all engaged in offending behaviour, and some were connected or involved in gangs. However, the analysis of offending behaviour relates to whether permanent school exclusion as a life event entrenched and accentuated their self-reported offending, criminal charges, and gang involvement. The accounts of the young men and their mothers support this.

It must be noted, however, that the data used in this analysis has its inherent limitations given the nature of the study on offending and the legal implications to the young men's life and freedom. Specifically, the young men had to be careful in incriminating themselves in serious crimes that they were not criminally charged or convicted for or were not being adjudicated in a court of law; therefore, the full range of individual offending behaviour may not have been captured in this study. Interestingly, however, the young men made many references to the offending, criminal charges, and convictions of their close friends, presumably to conceal their involvement within the collective peer group. Notwithstanding this limitation, the documented offences that they were criminally charged for are discussed in the section 'Interaction with the Criminal Justice System.'

Firstly, I will present the individual offending behaviour that the young men of this study self-reported as occurring post-school exclusion. Most of the young men (except Matthew) were criminally charged for various crimes after their permanent school exclusion, including robberies, aggravated assault, shootings, gang fights, gun possession, attempted murder, and murder. Half of the young men were involved in robberies aimed at financial gains from acquisitive offending. The various crimes detailed in their interview do not account solely for the criminal charges. For Marco, his involvement in robberies was connected to his peer group, but it was also an act that he committed on his own. For Matthew, it was largely a solitary endeavour with a personal goal of gaining material possessions that his friends had but his grandmother was unable to provide him with.

Marco: *The worsest a crime you could think bout. Mostly robbery though. Robbery with firearm and dem deh.*

Matthew: *I used to rob people, go after people with gun, beat up people, all kinda things I used to do…I left school and come hang out with a bagga (a lot of) man weh di wear Air Force [tennis], Dickies [trousers], all a they thing deh. I want dress like that. My granny wa give me money fi buy wa air force weh da $250, she wa never do that! So da suh I go get it.*

The mothers' accounts help to shape our understanding of the uptake in offending behaviour of their sons because though most of them were unaware or unable to describe their sons' offending prior to permanent school exclusion, most of them were aware and able to do so after permanent school exclusion. Andrea, for instance, declared that her son's offending behaviour had increased in scope and frequency. She attributed this acceleration and severity of his offending to being "idle" because he did not have anything constructive to do after permanent school exclusion.

Andrea: *To me it di get worse. Ih get inna bigger trouble now. Ih nuh got nothing fi do. Cause ih pa always say "Devil find idle hands". Deh out ya di hang out and idle ih mind. Ih always say if ih got something fi do, ih nuh wa have they things pon ih mind.*

Likewise, Cassandra acknowledged a significant increase in her son's offending after his permanent school exclusion and was aware that he was gang-involved, smoked marijuana, committed robberies, and had frequent contact with the police who detained him whenever they detained the other young men in the neighbourhood. She attributed his offending to him being angry about being out of school.

Cassandra: *Yes. A big difference. I know ih hang out, I know ih smoke, I know ih di go through wa thing da court weh they di accuse ah of. Wa robbery. But, I nuh know, I think fi he biggest downfall da because ih hang out with they guys. So when police pick up they guys, da all a they, whether you mi do it or not.*

Other mothers provided their awareness of the variation of clandestine offending their sons were involved in that was not made aware to them through contact with law enforcement. Gina, for example, suggested that her son was unaware of her knowledge about many of his criminal activities, including the sale of marijuana with his friends. While it was insufficient to deter his involvement in drug selling, Gina's attempt to dissuade her son from bringing an illegal substance into the home demonstrated the importance of family-related influences.

Gina: *Lotta thing I know, he nuh even know I know. Just like if he go out deh go do something, he nuh wa tell me…When ih used to sell, when they used to, you nuh fi got big bag a weed, me*

see ah out deh the open the weed and everybody take they piece. I make ih know, "your piece nuh di come in ya [house].

On the other hand, Nessa only knew about her son's offending when he conflicted with law enforcement, such as being criminally charged for an offence that emanated from a family dispute, and another encounter based on possession of small quantities of marijuana. She was unaware of the offending that he engaged in, including his gang involvement.

> Nessa: *nuh know bout no trouble weh ih get inna. Only thing like weh I say, the one weh they arrest ah and charge ah (him) fa da the one with my [situation], and just weh ih deh pon the street they police they search ah. Mussi find piece a weed pon ah because ih smoke and just like that. But never yet gone da court bout fi find ah with weed or gun or nothing like that.*

The offending behaviour of the neighbourhood friends as the young men's peer group will be presented to position the young men as actors embedded in this social network. The entrenchment of offending behaviour among the young men was also attributed to their increased interaction with neighbourhood friends from their low-income neighbourhoods that were characterised by gang violence and criminal activities. Only one young man claimed that his friends did not engage in serious crime, while the others had friends who were arrested, charged, or convicted for a variety of crimes, including possession of an unlicensed or prohibited firearm, robbery, rape, attempted murder, and murder.

> Daniel: *When the man [police] they grab you and di investigate a crime or something. Ye, the man they grab. Anything weh happen, like if wa shooting or somebody dead or suh, then they wa come fi we or suh…Lotta my friends deh da jail. Murder, robbery, attempt murder, gun.*
>
> Anthony: *They get charge fi murder, all kinda thing. They get charge fi murder, thief, assault, all kinda things, like into the streets, you get the sense. Thing weh da bruk law, outlaw*
>
> Dante: *My friend mi get charged fi wa homemade gun. One mi get charge fi, but I nuh talk to he again, one mi get charge fi rape. One mi get charge fi robbery. Two mi get charge fi robbery. Gary, I nuh remember weh Gary mi get charge fa. Nelly mi get charge because he bax (slapped) wa gyal.*

To many of the young men, criminal activity after permanent school exclusion became a feature of living and participating within their neighbourhoods. The interactions among neighbourhood friends included socialising, risk-taking behaviour, such as misuse of drugs, street-level drug dealing, and gang activity, and added peer pressure to misuse drugs and commit robberies, especially among peers who

were not enrolled in school or working. Therefore, most of the young men indicated that robbery was the main offence among their peers, which often included them. For example, Marco had previously detailed several high-profile robberies that occurred in Belize City that he attributed to him and his friends, but he suggested that the motive for these robberies was a lack of job opportunities. Interestingly, while Marco suggested a need for support to employ his neighbourhood friends, he also acknowledged that harm by rivals was a potential risk that they would face if they worked in unprotected environments.

> Marco: *Da mainly robbery, murders they deal with. You nuh see nearly, if you notice this past year and last year, lone robberies robberies robberies you di hear bout...Once an organisation woulda just come round and say give all they young bwai wa work or job, they young bwai going go work. They young bwai want work. I can't stop nobody or tell nobody nothing when they di siddung whole day, nuh know what they wa eat, belly di bubble. People wa say go do something constructive. Man want kill you, you can't work anywhere.*

The concentration on robbery as a mainstay of the young men from different gangs were justified by Marco based on the lack of opportunities, entrenched poverty, unemployment, and hunger associated with the households and neighbourhood that he lived in.

> Marco: *I go through deh (there), they young bwai belly (stomach) di bawl many days, suh some rich people have to bawl. Rather you go rob they people weh got it than rob your same poor people. Grab a purse round the lane, grab a chain round the lane, and deal with petty [crime].*

As a mother, Shantel was also able to verify the involvement of her son in committing a robbery. She believed that her son who was only 14 years old at the time of his permanent school exclusion was influenced by his neighbourhood friends.

> Shantel: *The first problem I see ih get in da mi robbery, when I see it pon the news. That da mi the first one. I think this when he mi gone rob, da he and friends gone. They influence him to go and do it.*

The consequences of those offending at times included death, for example, Anthony referred to a close friend who was killed during a failed robbery the year before the interview.

> Anthony: *Cause da we 3 does hang. Me, he and Johnson. Johnson dead off a robbery and thing. Suh only me and he leff now.*

Over time the young men and their neighbourhood friends engaged in more serious offending such as robberies, shootings, and murders of rival gang members. Marco, for instance, was able to detail a

concerted effort by the people to clamp down on him and his friends who were accused of committing robberies and murders. Likewise, Daniel and Matthew suggested that being accepted in their gangs required them to commit robberies, shootings, and murders.

> Marco: *Right now they di look fi one a my lee bwai fi, watchya anuh nothing bout no boast, you get di sense. Like fi say I heng with these type of people but da just peoples. That da one a my friend, right now they di look for he for da double murder weh just happen. But they just di try frame we, you dig. They just di try frame we.*

> Daniel: *Trouble weh I do now. Hang out. Hang out mean, like, you gangbang. Just hang out with the big (homies), hang out and put in work too…but once you want hang out, you have to put in work too. You have to kill and rob and them deh too.*

> Matthew: *Nothing fi really, the trouble weh I used to get inna, nuh fi really. We just used to go rob, used to go rob, heavy. Used to go shoot after man.*

<u>Criminalisation and the Criminal Justice System</u>

The increase in offending behaviour among the young men in this study increased contact with law enforcement and greater criminalisation. For most of them, their early onset of offending behaviour, the entrenchment of offending behaviour during their transition from school, and subsequent acceleration in offending behaviour post-school exclusion placed them at odds with the police and the criminal justice system. Importantly, the accounts of the young men suggest that criminal charges as administrative records do not provide a reliable measure of the offending careers or experiences of the offenders as self-reporting. In this sub-section, I will detail the criminal charges of the young men and complement them with their reporting of their interaction with the police in their neighbourhoods.

For most of the young men, their deepening ties with the neighbourhood and the neighbourhood gang contributed to them committing criminal and violent acts that earned them a reputation among neighbourhood friends, rivals, as well as police. Consequently, most of the young men were introduced to the prison system and remanded at some point in their adolescent years. In addition, at the time of the interview, half were on bail for varying offences in ongoing criminal cases that can result in long-term imprisonment if convicted. This is consequential for the young men because it suggests that the role of criminalisation in their lives resulted in labelling that made them substantially more vulnerable to harassment and discrimination by the police when faced with targeted criminal investigations or ongoing criminal cases.

For example, Anthony's first documented criminal charge and arrest was for possession of an unlicensed firearm. He was remanded to an offender's institution for young offenders for 11 months. This served as a formal introduction to the prison system.

> Anthony: *First time when I get charge fi the gun, I went to Hostel. I lick like 11 months da Hostel and then 2 weeks da Booth Camp because they shift me over to Booth Camp. And then as I reach Booth Camp, I only lick (spent) like one week, I only lick like 10 days because they let me out. I get Supreme [Court] bail.*

Anthony reported that since his first arrest, he and his neighbourhood friends routinely became targets of the police, and he was eventually criminally charged for a murder that occurred in his neighbourhood near his home. He was placed on remand at age 16 but was released less than a year later when he was exonerated of the charge when a criminal investigation suggested that he was not involved. This was his second experience of a custodial sentence as a young offender.

> Anthony: *Ye, I mi get accused fi a murda, you get the sense. I mi gone da jail. Ye this da after I expelled…I mi get accused fi a murder and thing. Da mi right out deh the murder mi happen. But the judge and the system realise da nuh me and thing, you dig.*

Anthony's exoneration was quickly rebuffed by his forceful re-arrest less than an hour later, which suggested that the process of criminalising him, even after the adjudication of the court, served as harassment to extend the police's control and to frustrate and remind him of the reach of law enforcement. It also alienated him from his home and neighbourhood as he detailed living in hiding for three weeks out of fear that he would be further targeted by the police. Anthony's experience typifies the experiences of most of the young men in this study through a revolving door between them and the police and the wider criminal justice system.

> Anthony*: And they release me and thing but when I mi get released and thing, they try grab me back, as I come out Greg, 30 mins after, I di siddung (sit down) the eat and thing they come and grab me back. I mi lick 10 months, I done do 10 months remanded fi murder. When I come out now, I di siddung out deh and the eat up and thing, smoke up and thing, the man they come to me, tell me bout "get in, put up yuh hand, put up yuh hand, nuh move". You know mean kinda way, di cuss up and thing. Cuff up me and talk bout charge me fi murder, involuntary manslaughter and rrrrr (etc.) and all kinda thing. Put me inna trooper, call my ma (mother), reach station, they just hold me fi wa lee while, just release me, tell me bout "free to go again" for the second time.*

Marco, for instance, had two criminal charges in the court system at the time of the interview. He had been criminally charged, remanded to prison, and released on bail for a robbery and then shortly after criminally charged, remanded to prison, and released on bail for attempted murder. For him, the concern of recidivism and eventually a conviction with a long-term prison sentence is a reality. It is a reality that competes with the prospect of an inter-gang war between allied gangs in his view engineered by the police that can lead to his murder. The situation described by Marco suggests that the police in criminalising him and his friends also sought to devalue their lives by pitting one group against the other with the eventual outcome of a violent inter-gang conflict.

> Marco: *The man they (police) just di try frame we because they bally weh dead [high-profile murders] partly associate with Cooper Street to, you dig. They bally have links out suh to. And my peoples they weh I di tell you bout, da from out suh. So da like a, di man dem (police) just, da like me and you roll (hang out) hard, police they done know that, but we roll hard, they di start brain, we roll hard right, they di try like put thing inna my head like me kill you. And da nuh nothing like that it gone…so they di try make it look like one of unu own kind kill unu. So unu could go up 'gainst each other.*

Likewise, Daniel had an active criminal charge for a robbery that he was attending court for and was recently released on bail from prison. The stigma of being from a specific neighbourhood and having been in contact with the criminal justice system, he argued, contributed to increased targeted run-ins with the police. Therefore, in the event of a shooting or murder, Daniel along with his friends were routinely detained for criminal investigation.

> Daniel: *Ye. Go da station and suh. Only that. When the man (police) they grab you and di investigate a crime or something. Ye, the man they grab. Anything weh happen, like if wa shooting or somebody dead or suh, then they wa come fi we or suh.*

The young men's interaction with the criminal justice system also has wide-reaching implications. For example, Dante who was recently acquitted of a criminal charge of aggravated assault attributed this criminal charge and the court proceedings as the hindrance to his attempt to return to school shortly after permanent school exclusion. According to him, he had to attend court hearings regularly and report to a designated police station that was located in the territory of a rival gang.

> Dante: *We mi ketch inna wa fight, then police mi come and carry two a we da station….and sake weh I mi do go da court to, I couldn't gone back da school. Cause when you di go da, every minute you have to go da court. Like every month you have to go da court fi bout 3 weeks.*

> *Then every day you have to go sign in cross a Centry Street. Wa area weh part you can't walk go or ride go.*

Matthew as one of two young men who acquired early criminal charges managed to avert criminal charges thereafter. Matthew's interaction with the police changed after his criminal charge and the police's approach to continue to target him, in his opinion, adversely impacted his life chances by undercutting his career goal to join the Belize Police Department when the desired employment opportunity arose after permanent school exclusion. According to Matthew, the police detained and released him for a shooting that he was not involved in, but he, unfortunately, missed the opportunity to meet with the relevant party to explore the job prospect.

> Matthew: *Da just like the other day, I mi want gone join police bad. The Wednesday when I suppose to mi gone meet Chester da fi he office last week Wednesday, police come fi me ya fi wa shooting I nuh know nothing bout, carry me da station, throw me off right deh. So I da like that nuh fi happen.*

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter suggest that there is a relationship between school exclusion and offending. Importantly, prior to permanent school exclusion, all the young men in this study indicated that they had engaged in offending behaviour. While their early offending behaviour was mostly influenced by neighbourhood and peer factors, there were some accounts of early offending behaviour during fixed-term school exclusion when the young men were transferred back into their neighbourhoods.

For most young men, fixed-term school exclusion preceded permanent school exclusion and represented a sequence of school exclusion. The main reasons for fixed-term school exclusion were disruptive behaviour while the main reasons for permanent school exclusion were persistent disruptive behaviour characterised mostly by confrontations and weapons-carrying. The appeal process was described as lacking transparency or balance, which further marginalised the voices of the young men and their mothers and inculcated a sense of unfairness in the young men.

Permanent school exclusion served as a structural disadvantage that influenced the offending behaviour of the young men. The transition from school was characterised by increased interaction with neighbourhood friends caused by a lack of structured or supervised activities. In the absence of participation in education or employment, the early offending behaviour of the young men was entrenched over time, and for most, it resulted in an uptake in offending behaviour, which manifested in both criminal charges and gang involvement.

CHAPTER 7: THE EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AFTER SCHOOL EXCLUSION

Introduction

This results chapter examines the young men's participation in mainstream life after permanent school exclusion to understand the complex, multidimensional, and dynamic nature of advantages or disadvantages which shaped their opportunities, choices, and prospects. The analysis suggests that the structural and institutional process of permanent school exclusion served as a denial of rights to a secondary education, which changed the life circumstances of the young men and adversely affected the continuity of their mainstream education and obstructed an important peer social network of school friends. It also served to deepen the young men's ties to their neighbourhood and contributed to the entrenchment in offending behaviour that existed prior to permanent school exclusion.

Education and Training Participation

In terms of the focus of this study, the analysis suggests that fixed-term and permanent school exclusion served as structural roots of disadvantage that initiated the educational marginalisation of the young men. Permanent school exclusion was the first phase of an abridged educational career that set into motion a series of exclusionary outcomes. The permanent school exclusion of the young men was exacerbated by the absence of any form of educational support from the Ministry of Education to place them in other mainstream secondary schools, which contributed to a process of education and training engagement, followed by disengagement, and for some, re-engagement over time. Therefore, this section presents the educational and training disadvantages experienced by the young men through a protracted educational and training journey characterised by delayed enrolment and transitions to new secondary schools, prolonged searches for educational or training opportunities, unstable transitions between different training programmes or vocational institutions, and educational disengagement.

Institutional Support for Placement

An absence of administrative, financial, or material support from any public or private organisations after permanent school exclusion was a shared experience among all the mothers and the young men. This, however, was particularly noteworthy when the Ministry of Education did not support the young men to place them into another mainstream secondary school or an alternative education programme. As a result, the onus of supporting the young men's educational development was only up to their parents.

Most of the mothers, who were sole parents, were unsure how to navigate the education system in response to permanent school exclusion and many found themselves negotiating an exclusion process that was characterised by power imbalance. For the most part, this placed an extraordinary burden on their already limited understanding of the education system. When left to their competencies and devoid of any institutional support, none of the young men had an easy transition to another mainstream school. The mothers were the most appropriate to provide their accounts because the young men were too young to understand or could not be involved in the administrative proceedings that were central to their educational continuity. Nessa, for example, reported that a lack of support to place her son in another school not only contributed to her son's disinterest in school but also resulted in his disengagement from mainstream education for over a year before finally enrolling in a skills training programme.

> Nessa: *And from then, ih nuh, like, really interested inna the school. I get ah inna Golden Stream, ih do that. I get ah inna Buckley (secondary school), Buckley not even gone nothing much.*

Marco was one of the only young men who reported on the lack of institutional support for placement after permanent school exclusion. He indicated that he did not receive any support and that it was his sheer will that made him enrol in a training programme after being unable to get into another mainstream secondary school.

> Marco: *No, nobody nuh come give me no support. If I never choose to gone back to school that woulda mi be it right deh.*

A pattern emerged in the lives of the young men after permanent school exclusion when a series of events started because they did not receive support to be placed in a new mainstream school. . Foremost was that their school disengagement worsened to the point that most of the young men no longer attempted to enrol in any other mainstream school.

Post-Exclusion Experience with Mainstream Education

As presented in Chapter 6, the education experience of the young men can be divided into two groups. The first group accounts for a minority of the young men – Anthony and Dante – who attended two mainstream secondary schools. The second group accounts for most of the young men, like Matthew, who were permanently school-excluded from the only secondary school they attended and did not return to another mainstream secondary school.

Matthew: *So at da point deh, even if they mi wa try get me back inna wa school, I still never mi wa do good. The reason I never mi wa do good because my mind never deh pon school. I never interested inna school. So I still never mi wa do good, you get the sense. So, I nuh like waste people time so I mi wa make they know*

Therefore, while all the young men had a shared experience of permanent school exclusion, there were differences in their post-school exclusion experiences in terms of the number of mainstream educational institutions that they attended and their state of despondency and disengagement after multiple exclusion processes.

Briefly, Anthony and Dante shared similar experiences of prolonged searches for placement and delayed enrolment into the second mainstream schools. During that time several life-altering events occurred for the young men. Anthony, for example, had been criminally charged for possession of an unlicensed firearm and was remanded into a custodial institution at age 14, which resulted in his first permanent school exclusion. Whilst in prison, Anthony received access to an online education programme that allowed him to pursue his secondary education, but he was unable to finish it because he was released. Upon his release after having experienced an event that affected his life yet wanting to improve his chances, he was derailed because he did not possess a computer at home nor had access to ICT infrastructure to continue online schooling. It was proposed that he attend a community centre, but it was in the territory of a rival gang, so he decided to stop the school.

Anthony: *The last school weh I mi really active inna, but that da nuh like school weh, that da Kaina Online High School…But since I come out [of prison] I nuh finish it. Well, I never got no access to no computer and they want I go stray way da Johnson Street. They want I stray, you dig. Sake a that, I just stop.*

Subsequently, Anthony experienced a gap in his education during his incarceration, then enrolled in a second mainstream school at the age of 15. He was permanently school-excluded that same year because of a fight at the school.

On the other hand, after Dante's withdrawal from his first secondary school at age 14 he experienced a two-year gap period from mainstream education. The gap period was a direct consequence of a denial of the right to education because he was rejected by schools since he was older than the expected age for Form 1 that he was to return to. These rejections further supported his growing ambivalence toward school after permanent school exclusion, so he never re-engaged in mainstream education.

Dante: *Job or go back da school, but I nuh really di worry bout school again sake a my age. To me, like, this da how I watch it to cause I see everybody to, like if you done get kick out a school, cause I send in form to lotta school to –Providence, Hopewell, and when they refuse you, you nuh even feel like you want go da school again afterwards.*

Experience with Training Programmes and Vocational Schools

The examination of the young men's participation in training programmes and vocational schools serves as an analysis of the structure of opportunities that are available after mainstream education. Notwithstanding the distinction in the number of permanent school exclusions, and by effect the length of time spent engaged in mainstream education, all the young men were interested in transitioning to a training programme or vocational school. For the most part, the young men's educational transition suggested that after their disengagement with mainstream education, they were re-engaged through training and vocational schooling.

Daniel is the only young man who never re-engaged in the educational experience because the tuition for the vocational school was unaffordable for his family. His subsequent transition would be characterised by marginalisation, criminalisation, and stigmatisation through the criminal justice system and prison system.

Daniel: *Nowhere. Jail.*

In terms of participation in training and vocational schooling, the transition for the other young men included prolonged searches for training opportunities. For example, Marco enrolled in a vocational school an entire year after his permanent school exclusion. He further enrolled in an alternative education night school, followed by a skills training programme at another institution.

Marco: *I gone da Tech Vocational after that. After Tech Vocational, I gone da Golden Stream*.

Sonny enrolled in a vocational school and subsequently a skills training programme.

Sonny: *He (family member) mi make mi do certain things and link up da Tech Vocational. You do everything weh you do da high school. Otherwise, you do auto mechanic, building maintenance, etc.*

Matthew attended a short-term skills training programme.

Matthew: *Da suh I gone, me never mi di work, my sister never mi di work, my cousin never mi di work, all a we gone fill out the Generation Now Project form.*

Dante attended a skills training programme and was advised to enrol in a vocational school, but like Anthony, his gang involvement and the location of the vocational school posed a risk for physical harm, so he did not enrol.

> Dante: *Then afterwards, then one of the lady from Golden Stream and a man mi thing me fi Tech Vocational. But I tell they I never want do Tech Vocational cause Tech Vocational deh far…Far from the zone, and never want, like, I go ketch inna problem or nothing.*

Anthony was enrolled in a vocational school with the support of a government-based organisation but his gang involvement and concerns about safety, followed by an eventual confrontation with rival gang members at the school resulted in an abrupt end to his schooling.

> Mother: *That's why I di tell you they try put ah da Tech Vocational and they place deh but it nuh di work, it nuh work…He tell they he nuh gwein and I tell they I nuh di send ah. Make ih get stab anywhere from my shop to home, because if ih get stab from ya to school, I wa say da because a unu.*

The transition into training programmes and vocational schools was not easy for the young men and their mothers. They encountered several issues that made the transition difficult and, in some instances, hindered their participation. These factors included financial constraints, safety concerns, constraints on age eligibility, and unstructured programmes.

Financial Constraints

Access to training programmes or vocational schools was hindered for some young men due to the financial situation of their families. For example, two mothers attempted to enrol their sons into vocational schools but were unable to do so because they were lone parents with other children to take care of and their sons' enrolment was too expensive to afford. Therefore, their sons' pursuit of further education was halted. She was not the only mother to experience this challenge. For one mother, since the enrolment was expensive, and she was unemployed with no financial support her son gave up on returning to school and urged her not to invest any more in his education.

> Mother: *I mi wa put ah da Tech Vocational. I mi wa try put ah back to Tech Vocational. Well, basically, I never have all the finances, like, support and thing because da just me with they.*

> Mother: *I think ih mi, like, just give up. Cause I ask ah (him) and I mi willing to try get ah into something else but he say "nuh waste your time, nuh waste your money", so. Well, I tried, but it was too expensive, so that never work out. Then afterwards, he say "well just nuh bother."*

Safety Concerns

Another key feature of the young men's participation in training programmes or vocational schools was the inherent danger associated with the geographical location of the institutions. Most of the Institutions were not near the neighbourhoods of the young men, so a common consequence of their safety concern was truancy or self-exclusion. Anthony was fortunate to receive support from a government-based organisation to enrol in a vocational school. However, the location of the vocational school proved to be a major concern for him because it was in the neighbourhood of a rival gang, which led to his initial truancy because of safety concerns. He was eventually involved in an altercation with another pupil from the rival neighbourhood which resulted in a larger dispute where he was accosted by the young man's friends. Consequently, his mother asserted that he would not return to the vocational school due to fear that another such incident may occur.

> Mother: *They put ah da Tech Vocational. When they put ah da Tech Vocational weh [Gang Name 1] nuh 'gree with we…Ih miss and stop. Wa lady say ih punch wa lee bwai (boy) and me nuh know what happen. And some a they come and so he run and I tell they "he nuh gwein (going) da nuh more school"*

Likewise, Dante's time in a skills training programme was very difficult because of the geographic location of the institution. Its location also meant that many of the young men from the rival neighbourhood attended the programme. According to Dante, the other young men recognised him based on his neighbourhood. This created many unpredictable situations and truancy because the young men from the rival neighbourhood would contact their friends near the end of class time to plan attacks on him. He also reported that he was unable to enrol in a vocational school because the distance from his neighbourhood presented concerns about his safety and potential conflict.

> Dante: *I mi di go da wa programme, Golden Stream. But I couldn't really gone there every day, sake a they one from Brendell. Part of the neighbourhood and they mi deh inna the Golden Stream programme to. Cause when I di deh the 2 lee bwai they wa got they phone and thing, then afterwards when da time fi soon done, you wa see he wa deh pon ih phone and thing, but, to me ih feel like da he lone mi di message they. Because I lone see he watch me then every time I, like when school soon done, you see he haul ih phone and he watch pon me and text. Then afterwards you see wa bunch a bwai wad deh front a the school, then I mi have to, like, jump the fence and go all the way round. They mi aware I mi from Cooper Street but I never did tell they nothing bout how they mi come fi me da the school.*

Constraints on Age Eligibility

Age served as an educational disadvantage for Matthew and Marco when after permanent school exclusion. Matthew was too old to return to complete mainstream education and Marco was too young to transition into vocational schooling. For Marco, having remained out of mainstream school for a year after his permanent school exclusion at age 15 and then seeking enrolment at a vocational school his age hindered his successful enrolment. It was determined that he was too young, so he was accepted into a pre-vocational class for a year. Since he was only accepted into a pre-vocational course, the course was not aligned with his area of training interest. Having been unable to pursue his area of training interest, Marco enrolled for a year at an alternative education night school to attempt to complete his secondary education. However, the latter prematurely ended because of no available physical space despite his successful advancement to Form 3.

> Marco: *I mi into AC (air-conditioning) and electrical. But when I gone there, I mi young, you dig. So I mi have to gone inna pre-vocational class but they turn the pre-vocational, da like a first form, second form. They end up turn the pre-vocational into a masonry class, so we end up di learn to stick blocks and lay tiles and dem deh…So if I mi want take the AC, I mi wa have to gone back the following year. I never did gone back.*

Unstructured Programmes

There were also complaints that some of the training programmes were unstructured and unsatisfactory. Nessa, for example, suggested that her son visited an organisation that provided life skills training, but instead, they played games and participated in group sessions to keep young people out of trouble. It was not a structured programme and attendance was voluntary, so her son eventually stopped going.

> Nessa: *We try. We try already with, uhm, Young Leaders Project. Ye, ih used to go da they. Like when I ask ah weh ih used to do deh, da just play games deh, da nuh like a regular programme weh they talk to they and whatever. Da just lone game they play he say. And like probably weh da lone game they play, they go when they ready, come back when they ready.*

Education and Training Prospects

Given the many challenges to participation that the young men encountered in their mainstream education and training, most of them did not complete their training programmes or vocational school. Sonny was the only young man to complete vocational school, then followed it with enrolment

in a skills training programme. At the time of the interview, Sonny had plans to further his training when the opportunities arise.

> Sonny: *After Tech Vocational, end up inna Generation Now Project, get wa diploma from deh, and right now I still di make papers (money) without high school paper (diploma). And da nuh who I know, dah the tricky part…Because now, nobody nuh want look out fi the kids. You got handful a people now weh di lookout fi the kids, and dah the future. I da mi wa kid, they never mi di lookout fi me. That's why I never got wa future and now I create wa future.*

In terms of the prospect of educational or training pursuit for the young men who were far removed from the point of permanent school exclusion, at the time of the interview two young men were interested. Dante suggested his influence in pursuing a vocational course as a boat captain and Matthew in completing his secondary education at a continuing education institution. However, both young men were at the time hindered by cumulative disadvantages that were out of their control because Dante was not yet a legal adult to apply for the license, and for Matthew, continuing education was only available at night, which would conflict with his security job.

> Dante: *Yes, I gwein (going) da Tech Vocational. Right ya when it open up…Then I wa try get mi boat captain fi during the summer because mi cousin they got wa boat. But da just di same thing, you have to watch pon the age.*

> Matthew: *Ye, I suppose to, I mi want, my mind mi deh pon go da Preston but I nuh know. Da just the other day my mind slip pon it fi go back da school da Preston. But the job weh I got I work da night and Preston da night. So ih mi wa rough fi me.*

Labour Market Participation

The young men's marginalisation after permanent school exclusion extended further than their limited education and training prospects to include a vulnerability to wider exclusion from the labour market. Low participation in the labour market, and for the most part an absence of employment, was the main feature of the transition of the young men after school exclusion, which represented a significant step in their marginalisation. The young men's capacity to successfully transition into the labour market was directly connected to and undermined by their educational experience in several ways, including early school leaving without lack of educational credentials, constraints on paid work due to their working age, their unpreparedness for the labour market, and limitations attributed to a criminal record or gang-involvement. Therefore, this section examines the young men's entry and participation in the labour market after permanent school exclusion, the nature of employment that was available to them, and their perception of how their experiences influence their life chances.

<u>Lack of Educational Credentials</u>

The entry into the labour market for most of the young men was hindered by permanent school exclusion, with most specifically identifying the incompletion of secondary education and the absence of a secondary school diploma as the main reason. As described by Sonny and Marco, the challenges experienced in getting a job were not based on individual choices, but rather a denial of participation because most employers required applicants to possess a secondary school diploma as a criterion for employment. Notably, their cumulative disadvantage experienced across domains meant that challenges in their education continuity also affected their capacity to earn paid work, which shaped their labour market experience. As a result, their job pursuits always fell short and contributed to a sense of dejection and subsequent refusal to look for jobs.

> Sonny: *Ye, dah the main cause. Once you nuh have no papers (diploma) fi show, you can't get a job.*

> Marco: *I find it kinda hard to mein. Because, from since I get expelled and thing, you know most jobs ask you for a lee high school, most jobs today day, want high school diploma, you dig. If you nuh got that and they di ask for that, you nuh even going go look for a job deh because you nuh got that. You nuh got the criteria fi fit deh, you get di sense.*

As the primary caregivers, the mothers were able to provide accounts of the challenges their sons to enter the labour market. Mothers like Gina and Cassandra asserted that the lack of educational credentials played a significant role in their sons' difficulty in entering and sustaining participation in the labour market. To emphasise their points, both mothers suggested that their sons were willing to accept manual jobs that were presumed to not need a secondary school diploma. Cassandra, for example, expressed uncertainty about the reasons her son could be rejected from jobs that she classified as "regular" to suggest that his rejection was disturbing to her.

> Cassandra: *Well, I'm not sure, but maybe. Because the jobs that he put in for was just the regular bag bwai or storekeeper or whatever, you know, fi work inna storeroom or suh. So, I nuh know if they need 4th Form diploma or what fi that.*

On the other hand, Gina was transparent about her low expectations for her son's job options because she recognised his level of employability without a secondary education. Gina provided an example of the only time her son was employed. He had been recruited along with recognised gang members from various neighbourhoods to work on a short-term government-funded project to construct streets in Belize City to militate the rising violence. Having to settle for that job because of not having

educational credentials was concerning to Gina because it heightened the risk of harm given the presence of rival gangs, so she withdrew him.

> Gina: *Bwai Ih nuh get wa education, so weh kinda job you wa get? Only cause, and ih used to work it. Ih used to work, weh you call the street one weh yuh have to tie and full so much basket (construction)?*

It is important to note that the complex nature of social exclusion lends that different factors can simultaneously contribute to exclusionary outcomes. Nessa's account provides support for the cumulative disadvantages that some of the young men experienced having been permanently school-excluded and not acquiring a secondary education credential while simultaneously being disadvantaged by the age at which they were school-excluded.

> Nessa: *I think da because of ih age right now, but like weh ih say, ih wa try when ih [birthday] 25 October. So, then we wa see if da because ih nuh got that qualification or whatever.*

Constraints on Working Age

A young person in Belize is any person 14 years and under 18; therefore, despite the International Labour Organisation's allowance for light work but not hazardous work between ages 15 and 17, persons under age 17 working in Belize are still considered child labourers. This stipulation is likely to disincentivise employers from hiring young persons under the age of 18. The collective experience of all the young men in this study was a denial of participation in education through their permanent school exclusion before the legal adult age of 18. Consequently, this shared experience resulted in similar exclusionary outcomes in terms of their labour market participation.

Since all the young men were under the legal adult age of 18 at the time of their permanent school exclusion, and at the time of the interview half were still under that age, their experiences with employment were directly connected to their ages, which was compounded by their lack of educational credential. These disadvantages were out of the young men's control and as a result, led to persistent unemployment and manifested in most of the young men being unemployed at the time of the interview. For example, as hard as Dante tried to secure employment, he received only promises from potential employers that he would be given a job when he turned 18 years old, but it was not guaranteed, and at the time of the interview he was 17.

> Dante: *I got, ehm, wa person weh tell me once I turn 18, cause I mi done gone check Brenton Enterprise from I mi 16 but the person, sake a I mi gone back when I mi 17, the person tell me*

once I come back, ih (he) wa make sure I get wa job because he say he notice I da the only one weh stay come back come check.

The interviews with the mothers suggested that despite their sons' persistence in securing paid work, the constraint on their working age stymied their participation in the labour market. Both Cassandra and Nessa asserted that their sons submitted several applications for jobs, but they never got any, which they felt was attributable to their sons' young age.

Cassandra: *Yes, he did go and fill out some applications and thing one time after they mi put ah outa school. And then nobody respond, nothing. I think ih mi try da Store 1, Store 2 and Store 3, I think. Well, first I mi tell ah that maybe da because ih young because at da time deh ih mi just bout 15, 16. Ye, so I tell that maybe that's why. They probably wanted people over 18 you know.*

Nessa: *It difficult right now fi find a job, especially he, and one or two places ih mi check and they tell ah he have to wait till ih 18.*

<u>Unprepared to Participate in the Labour Market</u>

A striking observation of the young men's early departure from secondary school was not only the absence of a secondary school diploma but also the premature transition from secondary school that left them ill-equipped to successfully navigate the labour market and further compound their disadvantage. More specifically, as a member of a socially marginalised population, the lack of 'cultural capital' that comes with education and enhanced social sensibilities as described by Fahmy (2017) in Chapter 3 (page 70) was evident in Marco's case. Marco detailed finding a job in his area of interest at age 17 and worked for over a year, but his lack of adequate professionalism caused him to smoke marijuana at the job site which resulted in his termination. Interestingly, Marco's self-recognition that it was his "bad habits" while working for "big peoples" suggests that he showed some growth over the years after his termination.

Marco: *I mi di work, like I mi di tell you, I mi into AC till I even mi find a AC job, you dig. AC, electrical. I work AC, electrical for about a year or two. But I mi end up lose da job deh to, you dig. Ye. Cause I carry my bad habits everywhere mein. I di smoke up inna di people they yard and deh people da big peoples, you dig. People deal with big peoples.*

For others like Matthew, the early departure and premature transition from school meant that he was not socially prepared to join the labour market at age 16. Though Matthew was employed at the time of our interview, this was not always the case. He explained that the transition away from school after

permanent school exclusion did not directly result in interest in work because he still considered himself dependent on his grandmother due to his age. However, the presence of other family members as dependents later encouraged him to enrol in a skills training programme to enhance his employability.

> Matthew: *When I get expelled, my mind still never deh pon work. Because one spell I mi di live with my granny, I mi talk to she bout it when I mi stop school and thing. Da suh I gone, me never mi di work, my sister never mi di work, my cousin never mi di work, all a we gone fill out the Generation Now Project form.*

Precarious Labour Market Participation

The labour market participation for most of the young men comprised of gaining low or no skilled, low-paid manual, or marginal employment. When the young men did find jobs, like in the case of Sonny and Matthew, they experienced job instability or insecurity based on little permanence that resulted in termination or seasonal job opportunities. They got jobs as maintenance workers, construction workers, cleaners, bartending, cooking, and low-level security, which for many increased their risk of harm. Matthew, for instance, described four unrelated low-level service and part-time jobs for which he was hired and terminated within a short period. The roles that he held during this time did not demonstrate any continuity in terms of stability or skill requirement, which could have improved his employability over time.

> Matthew: *I mi be, they put me da wa warehouse da Thrift Store. I da mi wa Inventory Officer. Before da 6 months I get hired. Before da 6 months I done get hired. After that I mi get fired from deh. When they say they mi di, something, they fire bout at least 15 a we. When they mi fire me I mi gone, no, I mi gone work da Daily Adventures. And you done know that da wa season thing pon the waters and thing…Reach da Marlin Motel, boom, I get hired deh. Right deh suh that just make I start get lotta lee skills inna all kinda things. Lotta things, bartend, start cook, start whatever whatever, start Orchid Lounge. Start do wa lee part time thing fi they. They offer me wa job and thing, and I had to turn it down because the money never right and if Marlin Motel mi know I mi di do wa part time thing fi they, they mi wa fire me.*

> Sonny: *The process never right, so before I get fired, I walk off. Because I mi done di see weh di happen.*

The risk of harm increased for some young men who accepted low-skill jobs. Gina, for example, felt that her son's permanent school exclusion negatively affected his ability to secure long-term or well-paid employment. His participation in the labour market was limited to manual jobs, like construction

work, that rival gang members were also involved in. This blending of rival gangs at the workplace concerned her, so she discontinued his involvement because her responsibility for his safety as a legal minor was paramount.

> Gina: *Ye, he mi gone work one or two time. Oh no, me make he stop that because when you look you got some [Gang Name 2] di work, some this di work…I put it like this, he da wa minor so we have to mind ah (him). Because if something happen to he right now police wa come fi me because ih da wa minor.*

Social and Professional Networks

The marginalisation of the young men in this study also included curtailment of important social and professional networks that exacerbated their exclusionary outcomes by enhancing the denial of work opportunities. Several of the young men espoused that in Belizean society there is a need for a social and professional network that can support their employment pursuit, especially in the absence of secondary education credentials. Sonny, for instance, suggested that even education credentials do not always guarantee employment because in Belize a "link up" through nepotism was necessary to place a person in a favourable position to find a job. The perception of the role that these social connections fundamentally play in getting a job in Belize provided an important insight into the extent that exclusion can contribute to social network deprivation.

> Sonny: *Worse, you have to know somebody weh got da link up. Right now you got diplomas and you nuh even wa get wa job just cause you got diplomas. You wa get wa job because a who you know.*

Matthew, on the other hand, suggested that a social or professional network is not only needed to secure a job, but also to provide information about employment opportunities. Access to such information helped Matthew to recover quickly, curtailed his period of economic strain, and transitioned into another job after termination. This was particularly important because of his precarious participation in the labour market through low or no skilled, low-paid manual, or marginal employment. However, in the absence of job opportunities and access to a workplace, most of the young men were unable to establish new bonds with or have access to a professional network that could provide similar opportunities for socialising or information sharing.

> Matthew: *No matter what. I know lotta people, I always di work, no matter what…So when that (termination) gone down, gone back da Mr. Jackson. I mi really gone da Mr. Jackson fi wa reference, wa recommendation. I gone right deh gone siddung inna the Project, "I got wa job*

fi you enuh." "Cho, weh (where) part?" "Marlin Motel, Monday morning" "I wa tek that". Easy as that. Reach da Marlin Motel, boom, I get hired deh.

A salient finding was the relevance that informal local networks played in providing legitimate manual work in the legal economy when the young men had difficulty entering the labour market. Since his permanent school exclusion, Nessa reported that her son had difficulty finding steady employment. His young age made it difficult for employers to give him a job. As a result, her son had to accept menial jobs, such as maintenance and ancillary work, from her friends and work colleagues until he could explore the labour market at age 18. She felt that at that point she and her son could adequately assess if the lack of a high school diploma further contributed to his unemployability. Nonetheless, her son's experience with the labour market suggested the importance of informal social networks through her job which served as a source of legitimate manual work.

> Nessa: *Now and again weh part my work her boss woulda call ah fi help ah wash down, di place weh part she work, di verandah and clean windows and stuff fi ah. Ye, just they lee jobs like that. Wa steady job, no. It difficult right now fi find a job, especially he, and one or two places ih mi check and they tell ah he have to wait till ih 18. I think da because of ih age right now, but like weh ih say, ih wa try when ih [18]. So then we wa see if da because ih nuh got that qualification or whatever.*

The quality of social networks also adversely affected the capacity of the young men to find and maintain new job opportunities. Marco's situation highlighted the disadvantage of a low-quality social network, especially if members of the social network are also from a marginalised population. Having been unemployed for over a year, Marco found a job a month before the interview for this study. He secured a job at a municipality that was a tourist destination outside of Belize City, but his family in the municipality was of a low-income background and was experiencing financial strain in paying their rent. The landlord had threatened to initiate court proceedings to recover the rent, so Marco was unable to stay with his family and unable to find an alternative residence because it was expensive to live in the municipality. Therefore, he lost the job opportunity and returned to his neighbourhood during a gang conflict that he feared would result in him being a victim or perpetrator of a murder.

> Marco: *Like watch it, I gone out deh (municipality) somewhere strange, somewhere new I get wa job, lotta job di out deh, you get the sense. But what, same time I get a job, place fi stay (residence) da the problem. So that da the problem right deh. I need fi just move out from my surroundings or else I wa end up di kill people or I might end up di get killed... People, my family weh I mi di stay with, fi they landlord di trip pon they right now fi rent, you dig. Fi carry them da court fi rent and thing.*

The Stigma of a Criminal Record or a Criminal Charge

Having a criminal record played an important role in the economic marginalisation and stigmatisation of the young men in this study. For example, Anthony's disadvantage after permanent school exclusion further increased after his criminal charge and incarceration. He felt that his experience with the criminal justice system hindered his job prospects and life chances because it was on the national news. Since all the young men in this study were criminally charged with serious crimes and most were remanded to prison based on the nature of the alleged crime, their criminal charges were likely covered on the national news. Nevertheless, in the case of Anthony, his experience prolonged his successful transition to economic independence, delaying his departure from his parent's home, and increasing his economic dependence on his intimate partner. At the time of the interview, he was supported financially by his older partner who worked, so he did not look for a job.

> Anthony: *The gun record weh I have. Nuh fi say it like that, but my gyal look out fi me, you get the sense. I got wa big woman. My gyal look out fi me and thing*

It Is noteworthy that most of the young men did not emphasise the stigmatisation and marginalisation that a criminal record could have on their employment prospects. Presumably, this was because many of them were disengaged from the labour market, but also because their employment history of low or no skilled, low-paid manual jobs suggested that a formal police record was not always a requirement. Nevertheless, specialised jobs require a formal police record to demonstrate a lack of criminal conduct or past conviction, such as in the case of Cassandra's son. Cassandra expressed a fear that her effort to get her son into the military would be unsuccessful because of his criminal record.

> Cassandra*: No. I am trying to get him right now into the BDF thing that will start this month. But I am trying to get his police record. So, ye. That he says he is willing to go and give it a try, but I just the hope they accept ah because I know da lotta people and you have to be accepted.*

Incidentally, in this study, conflict with the criminal justice system and possessing a criminal record rarely occurred in isolation since most of the young men who had been criminally charged or incarcerated were also gang-involved.

The Stigma of Gang Involvement and Risk of Harm

The constraints of being gang-involved after permanent school exclusion cannot be understated. Most of the young men in this study openly expressed their fear of working in unprotected environments where they could be exposed to rivals or individuals identifying them based on their neighbourhood. The young men preferred not to work rather than endangering their lives because they were aware

of the threats associated with leaving and working outside their neighbourhood or in rival neighbourhoods. Importantly, none of the young men suggested that their stigmatisation based on gang involvement was directed by prospective employers. Rather, their fear of harm was grounded at the neighbourhood level which made them increasingly vulnerable to harm and thereby entrenched their disadvantage. Marco, for example, accepted the need to work but emphasised that his safety would require indoor work with protection by an employer with a licensed firearm.

> Marco: *People wa say go do something constructive. Man want kill you, you can work anywhere. I nuh gwein go work anywhere once dunno (don't know) somewhere I feel safe. Weh I know, bam, I deh inna your office, you have a license gun, I nuh wah (want) deh outside too much weh like people di fly pass too much and people could say, "ye bwai, Marco di work deh suh". Once da nuh somewhere safe like that then I nuh gwein go work.*

Anthony and Daniel similarly shared that the stigma of their neighbourhood and the gang that they were in further hindered their participation in the labour market. Specifically, Daniel partially attributed his protracted unemployment to having joined a gang post-school exclusion, which obstructed his successful job pursuit because his physical movement was severely impeded. Like Anthony and Daniel, these impediments did not directly represent the choices of the young men to engage in paid work, but instead, they represented a state of involuntary unemployment.

> Daniel: *[It] depends da weh [job]. Nuh anywhere. I nuh gwein work anywhere. Any type a job.*

> Anthony: *Sake (because) a my neighbourhood and sake a people weh (who) they think I associate with cause I hang with, they wa try harm me. I can't go certain places.*

Mothers like Andrea, Shantel, and Gina also felt that their son's participation in the labour market was marred with challenges because of gang involvement. Andrea's son's involvement in gang "beef" or conflict with rival gangs served as a major hindrance to his job prospects. According to Andrea, her son reported that he had been promised a job by an influential individual with the Government of Belize, but he was unable to take it, though the nature of the work was not specified.

> Andrea: *To me, he kinda fraid fi go out deh. That da the next thing. Beef weh ih got. He fraid fi go out deh go look fi thing. Something fi do.* He say that wa man mi wa put on to a job through government but I nuh know weh da di hang up. I nuh know what da di holdup. *The street stuff.*

Likewise, for Shantel, her son's gang involvement from as early as age 14 prevented him from attempting to enter the labour market and will likely impede his future employment prospects

because of possible attempts to harm him because he was criminally charged with murder and recently released on bail.

> Shantel: *I nuh know weh fi say, cause, this street life weh [Son] deh pan, like sometimes, I frighten ih get wa job and somebody see ah da wa spot and then go attack him.*

However, Gina admitted that her son's gang involvement was problematic to his job pursuit and safety. She accepted that she would have to help to care for him in the long term and committed to preserving his safety by rejecting two job opportunities that could have potentially brought him in contact with rival gang members.

> Gina: *I say "No! [Son] nuh gwein outa Belize (City) go work, nuh." I tell Mr. Dirk, I say "I nuh want you carry my son go work and then you wa call me and say, "gyal Gina" … "Gyal, well you know [Son] get juk (stabbed) down, ih deh right ya suh." Nope, no, make ih (let it) happen da Belize. So I nuh make he gone.*

> Gina: *Yes man, when you, you see how they build by Belama pon the street, pretty pretty pretty. Ye, he mi gone work one or two time. Oh no, me make he stop that because when you look you got some Belby di work, some this di work. And all a they say you da they crew but later on they throw phrase. When I hear all a they talk, I say "oh no, you nuh gwein back." And he nuh used to it.*

Blocked Opportunities Based on Ethnicity

It was suggested by Sonny and Matthew that they experienced discrimination, humiliation, and stigmatisation for being Black in Belize. In the case of Sonny who was employed at the time of the interview, he relayed an adverse experience with racism at a previous job. According to him, he worked with racist colleagues who treated him badly and he felt that they unfairly accused him of stealing because he was a Black person. Interestingly, he extended his experience as an observation of the racial milieu in Belize between ethnic Blacks and Hispanics, where the latter's ethnicity is regarded as a marker of social advantage. This experience of exclusionary employment where he felt that his job was insecure and that there were already plans to terminate his job made him frustrated and he stopped working.

> Sonny: *The process never right, so before I get fired, I walk off. Because I mi done di see weh di happen. I deh round lone Hispanic people and Belize da wa racist place. They expect Black man nuh fi too smart and they expect Black man nuh fi reach nowhere.*

For Matthew, establishing his own security company would empower him and lead to self-reliance that improved his life chances. However, Matthew did not think it mattered what his dreams were or the guidance he received from well-intentioned older friends as guides, he felt that he was limited by his ethnicity and poverty as a young person of Black descent in Belize, which he suggested to be a result of socio-demographic inequality based on ethnicity and class.

> Matthew: *Right now I woulda want do my own, start my own lee security firm and thing. That da weh I want start. But right now we da Black people, we nuh got funds fi do this, we nuh got funds fi do that.*

Social Support and Social Participation

This section analyses the change in social support as another dimension that the young men had access to after permanent school exclusion by looking at the supportive social contacts, social relationships and networks, and their participation in social activities with family and friends.

<u>Perceptions of Social Support from Family</u>

The sustained relationship between the young men and their families and the social support that they received helped to shape the transitions of the young men's post-school exclusion. Adverse effects on the relationship between the young men and their families were attributed to permanent school exclusion. The young men reported that their families' perceptions and interactions with them changed as a reflection of the family's frustration and disappointment in the young men's permanent school exclusion. The change in perception was a result of how the family viewed each other based on educational success or lack thereof. In Dante's case, he reported that his family's frustration and disappointment were grounded in their expectation of him because he was known for completing his school assignments. His permanent school exclusion surprised the family and broke a promise he made to his mother to complete his secondary education. He surmised that his mother and the rest of his family stigmatised him and felt that he would no longer be able to complete school, so it affected their relationship.

> Dante: *I think it change how they see me because I does always do my work and thing. I does never like study but when da time fi do my test and thing, I does pass. I mi promise my ma I mi wa finish school. Like, they mussi (must) say I nuh wa finish school or nothing.*

On the other hand, Matthew and Anthony reported that their families were displeased with their permanent school exclusion and viewed their permanent school exclusion as a representation of a lack of ambition on the part of the young men.

Matthew: *My granny mi just bex because she mi want I finish but life da life. If something never meant to be, it never meant to be.*

Anthony: *Ye, they look pon me different, but certain a they. Cause maybe some a they woulda say I nuh want nothing and maybe say I careless.*

However, not all changes in interaction with the young men were received with understanding by them. Sonny, for example, suggested that his permanent school exclusion was viewed through the lens of his mother's social and professional status based on her job instead of his own lived experience.

Sonny: *But to my ma because a her position at the time, she mi feel breakdown, she mi feel like her world mi wa end. Not knowing ih got wa son weh mi blessed.*

While disappointment was the response of most families to the young men's permanent school exclusion, not all allowed it to significantly affect their relationship. Daniel reported that his permanent school exclusion upset his family but did not significantly change his relationship with them because they continued to support him.

Interviewer*: How did expulsion affect your family or how you interact with them?*

Daniel: *It nuh really affect nothing.*

The mothers likewise reported their disappointment in their sons because as lone parents they had invested in the education of their sons with poor returns. Shantel was disappointed in her son because he had performed well academically when he was initially enrolled in secondary school, but he eventually "slack" off from his schoolwork. Her disappointment was particularly noteworthy because she was a struggling lone parent who successfully ensured that all his older siblings completed secondary school, but he did not.

Shantel: *I mi hurted because da me, reach 1st form, ih mi di do good, then ih start to slack up inna ih work and right deh suh. I mi feel kinda annoyed. I mi feel annoyed. Because da me one and I can't. I done put the next one they, da you and he left. I rail up with ah everyday *laughs*. Well ih bredda and sista they mi upset bout it, ye.*

Similarly, Nessa felt that her son did not reciprocally prioritise his education as she invested in him. Her drive to provide him with educational opportunities that she did not have during her childhood and adolescence made her emotional, so she started crying during the interview as she expressed the struggles in their current relationship. In addition, she relayed that there was a change in the relationship between her son and other family members who stigmatised him and perceived him

negatively after his permanent school exclusion. Their view of him was exacerbated when he seemingly refused to continue his educational pursuit.

> Nessa: *I mi feel bad. I rail up to ah and stuff. I mi have to just get over it and done because I try my best and it mi just up to he. We could try, I try so much, just up to he. Like I always say, when ih (he) ready, I could find the time and I wa find the money fi ah. Da just he have to show the interest. Fi show up da the places weh ih want.*

On the other hand, Gina expressed that the family was initially upset with her son, but they empathised with him and were distraught by his permanent school exclusion. The reason for Gina's emotional response was her awareness that his permanent school exclusion was based on a situation in which he had to defend himself from another pupil. She and her family were acutely aware of his academic prospects because he was an intelligent young man, so they shared a positive outlook on his future based on his intelligence, rather than a perceived disappointment.

> Gina: *Me never like it, I rail up, rail up. I cuss up, cuss up. Nuh pon the teacher behalf. And he cause I di say, you know…Well when time when ih mi get expelled, everybody mi bex with ah, we know that he da wa bright kid.*

Access to Material Support from Family

The change in interaction with the family, for some young men like Marco and Anthony, resulted in further marginalisation when they received less support in material and financial support. This was especially important since both young men were still legally under the adult age and in the care of their families. Marco, for example, felt that his family's opinion of him and his interest in education made them question the relevance of financially investing in sending him to another school. He also experienced less support in obtaining daily amenities and conveniences, so he and his unemployed friends felt justified in their involvement in acquisitive crimes like robbery to support themselves after permanent school exclusion. Similarly, Anthony reported that his family's perception of his ambition for his future helped to justify their gradual reduction in financial and material assistance to him.

> Marco: *They mussi say you di waste f i they money and nuh into school, so it nuh make sense. They just stop deal with me pon a level. Like, stop deal with me. I have to go find my own thing out deh. Have to do my own thing. And as a man without a job, nobody nuh di give you nothing, you know today day nobody nuh di give you nothing.*

> Anthony: *They slow down pon give me thing. Like I coulda mi get anything I want.*

Despite the challenges associated with the transition of the young men from school and their subsequent problems related to education, employment, and conflict with the criminal justice system, there were no cases where the family evicted or expelled the young men from the household. The perspective of some of the mothers suggested that disappointment was a rational response given their effort to curb the behaviour of some of the young men before permanent school exclusion, but none of them felt that abandonment was justified. For example, Andrea's frustration about her son's permanent school exclusion was palpable as she recalled dissuading and advising him to change his behaviour and attentiveness at school because those were cited as some reasons for his school exclusion. Likewise, Cassandra's displeasure was attributed to her son's failure to communicate the issues he encountered at school so she could properly support him.

> Andrea: *I tell ah he shoulda mi, I tell ah ih have to learn to listen and behave because then education important. Like I tell you, you talk to he and sometimes he make you feel like give up pon ah.*

> Cassandra: *Well, I think fi di family, it had an effect on everyone because everyone mi, like, everybody see the change inna ah, knowing that da never he. He da never da type of person, so. I think ih mi affect everybody inna some way or the other. And then ih gone do schupidness and get inna problem and then, ye.*

Constraint on Social Support from School Peers

Since all the young men in this study were permanent school-excluded as adolescents, their relationships and interaction with school peers were severely impeded. The marginalisation caused by inaccessibility to the shared school environment resulted in the gradual petering out of friendship groups and a detachment from the social network of school friends. This exclusion was both in terms of frequency of socialising and of capacity to choose when or if they could see their school friends.

The loss of such an important social network of peers was worsened by the early school leaving in Forms 1 and 2 when fewer opportunities were available to develop enduring friendships that could withstand their daily absence from the school environment. According to Dante, Matthew, and Marco, they initially only had access to a few school friends who they met at the end of the day by going to the school to visit them. However, over time, that access considerably diminished, and they only interacted with them in passing. In the instances when some friendship groups from school were maintained, they were based on trust characterised by low probabilities of harm, engagement on social media, and at times coincidental meeting. This was especially noted when they had friends who were from rival neighbourhoods who they had only interacted with in the school environment.

Dante: *Like now I say it change because I nuh really hang round they (school friends) like that. I just blow pass through and hail they…I still talk to they, hail they, and now and again we message pon Facebook. Because like last night one a my friend mi the message me from, weh does go da Northridge. I nuh see ah bout like that because he live da Vincent Street.*

Interestingly, Matthew was conflicted about the impact that permanent school exclusion had on his interaction with school friends. He initially reported that it did not affect his life in any way, but when asked about his relationship with his friends from school, he suggested that his school friends would scold him on social media and in their occasional coincidental meetings for not completing secondary school. Sonny, on the other hand, reported that after his permanent school exclusion, some of his friends viewed him as a "bum" or failure who would not continue school or be successful.

Sonny: *Because after I get expel everybody mussi think I wa stop deh (there) and be a bum. At one point, I used to like, start to go out more, ye. But when I get back pon my foot as in schooling, I just get back to the same me because I da wa person like this, I hard fi somebody encourage me fi do something.*

The complex relationship between Marco and his friends from rival neighbourhoods required them to mutually protect and vouch for each other when issues arose among their opposing groups.

Marco: *Cause da just like if I da from back ya and I ride over the bridge, one of my dawg Flacks, meet he one year, me and he only do one year inna school, but me and he get straight da school. Maybe the crowd weh I, the area weh I live, fi he crowd and deh crowd nuh 'gree, but they see me the ride over the bridge or they meet me somewhere and through sake a me and he straight, you dig.*

An important point derived from the young men's accounts was that the school environment acted as a neutral space where they could socialise with young men from neighbourhoods that were considered rivals to their own. Consequently, the loss of a neutral space for friendship formation and maintenance also constrained the interaction Anthony had with his social network of school friends. According to him, many of his school friends were from different rival neighbourhoods, and since the school was a neutral space where they could socialise, their interaction outside of school diminished. More importantly, he recognised that his school friends from rival neighbourhoods started to treat him differently, which would suggest that on his or either side, the loss of the school environment as a neutral space and the deepening immersion into the neighbourhood contributed to the changing dynamic in their relationship.

Anthony: *Yap, cause certain a they, like, da mi from different neighbourhood and when we meet each other they want move different. I conscious it. Nuh got no faith. Inna di streets.*

The fact that none of the young men completed mainstream education meant that there were limited opportunities to create new friendship groups with schoolmates or strengthen their social network with other pupils that they can rely on for socialising and support. As a result, the reality for most of the young men after permanent school exclusion was an exclusionary outcome where they were excluded from the school peer social network but simultaneously included in the social network of neighbourhood friends as their ties deepened.

Matthew: *Ye, I hang out more and I start gangbang… Go hang out da Belby. Wa lot! Cause my ma live back deh to, so most a the time I deh back deh. Da Jubilee Block. They da mi di 2 locations. Belby and Jubilee Block.*

Social Support from Neighbourhood and Gang Social Networks

The constraint on the friendship with school peers indirectly imposed by permanent school exclusion reshaped the social relations of the young men. It resulted in the young men spending more time in their neighbourhoods and connecting with their neighbourhood peers. This created a social dynamic where the related increase in participation in the neighbourhood social network, and by extension the local gang, represented both an inclusion into this network and an exclusion or low contact with other networks, such as school and professional.

The exclusionary outcome of permanent school exclusion on the social network of the young men was the deepening ties with a limited neighbourhood social network characterised by an itinerant lifestyle and activities limited to the neighbourhood and other allied gang areas of the Southside of Belize City. This deepening ties with the neighbourhood social network contributed to a change in the behaviour and activities of all the young men. A limited social network militated against their active social participation in a range of activities that young people their age engaged in, which included going to entertainment clubs and parties. For Daniel, he had less exposure to social events and life outside of his neighbourhood. He only occasionally visited a rural village outside of Belize City, but his life was overwhelmingly limited to his neighbourhood, and he rarely engaged in activities outside of it.

Daniel: *You lose lotta your friend they from school, who used to go da school with. Because da school you get fi meet lotta people. Because you get expelled. You hang out more because if you mi deh da school you mi wa inna school. Start to hang out more because you nuh have nothing else fi do.*

Their gang involvement also and activities within the gangs progressively escalated to serious crimes since the gangs became their new social network. This was typified by Marco whose daily interaction manifested in a deep immersion in the street lifestyle based on his availability to socialise every day. The social network within his neighbourhood consisted of young men who were similarly permanently excluded or had dropped out of school. Many of these friends who were out of school longer than Marco were involved in gang life and had enemies who would eventually become Marco's enemies based on his association with them.

> Marco: *So after expulsion, you find yourself whole day home or whole day pon the street because you wa get tired of deh home. You wa deh pan the streets. Eventually, when you deh pon the street, whole day, idle, nothing fi do, you will meet friends weh got different energy when into different levels, mussi done got enemies out deh. Them time you just get expelled, young lee bwai come out a school, you just get expelled.*

Likewise, for Anthony, the relative risk of participating in a neighbourhood gang reduced the possibility of successful engagement in other social networks. As mentioned previously under the sub-section 'Understanding the Role of Women as Sources of Social Support,' (page 110) his neighbourhood social network was restrictive because his social activities outside of the neighbourhood were limited and were dependent on his partner's capacity to take him to safe places. Furthermore, involvement in a gang contributed to conflict with the criminal justice system, which undermined his maternal grandmother's plan to expatriate him from Belize through the citizenship programme of the United States. This loss of opportunity was immense on his life chances because he felt that he was confined to the streets of Belize City.

> Anthony: *Lot, because right now I coulda mi find, maybe I ne'em (never) mi deh ya cause my granny di try send fi me right now fi go da States fi come outa this. Ye, but I nuh want try no illegal thing through no back or nothing.*

For many of the young men, as detailed in Chapter 6 under 'Criminalisation and the Criminal Justice System,' (page 165) their gang involvement and the neighbourhood seemed to encourage criminal activities and, therefore, contributed to their marginalisation and criminalisation as they were frequently targeted by the police. The neighbourhood social network also contributed to sustained offending behaviour, leading to situations that resulted in conflict with the criminal justice system and subsequent criminal charges and incarceration. Anthony, for example, was accused of murder – according to him based on his reputation and neighbourhood presence. Marco and Daniel along with their neighbourhood friends were frequently detained by the police for criminal investigation.

For others like Marco, his neighbourhood social network helped to protect him from harm against rivals in and around his neighbourhood.

> Marco: *After when I get shot at two times sake a people di pree my peoples because they can't play round they, they want play round me, you dig. But my people they wa show they face definitely once they play round me. But I just di show my peoples they to, I nuh need they.*

Also, neighbourhood friends who were not attending school provided criminal opportunities by providing material support, such as marijuana and firearms, that advanced the collective group identity and served as a means of entering the illicit drug market.

> Marco: *They wa want give you weed. They want give you this, that. Because they di do the same, they nuh di go da school neither*

However, the neighbourhood social network also provided social support to the young men after permanent school exclusion. As a proximal social network in the neighbourhood where the young men were confined after no longer having access to the school environment, the neighbourhood friends helped to reduce the young men's risk of social isolation. For example, Dante explained that after permanent school exclusion, he would visit his friends and family to socialise since he had free time.

> Dante: *I woulda go play games or hang with my two cousin they. Otherwise, I woulda go ride bout or right now go hail one or two a they just pass, hail or go da my friend house go play game. Then afterwards, we woulda message three gyal, ask they if they want hang out, then afterwards go da fi we cousin house and 6 a we hang, watch tv, drink and thing. Da most a di time thing.*

For others, like Dante and Matthew, their social network continued to diminish or decreased in influence when they desisted from socialising with neighbourhood friends or the gang because of either intra-gang conflict or as they grew older, they no longer believed they benefitted from the social network, so they refused to socialise, or engage in illicit or violent activities.

> Dante: *I talk to they, but I nuh really like, fi say go hang with they like first again because everybody di fight up 'gainst each other. That's why I say I nuh really like go hang pon Cooper Street again because you go pon Cooper Street, this one wa say "Oh, you turn snake because you di hang with this one now". That's why I just keep to myself now.*

> Matthew: *Well, fi tell you the truth, right now, I nuh really keep friends like that. My phone da my friend. Most of the time da that.*

Conclusion

The data suggests that young men in this study were at a higher risk of multidimensional exclusion after experiencing permanent school exclusion. An absence of administrative, financial, or material support from the Ministry of Education or any private organisation after permanent school exclusion to place them into another mainstream secondary school or an alternative education programme, contributed to none of the young men completing mainstream education. Their participation in education and training programmes was precarious given constraints such as a paucity of training or vocational options, their young ages, unaffordability, and safety concerns. In the end, those who completed short-term courses were not guaranteed employment, leading to only two young men at the time of the interview being employed.

The economic marginalisation that most of the young men experienced through nonparticipation or precarious participation in the labour market after permanent school exclusion threatened their successful transition to economic independence. The labour market participation for most of the young men comprised of gaining low or no skilled, low-paid manual, or marginal employment. This led to most of the young men experiencing long-term dependency on their families because of constraints to their effective participation in the labour market, such as age ineligibility since all the young men were under the legal adult age at the time of their permanent school exclusion. Moreover, their lack of educational credentials, criminal charges or records, and fear of working outside of neighbourhoods severely impeded their participation in the labour market. Consequently, the young men's permanent school exclusion and deprivation of social networks regarding school peers were further obstructed by a lack of opportunities to develop new social bonds with work peers because of low or nonparticipation in the labour market.

The next chapter discusses the findings chapters discusses the influence of permanent school exclusion on the offending behaviour and social exclusion using the theoretical framework that combines the Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The following discussion encapsulates the findings in relation to the three research questions:

RQ1 How do the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school influence the lives of young men experiencing permanent school exclusion?

RQ2 What are the implications of permanent school exclusion on criminal offending in young men?

RQ3 How does social exclusion manifest in young men who have experienced permanent school exclusion?

The discussion draws on a theoretical framework that combines the Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion to explain the influence that permanent school exclusion as a "conscious policy choice" (Bailey, 2017, p. 159)[4] had on young men in Belize City. The discussion suggests that the young men in this study experienced deep exclusion through multiple forms of exclusion across more than one domain or dimension of disadvantage, which resulted in severe negative consequences for their quality of life and future life chances. To accomplish this, the discussion loosely draws on the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM) developed by Levitas et al. (2007) – presented in Chapter 3 – with a comparison to research findings of previous Caribbean and International literature.

The chapter is organised into four main sections: Understanding the Influence of the Home, Neighbourhood, Peers, and School; Understanding Offending Behaviour Before and After Permanent School Exclusion; Understanding Experiences of Social Exclusion After Permanent School Exclusion; and ends with a Conclusion.

UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOME, NEIGHBOURHOOD, PEERS, AND SCHOOL

One of the most important findings from the study was that the young men shared very similar socioeconomic and family backgrounds and came from neighbourhoods in the same geographic location of the Southside of Belize City. In response to RQ1, this section briefly discusses their accounts of the interactions and processes that occurred within the social environments of the home, neighbourhood, peer group, and school leading up to their permanent school exclusion.

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[4] 4 Bailey (2017) referred to conscious policy choices in relation to policies within the labour market and welfare as drivers of growing inequality in the benefits of employment.

The section is divided into four sub-sections: Family and Home Relations, Neighbourhood Relations, School Relations, and Friendship Networks and Peer Groups.

Family and Home Relations

The family or home is considered a proximal influence in which a developing person spends most of their time engaged in a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations that is more likely to have a greater impact on development than the neighbourhood, school, and peer group (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The relationship that the young men in this study had with their families in childhood and early adolescence impacted their lives in complex ways before permanent school exclusion and played an important role in whether their social outcomes after permanent school exclusion were exclusionary or not.

The discussion on the family and home is divided into four headings: Family Socioeconomic Status; Family Relationship and Support; Parental Supervision; and Parental and Family Criminality.

Family Relationship and Support

As proposed in various iterations of the ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), the relations within the family are considered the most enduring interactions that provide immense influence that occur over an extended period in the developing person's life. Therefore, when considering family relationships and support, the family composition (Dermott and Pomati, 2016) and functioning (Farrington et al., 2013) were critical to understanding the nature and frequency of interactions in the home of the young men in this study.

As such, the family structure was reported to influence the quality and amount of time that both parents were available to provide emotional support to the young men while growing up. The primary family form of the young men was the lone-parent mother household. There was only one couple family among the households of the young men with both biological parents cohabiting in the same household. The absence of fathers or father figures in most of the homes and the reports that most of their fathers were not consistently involved in their lives suggested that the relationship and support were more limited. Mothers were identified as the parent whom the young men were more likely to approach when in need of emotional support, perhaps because most viewed their relationship with fathers or father figures as strained because those who were present were restrictive or less tolerant of indiscipline. Other studies in Belize and Trinidad and Tobago (Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Gayle et al., 2012), as well as the UK (Bowling and Phillips, 2006), have also noted that the absence of fathers in households due to parental separation or other family problems is a recurrent problem. More

specifically, it has also been suggested that in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010) the absence or disengagement of fathers or positive male role models in the home, and single-parent households based on family breakdown are linked to a less emotionally stable home environment and involvement of young Black people in gangs or other criminal youth groups.

The perceived closeness of the family unit based on the mother as the primary caregiver and emotional support, in most cases, the lone parent, appeared to influence the young men. This influence manifested in a growing shift in the interaction between the young men and their mothers as they grew into adolescence and continued to age. This was evident when the mothers and the young men's views of family closeness during adolescence diverged, with mothers being more likely to appraise the family relationships and closeness more positively than the young men. The implication was that as the young men grew older, they did not discuss their problems with their mothers, and in some instances, preferred to discuss them with their siblings or withhold details of their problems altogether. Being left in the dark about the young men's realities meant that the parents were unable to intervene early in situations that may have required emotional support. Research in the Caribbean (Blum et al., 2003; Blum and Ireland, 2004) and the UK (Collins and Laursen, 2004) has suggested that parental connectedness, which was absent in this study, was a protective factor against violence for young people under age 16 years, which all the young men in this study were before permanent school exclusion.

Family Socioeconomic Status

While there are suggestions that household income does not provide the most reliable guide to actual living conditions and living standards (Fahmy, 2017), subjective poverty has been proposed to understand people's perception of whether they live or have lived in poverty, or whether their income is below the standard needed to keep their family out of poverty (Levitas et al., 2007). Though an actual measure of income was not taken in my qualitative study, the interviews suggested that the households that the young men came from similar low-income households. Most of the young men and mothers openly conceded that they experienced financial hardship driven by a lack of support from a partner in situations of lone parenthood and job instability.

Undoubtedly, financial hardship played a significant role in access to economic resources experienced by the mothers and their families. This was mainly because most mothers did not have a partner in the household to help support the family and ease the financial burden of raising the young men and their siblings. However, unlike some studies that have recognised lone parenthood as a contributor to unstable homes (Anderson, 2002; Paton et al., 2009) this study does not consider family structure per

se as a sufficient contributor to the adverse future circumstances of the young men. In fact, the finding supports other propositions (e.g., Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994) that have argued that family functioning and the quality of family life were more consistently associated with delinquency than family structure. Therefore, in this study, the mothers' ability to moderate the effects of the financial challenges on their families in different ways, such as working multiple jobs demonstrated their desire to maintain a functioning household. The challenges of parents with poor resources in deprived neighbourhoods like the ones these mothers and their sons lived in made it even more difficult for them to be effective, suggesting as espoused by Smith and McVie (2003) and Webster et al. (2006), that parenting in poor communities needs support.

A positive indication of the mothers' ability to maintain a functioning household was their capacity to ensure that despite the financial circumstances of the family, the education of the young men remained a priority and was not disrupted. The mothers of the young men in this study, in most respects, defied the financial challenges when it came to prioritising the inclusion of their sons in education. Basic needs such as food and shelter were always met, and their schooling was never interrupted by unmet obligations like school fees, school backpacks, and stationery. This finding differs from previous research in Latin America and the Caribbean that suggested that households experiencing financial strain prioritised the basic needs of the home at the expense of education (Chevannes, 2001; Gayle, 2002; Marshall and Caldéron, 2006; Gayle and Levy, 2009).

For some, however, their attempts to address financial challenges associated with lone parenthood created linked problems driven by job instability, such as low parental supervision. Some mothers had to work multiple jobs, many of which were marginal, and menial jobs, and in doing so, resulted in demanding work schedules that were felt to have influenced the quality and consistency of parenting and effective child-raising. Though from a financial standpoint, it served their households better than the mothers who experienced long-term unemployment and economic marginality. Previous studies in the UK and US have also suggested that parental unemployment and economic challenges within the families of young people negatively affected parenting were an important risk factor for low educational attainment, later offending, and social exclusion outcomes of young people (Farrington et al., 2006; Piotrowska et al., 2015).

While Levitas et al (2007) acknowledge that there are differences in the necessities of children and the household, using possession of necessities as an indicator of material and economic resources is useful to understand the level of material deprivation that the young men perceived that they experienced. This material deprivation, real or perceived, contributed to how some of the young men viewed their life choices at the time. Hence, several of the young men tried to alleviate the financial

burden of their families by relocating to live with family members or running errands for neighbours. Some reported that when they wanted clothes or footwear like their peers that they resorted to early offending behaviour by committing acquisitive crimes such as burglary or theft, or financial extortion. For others, their acquisitive crimes eventually evolved into violent crimes like robbery to achieve and afford the material lifestyle that their peers lived. The involvement of some of the young men in acquisitive crimes in response to poverty as they were growing up, which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter, was consistent with previous research findings from longitudinal research in Jamaica and qualitative research in England that home environments characterised by poverty and a simultaneous desire for material goods among young people may serve as a precursor to risk-taking and offending behaviour (Samms-Vaughn, 2000; Scott and Spencer, 2013).

Parental Supervision

Low parental supervision was a major theme in the lives of the young men. The periods of low supervision that were described by the young men and mothers represented certain times of the day when the parents or other adults in the household were unavailable to provide supervision or otherwise predisposed due to work obligations. As mentioned earlier, one of the linked problems connected with attempts to alleviate the financial circumstance of the household in a sample of mostly lone parents was reduced supervision. As a consequence, the after-school activities of the young men were mostly unknown to the mothers. The mothers' low parental supervision or awareness of after-school and free-time activities of the young men and their peers because of their busy schedules corresponded to previous research findings among adolescents in which parental knowledge of activities with peers after school and during free time was low (Cutrín et al., 2017).

Low supervision was compounded by the young men being allowed more free time to socialise with neighbourhood peers during leisure periods like the weekend. These unsupervised times allowed them to engage in unstructured social activities with neighbourhood peers and served as contributors to their problem behaviour, early risk-taking, and early offending behaviour, such as underage drinking, recreational use of marijuana, and occasional fighting. Less parental supervision has been shown to contribute to behavioural problems among young people in the US and UK and disrupted the quality of the parent-child relationship (Hodgson and Webb, 2005; Haynie and Osgood, 2005; Bowling and Phillips, 2006; Piquero et al., 2007; Humayun and Scott, 2017).

However, there were some instances when the young men in this study were adequately supervised. The home situations in which they were heavily supervised were when fathers or stepfathers were present to regulate their activities and interaction with neighbourhood friends. During their childhood,

the young men considered the boundaries or restrictions on their activities and behaviour to be excessive. This was an interesting finding because some of the mothers and young men reported that the mothers were not strict in enforcing boundaries in the same way that the fathers or stepfathers were. Therefore, the deaths of stepfathers (not biological fathers) during childhood or early adolescence of three of the six young men resulted in inconsistent parenting and left a gap in the otherwise consistent daily supervision that the mothers were unable to maintain. With the loss of that parental guidance and supervision came a different parenting style and greater freedom of unsupervised activity with neighbourhood friends. The disciplinary role that fathers or father figures played in this study was particularly important because this study, like others in the Caribbean, suggested that the roles of fathers or father figures have been identified as protectors, providers, nurturers, and role models with their presence enabling more discipline in the lives of young men (Chevannes, 2001; Gayle et al., 2004; Nurse, 2004).

Another significant area of analysis is the role that the stability of the home played in the differential social outcomes of the young men. Levitas et al (2007)'s proposition of 'social resources' was useful to look at the experience of separation from family or institutionalisation. Supervision in terms of whether the young men were ever incarcerated or removed from the care of their parents as children must be considered. Still, it does not immediately suggest that the family as an important social network and proximal influence did not provide social support, but it does mean that there is a constraint to support for overall well-being when it is not available daily. This was extremely significant to this study since three of the six young men had either been incarcerated or lived away from their families before permanent school exclusion. Some young men lived with extended family during early adolescence due to financial insecurity or early offending behaviour. For one young man, the situation that led to permanent school exclusion compelled incarceration when he was criminally charged and remanded to prison. These periods of a lull in supervision were critically important to the successful transition to adulthood.

Parental and Family Criminality

The role that family criminality played in the outcomes of some of the young men suggested that socialisation within the family context was important to their lives, particularly in relation to gender socialisation and masculine identity formation. Many of the young men reported that they were directly exposed to male family members (i.e., siblings, cousins, uncles, and a father) who engaged in criminal activities or were imprisoned. Several of the young men had older male family members as key members of gangs that they socialised with and respected while growing up. This was consequential when considering that most of the sample at some point had no fathers or father figures

as positive modelling for masculinity identity formation. Different situations suggested that gang involvement for some young men was, in part, attributed to the gang involvement of family members. For example, one young man joined the same gang as his older cousins to whom he was exposed throughout his childhood; another eventually joined a gang because the enemies of his deceased older brother sought to hold him accountable for his brother's transgressions; and another acknowledged that his father and uncles as gang leaders were the targets of ongoing criminal investigations by the police. Young (2019) similarly suggested that 80 percent of gang-involved young people in Belize City reported having family members in gangs, including cousins, brothers, and uncles. Likewise, Beckett et al. (2013) in England supported the notion that one of the main reasons young men joined gangs was that a network of family members and friends was part of a gang.

Neighbourhood Relations

Unlike the family or home which is considered a proximal influence on the developing person, the neighbourhood is considered a distal influence, which is presumed to have less pronounced effects on development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). The significance of this notion challenges us to consider the processes of interaction and exchange in specific cultural, social, and historical contexts that the young men learned the skills, values, and knowledge of the neighbourhood in which they grew up (Moll, 2000). This sub-section is discussed under three main headings: Neighbourhood Characteristics, Neighbourhood Influence and Social Support, and Exposure to Neighbourhood Violence.

<u>Neighbourhood Characteristics</u>

The ecological theory and social exclusion approach both allow for the analysis of the disadvantages and destabilisation of neighbourhoods from historical and contextual processes to understand how disadvantages occur over time (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Webster et al., 2006). During the period that the young men in this study grew up, the literature suggested that Belize's homicide rate increased markedly between 2000 and 2010 from 17 to 42 per 100,000 and consistently remained over 30 per 100,000 since 2007 (Gayle et al., 2016). A proliferation of gangs in Belize City (Peirce and Veyrat-Pontet, 2013) resulted in disproportionate homicide rates in Belize City, which led to its labelling as the "epicentre of violence" in Belize, with Southside having a concentration of gangs, violence, and homicides (Gayle and Mortis, 2010, p. 64). Moreover, the young men in this study have also grown up during a period when the national poverty rate was 43 percent in 2009 and kept rising to 52 percent in 2018 (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2021) with concentrated poverty in Southside. This historical context is important to appreciate that the common theme across the young men's

interviews in this study was that all the neighbourhoods in the Southside had a shared reality of cumulative disadvantage and social exclusion through poverty, economic marginality, high rates of violence, a proliferation of gangs, and stigmatisation.

Researchers such as Pitts (2001) and Smith and McVie (2003) have suggested that research examining the emergence of offending should consider how risk factors interrelate by merging the life histories of individuals and the effects of the neighbourhood context. The Southside neighbourhoods were described as gang areas characterised by conflict, mistrust, low social cohesion, limited job opportunities, high rates of poverty, and the prevalence of violence, with many unsupervised children and young people being out of school. The descriptors for the neighbourhoods among interviewees ranged from "gang areas", "deadliest gang areas", and "garrisons" to "hood." More specifically, the shared attributes of the neighbourhoods that the young men grew up in included persistent violence such as physical fights, seeing neighbours or friends harmed or killed by gunmen, high police presence, gang presence, gang rivalry, drug dealing, and other criminal activities. Additionally, all the neighbourhoods were described as structurally disadvantaged and marginalised because they lacked essential support since there was an absence of public services provided for some residents' homes such as access to water and electricity. These descriptions suggested that the young men were aware of the low socio-economic status and poor reputation of their neighbourhoods and were consistent with descriptions of Southside neighbourhoods in a previous study in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010).

Neighbourhood Influence and Social Support

In considering Johnston et al.'s (2000) finding that young people in a locality in England felt that the area in which they lived shaped both their opportunities and life chances due to local crime and criminals, my study identified a link between neighbourhood gang presence and the level of crime and violence. Firstly, all the neighbourhoods were perceived to have an active neighbourhood gang. The mothers described the neighbourhood as a space that was unsafe for children and young people because of prevalent violence between young men from different gangs, which manifested in frequent shootings and murders. There was a fear that other residents might engage in criminality outside of the neighbourhood, which can attract retaliations to the neighbourhood and possible victimisation of their sons because of the stigma on male neighbourhood residents. Previous studies on social violence in Belize (Gayle and Mortis, 2010) and the Caribbean (Gayle et al., 2012) have suggested that social violence among inner-city youth in neighbourhoods is driven by a feud, which is an endless violent relationship between two groups located within reach of each other in a setting of scarce resources and poor central political authority, including an ineffective policing and judiciary. In these neighbourhoods, individuals compete to meet their economic and social needs. Consequently, young

men living in harsh neighbourhood environments, including the ones in my study, increase their chances of survival by organising themselves into social units that can have an advantage over others.

A more distressing concern of the mothers, which may have direct implications on the offending behaviour and eventual gang involvement of the young men in this study, was the unpredictability of gang members turning against each other or fear that their sons' neutrality may be misconstrued as a lack of neighbourhood allegiance which can result in harm. Issues related to neighbourhood cohesion and solidarity were evident in occasions of intra-gang rivalry promulgated by older and more seasoned gang members that resulted in the fragmentation of the gangs. Most of the mothers and young men suggested that from an early age, they were aware of the expectation of the young men in the neighbourhood, but also the stigma associated with being a resident of specific neighbourhoods. Therefore, the risk of disassociating or rejecting a gang was potential harm or death. The finding suggests that most of the young men at an early age before permanent school exclusion had some degree of gang involvement because of the inherent risks of living in the neighbourhood. Associating with a gang, albeit reluctantly, served to minimise the risks for themselves and family. Research in the US (Anderson, 1999) and the UK (Brookman et al., 2011; Berg et al., 2020) has advanced the notion of a street code to explain social interactions within the neighbourhood context. Within these Black inner-city communities, characterised by poverty and deprivation, the code based on respect is established and enforced mostly by the segment of the community that is 'street-oriented,' but the 'decent' segment of the community, despite their opposition to the values of the code, are reluctantly governed by the code and encourage their children to live by them.

There were also neighbourhood-level social divisions based on mistrust of other residents and constant fear of being burgled by neighbours. Pitts and Hope (1997) and Pitts (2008) in their work on French and British communities, as well as Black and Minority Ethnic communities in East London, posited that crime and violence in high-crime or gang-affected areas were committed by and against their residents. Nevertheless, some parents in my study identified cooperation among mothers in the neighbourhood when the young men were in trouble or detained by the police. The fact that this was one of the only times that the mothers reported that parents supported each other suggested that reliance on other parents to help in monitoring the young men was low. The finding supported research evidence in the US that the neighbourhood influenced how parents managed young people since lower or higher levels of parental monitoring were based on lesser or greater collective efficacy in the neighbourhood in which parents can count on other adults in the neighbourhood to assist in monitoring young people (Beyers et al., 2003; Loeber et al., 2005; Byrnes et al., 2011).

As mentioned before, the ubiquitous presence of gangs represented an inescapable reality; therefore, their accounts of their exposure to violence mostly revolved around the neighbourhood and its gang. The young men's exposure to violence in their neighbourhood represented traumatic and distressing life events, such as witnessing the murder of friends, violent gang fights, or witnessing older gang members assault younger ones. The ages of the young men made them particularly vulnerable to the risk of harm from older gang members. Studies in the UK (Harding, 2014; Pitts, 2020) have argued that there is an age-based hierarchy within the street gangs that separate younger and older gang members, while others in Belize and the Caribbean (Pinheiro, 2006; Young, 2019) have emphasised that violence among peers increased as they aged with a marked increase in the rates of violence and homicide among young men around age 15.

Interestingly, most of the young men claimed that exposure to neighbourhood violence did not influence them to commit violence at school or in the neighbourhood. These rationalisations may have reflected the perception of the young men, but their accounts were replete with evidence of their participation in school violence and involvement in early offending, suggesting a normalisation of violence in their lives. The normalisation of neighbourhood violence also seemed to influence their sense of safety with some rationalising that the imminent dangers were from outsiders and that the risk of harm was not unique to their neighbourhood but was a part of the overall landscape of the Southside. Since all the young men grew up and resided in impoverished areas with high crime levels and offending by adult residents that exposed them to neighbourhood violence daily and weekly, it appeared that their observation and learning of the values of their neighbourhood as a macrosystem factor. This may have contributed to a normalisation of antisocial and offending behaviour as socially acceptable which corresponded with previous research in Belize and the US (McCord et al., 2001; Young, 2019).

School Relations

Like the neighbourhood, the processes and interactions in the school environment are examined to understand the extent of their distal influence on the young men in this study (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). The perceptions and experiences at secondary school are discussed under three headings: Perception of School, Masculinity and Disciplinary Behavioural Management, and Masculinity and School Violence.

<u>Perception of School</u>

The importance of school as a place for learning was underscored by most of the young men in the study. They had a positive orientation to school, and some considered it to be a space for learning complemented by supportive teachers, mostly females; while for others, it represented a safe place that kept them out of trouble as a deterrent from the negative neighbourhood and peer influences. This interest in school was represented by self-reported high attendance and low truancy by most of the young men and suggested that they appreciated the role of a positive school climate. In addition, most of the young men acknowledged that their pre-school exclusion perspective of school was that it served as a space for the formation of friendship groups. Similar findings in the Caribbean, UK, and Canada have suggested that a positive school climate serves several purposes in the lives of young people, including friendship formation and maintenance, attainment of credentials that could lead to the obtainment of a good job, and a feeling of safety that helps to lower the engagement in violent offending (Anderson, 2002; Munn and Lloyd, 2005; Crooks et al., 2007; Knight, 2016).

The young men's perception of their schooling experience was often connected with the subjective worth they attached to how they were treated by specific teachers and school principals. Teachers and school principals who were supportive and treated them fairly in their aspirations or achievements were viewed positively. Several of the young men and mothers identified teachers who supported and provided guidance, as well as assisted them with their homework after school. Notably, positive interactions were mostly attributed to female teachers or staff. Like the mothers, sisters, and partners, the young men reported that the female teachers were more likely to support them at school. Similar findings from early research in Jamaica (Parry 1996) suggested that while there was a disproportionate representation of female teachers in schools that left a deficit in male teachers as role models or authority figures, female teachers had a more positive relationship with male pupils compared to male teachers who preferred female pupils because they were motivated and less disruptive.

Conversely, negative interactions with teachers or school principals helped to sully their experience. This was particularly noteworthy when the young men were involved in behaviours that attracted disciplinary measures by the school without opportunities to explain themselves. Several examples of a power imbalance between the young men as pupils and school authority, such as perceived false accusations by teachers and school principals, and insinuated threats by male teachers, left the young men feeling helpless and angry toward school and adult authority. Several studies in Belize, the UK, New Zealand, and the Caribbean have also suggested that negative interactions between teachers and pupils, such as threats and excessive punishment, can influence the respect level for teachers, truancy,

and the oppositional conduct of pupils in school (Blair, 2001; Pottinger and Stair, 2009; Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Sutherland, 2011; Gayle et al., 2012; Knight and Ogunkola, 2016). Male pupils in Jamaica have reported being threatened, beaten up, treated unfairly, and excessively punished at school by male educators, unlike females, which contributed to increased oppositional conduct during school (Pottinger and Stair, 2009).

<u>Masculinity and Disciplinary Behavioural Management</u>

There was strong evidence of issues related to gender identity formation within the schooling careers of the young men in this study. Some of the young men felt targeted because they were male pupils. Interaction with other pupils at school was felt to be misunderstood because of their means of expression as young men, including their teasing, and taunting of each other. The disconnect between the teachers and young men often resulted in more males being disproportionately punished, which corresponded with several studies in the Caribbean and the UK (Figueroa, 2000; Maguire et al., 2003; Smith and Green, 2007; Plummer, 2007; Daniel, 2011; Hatton, 2013). More importantly, the perception of targeting and discrimination, which disadvantaged some of the young men, was felt to be based on mistaken interpretations. While there are no specific studies to explain this occurrence in Belize, Blair (2001) in the UK suggested that explanations for disproportionality in punishment ranged from cultural differences that led to mistaken interpretations of body language, dress, and personality traits of Black pupils by White teachers, negative stereotyping of Black pupils, and resistance by Black pupils toward teachers.

Other causes for conflict included disciplinary action taken against the young men for socialising with other male pupils whom teachers considered to be difficult or disruptive. The friendship groups in school represented the connections they had outside of school, so most of the friendship groups were based on their neighbourhood. The activities of those friendship groups included socialising in obscure areas of the school. The visual representation of this type of socialising was reported by the young men to influence the views of teachers who thought they were troubled young men, so they were often warned about assembling. Repeated violation of the warnings was perceived as an unwillingness to conform to school policies and contributed to negative teacher-student interactions. The evidence from my interviews suggested that the young men were aware of the neighbourhood influence on their friendship groups and while it served as a show of their masculinity, its primary purpose was to protect them against harm, which was in line with the finding of Gayle and Mortis (2010) in Belize. In contrast, the perception of teachers suggested that the teachers' views were more in line with the work of Evans (1999, p. 25) in the Caribbean, who purported that the expressions of masculinity at

schools by young men were linked to "crew or gang" membership that may inadvertently contribute to oppositional behaviour to school policies.

Masculinity and School Violence

The school was paradoxically considered a safer place than the neighbourhood because it prevented their involvement in early risk-taking and offending behaviour, but the school also exposed them to bullying from teachers and rival pupils from different neighbourhoods. The latter ultimately resulted in most of their fixed-term and permanent school exclusion. School violence, including bullying, was reported to be prevalent in all the secondary schools that the young men attended but they claimed to still feel safer at school than in their neighbourhood.

The witnessing or experience with bullying was divided into two categories. The first was bullying among pupils who were not gang-involved or stigmatised as being from a neighbourhood. This was mostly between older pupils and younger pupils, which entailed name-calling, financial extortion, and physical fights. The young men in this study asserted that they did not experience this type of bullying because they considered themselves to be tougher or had a more serious reputation than other pupils. This is similar to Gayle and Mortis' (2010) finding that in secondary schools in Belize, young men who did not want to appear soft as other pupils relied on violence as a show of their masculinity.

On the other hand, they were vulnerable to conflict based on neighbourhood rivalries. Their exposure to this kind of bullying was based on the presence of pupils at school who were either from a rival neighbourhood or members of gangs who initiated altercations and at times invited non-school-going friends or gang members of varying ages to confront them after school. In these situations, it resulted in them either having to engage in a physical fight, run for safety, carry weapons for protection, or request support from their neighbourhood friends or gang. These experiences of the neighbourhood or gang-based bullying subverted the role of the school as a safe space, which is similar to findings in previous studies in Belize, the Caribbean, and French and British communities that high levels of school-based violence, including fights, bullying, and homicide between pupils, as well as groups of pupils or gangs that may come from other schools, can transform the school to a space for the actualisation of neighbourhood conflict (Pitts and Hope, 1997; Gayle and Mortis, 2010; UNDP, 2010; Williams, 2013).

The interactions among the young men at school significantly reflected the masculine identity formation that occurred within peer groups in the neighbourhood that the young men came from. Issues related to gang conflict in the neighbourhoods did not only contribute to friendship formation along those lines, but they also negatively influenced the way young men behaved in school. The

young men treated perceived slights or disrespect by rivals at school with intolerance because of the possible implication to their reputation as well as that of their neighbourhood; therefore, their grievances were often addressed through physical means rather than a request for support from the school authority. The authority of the peer group that shared similar realities from their neighbourhood or friendship groups, competed with and at times supplanted the authority of adults at school with masculinity playing an important role in how school interactions were perceived. In this context, Anderson's (1999) street code has some utility when used to explain how the notion of 'respect' was transposed to the school environment and maintained its hegemony over the actions of the young men as pupils. For Anderson, respect as part of a broader street culture demanded that disrespect was met with a willingness to defend one's status through violence,

This often resulted in a hostile environment that pitted groups against each other and manifested in arguments, physical fights, and at times the involvement of police to quell situations that were overwhelming for teachers. Previous research in the Caribbean and the UK supported the link between physicality and reputation as central to masculinity gender formation among young men in school, with young men embracing the symbolism of masculine strength such as aggression and anger and engaging in violence, while simultaneously being less likely to report violence to adult school personnel (Plummer and Simpson, 2007; Pitts, 2007; Plummer et al., 2008; Gentle-Genitty et al., 2017).

There were also situations when stigmatisation based on the neighbourhood of the young men led to them being accosted during their journey to and from school. The situations either contributed to school disaffection, physical disengagement from school, or resulted in the carrying of weapons for protection in contravention of school policies. Several young men complained of being harassed, threatened, and assaulted on their way to school. For some of the young men, this represented another layer of violence as they tried to get to school. In some instances, it was reported to lead to a cycle of retaliation when the young men returned with neighbourhood friends at the end of the school day. For others, it represented a reason for conflict with school authorities as their justification for carrying weapons to protect themselves was not accepted and upon detection resulted in their immediate permanent school exclusion. The implication for the schooling experience of the young men was that navigating to, within, and from school acted as an extension of the microcosm of the gang dynamic that characterised the neighbourhoods that they came from but simultaneously constrained their safe participation in education. Therefore, the experience of the young men with neighbourhood conflict being transposed to the school setting was consistent with previous work in the Caribbean that suggested that a violent school environment or its environs may serve as one of

the most prevalent factors associated with violence involvement among young people (Pinheiro, 2006; Gentle-Genitty et al., 2017).

Perhaps the most troubling finding on exposure to school violence, albeit verbal or physical, was the negative interaction between some of the young men and male teachers. Male teachers were considered instigators of conflicts who simultaneously campaigned for their permanent school exclusion; therefore, it was highlighted by some as a reason for occasional self-exclusion through truancy. In fact, some male teachers were reportedly so provocative in their interaction with the young men that the teachers with implied association with rival gangs would issue thinly veiled threats, or at times physically engage the young men to escalate the situation. Some of the young men felt stigmatised and discriminated against by the male teachers because of their residence or reputation. It was claimed that teachers also sought to emasculate them in front of the classroom or demoralise them from returning to school. Some studies have suggested that young people with low positive interactions with teachers were more vulnerable to developing bonds with other alienated young people that may reinforce negative social cues that were learned in life, including the "efficacy of the use of violence and poor conflict resolution" (Crooks et al., 2007, p. 270) or gang involvement (Blum and Ireland, 2004; Katz and Fox, 2010; Williams, 2013).

Friendship Networks and Peer Groups

The final discussion on the social environment of the young men is about their peer groups. Studies (Zielinski and Bradshaw, 2006; Crooks et al., 2007; Dong and Weibe, 2018) have argued that as children grow older their peer groups increase in importance. The proposition of these studies provides an analytical focus on how the young men in my study formed and maintained friendship groups, the quality and frequency of their interactions, the social activities that they engaged in, and the social support they received or provided. This sub-section is discussed under two main headings: Friendship Network of School Peers and Friendship Network of Neighbourhood Peers.

<u>Friendship Network of School Peers</u>

Reynolds (2007) suggested that for Caribbean young people in the UK, the formation and maintenance of friendship groups can be influenced by restricted geographic mobility when young people do not move outside of the area where they live. This emphasises the importance of the school as a space for the formation of friendship groups during the transition to secondary school. However, since all the young men in my study were permanently school-excluded in Forms 1 or 2, most only had one year to make school friends. This severely obstructed their formation of friendship groups at school with other young people who were geographically or demographically different from themselves and their

neighbourhood friends. As a result, most of them did not have school friends to talk about, and the few who did only referred to them in terms of loss of social contact relative to neighbourhood friends. Notwithstanding the noticeable limitation to friendship formation reaching its full potential, some of the young men were able to make a few friends, though most would eventually be unable to sustain them after permanent school exclusion. This finding provides compelling support for Scott and Spencer's (2013) suggestion that school-excluded African-Caribbean young people in England missed social contact with school friends because being at school with friends provided a different experience from their neighbourhood friends.

Neighbourhood friends were the main peer group that the young men socialised with at school, which meant that the social network at school was not differentiated from the neighbourhood.

Friendship Network of Neighbourhood Peers

Outside of the school, the friends that were talked about the most were friends from the young men's neighbourhoods. Many of these neighbourhood friends were young men their age who they grew up with or were older and already a part of the neighbourhood gang. It is important to emphasise that gang-involved young men were endogenous to the neighbourhood and therefore not to be viewed as a standout element. For the most part, they shared similar socioeconomic realities and stigmatisation of their locality that identified them based on the neighbourhood from an early age. The interactions within the neighbourhood for most of the young men were characterised by socialising to some extent during the weekdays and increased interaction on the weekend. However, most of the mothers maintained either on their own or through the presence of a paternal figure, supervision that limited the young men's interaction with neighbourhood friends. However, as mentioned earlier, the supervision, for three of the six young men, was eventually undermined when important paternal figures were lost largely through bereavement. Consequently, many of the interactions with neighbourhood friends during the early adolescent years were characterised by a drift toward offending behaviour, such as underage drinking, smoking marijuana, and petty acquisitive crimes. The normal presence of gang-involved friends in the neighbourhood suggested that the likelihood of eventual gang involvement supported previous longitudinal research findings in England, where young people who reported having more gang-involved friends had higher levels of gang involvement (Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001).

UNDERSTANDING OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR BEFORE AND AFTER PERMANENT SCHOOL EXCLUSION

In response to RQ2 on the implications of permanent school exclusion on criminal offending, I take into consideration that all the young men in this study were criminally charged during their

adolescence; therefore, this section aims to link their permanent school exclusion with their offending behaviour before and after school exclusion. This section is divided into six sub-sections: Critical Life Events; Offending Behaviour before Permanent School Exclusion; Permanent School Exclusion as a Critical Life Event; Drifting Towards and Entrenching of Offending Behaviour; Post-school Exclusion Offending; and Gang Membership and Involvement and Masculinity.

<u>Critical Life Events</u>

Analysis of the social environment of the young men in this study up to this point has suggested that several interactions and processes served to disadvantage the young men and their families while growing up. These individual and collective experiences helped to shape their lives from an early age and their families. However, there is an added analysis that Levitas et al. (2007) emphasised as essential to understanding the risk factors of social exclusion. This is the collection and analysis of critical life events, such as changes in personal relationship status, bereavement, changes in employment status, and incarceration. The pivot toward these specific life events helps to sharpen our understanding of the life-altering situations that defined and constrained the choices and capabilities of the young men.

The examination of the life-altering events during the young men's childhood or early adolescence found that they were mostly presented as negative, some greater than others. The extent to which the young men experienced personal loss had significant consequences on their identity and lives and contributed to a substantial and lasting change in their life chances, with family trauma and bereavement being prominently featured. Bereavement was mainly in the form of the personal loss of a parental figure, family member, or close friend.

Webster et al. (2006) have argued that life events like bereavement have significant effects on the nature, direction, and outcomes of young people's transition to adulthood, which allows for young people with shared social and economic experiences to have different transitions partly because of those critical events. The importance of this is that the analysis allows us to examine individual agency and decision-making in terms of personal choice within a frame of shared realities such as economic marginality and poverty. For example, the experience of three of the six young men in my study underscores how the loss of a parental figure due to illness can alter the quality of life and socioeconomic conditions of a household. In my study three stepfathers and a biological father had died; however, the former was during the childhood and early adolescence of the young men. The biological father died shortly after the birth of the young man, but he was raised by a stepfather from infancy and remained in the household. Nevertheless, the loss of the stepfathers ushered in a

worsening financial condition and propelled the families deeper into economic marginality which they had little control over. The loss of a parental figure who was a breadwinner directly influenced the continuity of the quality of life of the family, especially since many of the mothers were unemployed at the time. Therefore, unlike findings from Gayle and Mortis (2010) which suggested that young men in Belize related more to their mothers as a reliable source of money over their stepfathers, the evidence in this study suggested that the stepfather's financial contribution was one of the main reasons that maintained the quality of life of the young men and their families.

The stepfathers were also acknowledged as being positive influences on the young men's aspirational outlook toward education. Before the loss of their stepfathers, the young men and mothers reported that the family considered education as a key element of their progression. The collective ambition of the family was perceived as a distinguishing feature of it as a unit from other families and residents of their low-income neighbourhoods despite their shared socioeconomic condition. It is with this background that the continuity or discontinuity of educational aspiration or expectation over time is situated. In citing Fleury and Gilles' (2018) suggestion in their meta-analysis that there is an intergenerational transmission of education from parents to children, I put forward that the transmission of educational aspirations or outlook requires an enabling environment that is not overwhelmed by disadvantages.

The finding that cumulative disadvantage occurred after the loss of stepfathers was salient. The loss of stepfathers as parental figures represented a concurrent loss of parental supervision and boundaries to their social activities while growing up. The stepfather's role was to limit the interaction between the young men and their peers within their neighbourhood while they were growing up. The young men who experienced this loss were exceedingly clear that this was a consequential point when their socialisation within the neighbourhood increased because the strict supervision was not sustained by the mothers and would eventually help to shape their drift toward early offending behaviour. Previous research findings in Belize and the UK have likewise suggested that the loss of parental figures, including fathers or father figures, because of death, imprisonment or migration resulted in a lack of contact with young men and in many instances contributed to their depression or aggression, offending, and at times a loss of control by mothers, which played a part in gang involvement during mid-adolescence (Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Young et al., 2013; Vaswani and Gillon, 2019).

Researchers like Johnston et al (2000) have suggested that family illness and death can create or contribute to tension among family members, especially when it involved care or financial loss. For this study, there was evidence that the death of an important familial figure - grandmother and

matriarch - of a young man's family further eroded already strained familial bonds that weakened the family as a social network that he relied on for social support. He would eventually have an altercation with a family member who insisted on pursuing criminal charges against him.

Loss of a family member can also have direct adverse effects as is the case of a young man whose older brother was murdered. His gang-involved brother's reputation implicated him in several murders, which upon his death set into motion long-term depression in the mother which affected the function of the household, as well as the young man's eventual gang involvement. He became gang-involved because his brother's rivals wanted to harm him for his brother's alleged past crimes. The neighbourhood gang became an important refuge and social network, which resulted in inclusion in the gang network, but later served as a risk factor for social exclusion from other social networks and opportunities, and his criminal career. Johnston et al (2000) and MacDonald (2006) in the UK similarly found that family experiences, including bereavement, served as turning points following uneventful or normal transitions up until that point, which helped to set in motion the formation of problematic relationships, such as that experienced by the young man in this study whose brother's death influenced his gang involvement and a subsequent gang rivalry in the neighbourhood.

Bereavement due to the loss of neighbourhood friends before and after permanent school exclusion also proved to be important in shaping the course of the lives of the young men in this study. For some young men who had already started to drift toward the neighbourhood gang or socialising with neighbourhood peers based on their residence, the experience of loss of close friends to violence had the effect of entrenching views about violence and gang involvement. Almost all the young men had stories about close neighbourhood friends who were violently killed, but for some, it catalysed further entrenchment into the neighbourhood gang. Witnessing friends being killed made them perceive the necessity for insulation through their association with the gang that the neighbourhood and its residents were already labelled and stigmatised for.

The next sub-section takes a closer look at the early offending behaviour of the young men in this study, with consideration of their social environments and critical life events before permanent school exclusion.

<u>Offending Behaviour before Permanent School Exclusion</u>

The interrelationship between the home, neighbourhood, peers, and school included interactions, processes, and different forms of disadvantage that influenced the young men's offending behaviour before permanent school exclusion in different ways. The significance of acknowledging this interrelationship in the analysis is because a focus on one social environment provides an overly

simplistic model in looking at developmental outcomes, including the risks for adolescent offending (Chung and Steinberg, 2006).

The interviews suggested that while the home and the neighbourhood experienced social and economic marginality during the childhood and early adolescence of the young men, parental supervision was associated with different outcomes in early offending behaviour. Most of the young men whose stable supervision limited or restricted their early interaction with neighbourhood peers and exposure to neighbourhood factors started their offending behaviour after the loss of the parental figures who enforced supervision. This exemplified Bronfenbrenner's proposition that a healthy home environment can produce stable outcomes for young people. However, the loss of the parental figures as a critical life event set into motion processes and events that generated other outcomes when the discipline and supervision were not sustained by the mothers. This finding emphasised the significance of critical life events in changing the social environment of the home through reduced parental supervision and contributed to a change in their interaction with the neighbourhood through increased socialising with neighbourhood friends. For others, permanent school exclusion, which will be discussed in the next section, was the critical life event that changed the presence and interactions in the social environments. Nonetheless, Deutsch et al. (2012) using the ecological theory to examine the pathways to delinquency among African American and European American young people similarly found that low parental control in high and low-risk neighbourhoods influenced their delinquency through its effect on deviant peer affiliation.

Johnston et al. (2000) and MacDonald's (2006) research on young people with a common experience of economic marginality in a specific locality in England provided some useful insight into the development of early offending behaviour that is of significance to this study. Johnston et al (2000, p. 28) argued that the locality in which young people came from shaped their youth transitions through opportunities and life chances emanating from a "local economy of crime" whose existence served to support the engagement and participation of residents in criminal activity. For MacDonald (2006), the transition starts with an early phase of criminal apprenticeship which is shaped by learning and engaging in acquisitive offending, such as shoplifting, petty thieving, speeding in stolen vehicles, underage drinking, and recreational drug use, which he suggested were rooted in boredom and helped to build camaraderie among the young people. While there are striking similarities in the early stages of petty offending in early adolescence of the young people in Johnston et al. (2000) and MacDonald's (2006) studies and my study, my findings suggest that neighbourhood effects and masculinity identity formation among peers, especially in relation to their collective identity as a stigmatised

neighbourhood, provided a more substantive explanation to early offending than boredom, though camaraderie among young people was suggestive of a collective identity formation.

This study found that the neighbourhood characterised by the presence of early offending peers, gangs, crime, and drugs was an enduring social environment where the young men spent a lot of time being influenced outside of school, which seemed to have provided the foundation for their early involvement in petty offending and recreational drug use. During the young men's early adolescence, the self-reported offending among neighbourhood friends seemed to have been perceived as a rite of passage and expression of masculinity. Most of their offending was non-violent, such as socialising and visiting entertainment venues while under the legal adult age, underage drinking, and recreational marijuana use. Most of the young men considered recreational marijuana to be an ordinary commodity that they encountered and used among their peers within the neighbourhood. The notion that recreational drug use or any other forms of early offending among the young men and neighbourhood peers were considered normal activities to engage in seems to be in line with the "normalisation thesis" discussed by Shiner and Newburn (1997, pp. 511-513). Within that context, it would suggest that since these activities were understood as normal parts of growing up in disadvantaged and marginalised neighbourhoods, the lack of participation would make them different from their peers. As such, the offending behaviour that the young men engaged in mainly occurred and was reinforced among their peer group. Plummer et al. (2008) and Plummer and Geofroy (2010, p. 6) in the Caribbean suggested that young men during their school years underwent a "rite of passage" in which the transition to adulthood was spent in the company of peers that ensured the conformity to "localised" hegemonic masculinity identity in their social network.

There was also evidence of an evolution to non-violent and violent acquisitive crimes, such as theft and robbery, respectively. The accounts of the young men suggest that while some of the acquisitive crimes were rooted in material and resource deprivation, especially to acquire the material amenities and lifestyle as their peers, others were driven by peer pressure and gender identity. Studies in the UK and the Caribbean have considered the role of masculinity in peer relationships and its implications on offending behaviour whereas certain features of masculinity were developed among young men, including learning to be risk-takers from an early age, early delinquency, toughness, and physical strength (Barker, 1997; Bailey et al., 1998; Francis, 1999; Jackson, 2003; Figueroa, 2004).

Another important finding was that many of the young men, including those who were not gang-involved at the time, reported having early interactions with the police and the criminal justice system. These early interactions were mostly negative in their neighbourhood and shaped the attitudes of the young men toward the police. Encounters with the police mostly centred around the police conduct

of arbitrary searches on the young men, their homes, family members, and friends often without an official warrant, to legally justify the profiling and denial of rights. These routinely negative interactions with the police in their neighbourhood contributed to resentment, suspicion, and alienation of the young men that often resulted in a relationship characterised by cynicism and mistrust. This was an interesting finding because most of the young men congregated on the street corners of their neighbourhoods with friends, which led to early criminalisation and stigmatisation when the police treated them as criminals from a young age. Researchers in the UK have suggested that young people who reside in neighbourhoods with local gangs are likely to be approached and assumed to be gang members by the police because of their residence or socialising with neighbourhood friends who were gang members, leading to adverse interactions that can contribute to the negative perception toward the police and motivation to join the gangs (Ralphs et al., 2009; Alleyne and Wood, 2011).

While all the young men in this study self-reported that they engaged in early offending behaviour, only two were criminally charged prior to permanent school exclusion. Most notably, in the chronological analysis of offending behaviour, it is important to point out that the time lag between the criminal charges and permanent school exclusion for both young men was very short. Permanent school exclusion for one young man resulted from a criminal charge of possession of an unlicensed firearm during a melee with a rival neighbourhood gang in which he stated that he picked up a rival's fallen firearm. The other young man's criminal charge for robbery while attending school was according to him based on defending the reputation of his neighbourhood and gang in the presence of members of an allied gang who challenged the seriousness of his gang's reputation and dared him to commit the robbery. Emler and Reicher (1995) have suggested that young people seek to be known as the instigators of delinquent acts, with delinquency reputations being their goal. More importantly, the finding underscores the negative outcomes associated with early interaction with the police and the juvenile justice system, such as lower chances of labelled young men graduating from secondary school or staying in school in a subsequent period, as well as reinforcing already established reputations (Bernburg and Krohn, 2003; Emler, 2009).

Perhaps the most pivotal finding about the early offending behaviour of the young men is the role that out-of-school fixed-term school exclusion played in contributing to structural disadvantage. An unintended consequence was its contribution to early offending by removing young men from the school environment and relocating them to their homes and neighbourhood where they socialised with neighbourhood friends. This change in their institutional status and access to the school environment corresponded with a change in their access to the neighbourhood environment. This

finding implores a deeper analysis of the role that school exclusion played in not only the offending behaviour of the young men in this study but also its contribution to the multidimensional disadvantage that can influence social exclusion.

<u>Permanent School Exclusion as a Critical Life Event</u>

One of Levitas et al.'s (2007) three broad areas under which domains of exclusion are identified in the B-SEM is Participation. Specifically, under the domain 'Culture, Education, and Skills' they identify 'institutionalised culture capital' to refer to the acquisition of formal educational qualifications through access to education and educational attainment. From a social exclusion standpoint, the policy of permanent school exclusion provides schools with an institutional and structural advantage in removing undesired pupils. Therefore, its examination allows for an analysis of the differential power relations between the school and pupil that ultimately served as a critical life event and denial of participation in education, which set into motion a dynamic process of social exclusion that limited the choices and capabilities of the young men of this study and impacted their future life chances.

Fixed-term School Exclusion

When looking at the structural factors that influenced educational participation, *fixed-term school exclusion* emerged as the first phase of school exclusion. Fixed-term school exclusion was a critical feature of the schooling experience of most (except one) of the six young men. The fact that only one young man out of the sample did not experience fixed-term school exclusion prior to permanent school exclusion suggested that there is usually a sequence to school exclusion. This finding leads us to surmise that if there is a sequence of school disengagement through fixed-term to permanent school exclusion, then Parsons et al.'s (2001) conclusion that permanently school-excluded children were twice as likely to have offending records than children who were fixed-term excluded only is telling about the futures of the young men of this study.

As previously described in earlier chapters, in-school exclusion involves disruptions that result in in-school punishments such as demerits, removal from the classroom, exemption from specific classes, and detention. Out-of-school exclusion is when a pupil is sent home for a prescribed number of days, usually between three and five days, and is allowed to return only after that time has elapsed. Most of the young men in this study experienced either in-school or out-of-school fixed-term school exclusion, with three of the six young men being fixed-term school excluded twice or more. The reasons for fixed-term school exclusion were physical fighting and disruptive behaviour, such as talking, playing, and throwing objects which did not diverge from previously cited reasons in the literature (Sellman et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2003; O'Regan, 2010).

Briefly, as mentioned in the section above, an unintended consequence of fixed-term school exclusion was that some of the young men early offended during out-of-school fixed-term school exclusion. In this regard, fixed-term school exclusion cannot be viewed as a benign policy when its unintended consequence of relocating the young men to their homes and neighbourhood as a form of punishment played a role in their early offending behaviour. Earlier research (Bilchick, 1999; Hyman and Snook, 1999) has suggested that fixed-term excluded young men committed far more delinquent acts than their non-excluded young men because school exclusion only effectively removes undesirable behaviour of antisocial children from the school setting but transfers them to the neighbourhood where there are more opportunities for unsupervised engagement with deviant peers.

Permanent School Exclusion

The profile of the school-excluded young men of being Black of Creole or Garifuna ethnicity and from Southside neighbourhoods is of interest. Population data indicates that Black ethnic groups in the Belize District account for 63 percent; therefore, the homogeneity of the sample of school-excluded young men could suggest a racial undertone. While the young men nor their mothers explicitly referred to their ethnicity as a likely contributor to the severity of punishment meted to them for their infractions, homogeneity of the racial background of the young men requires further research, of which there is no current Belizean literature to reference. Notwithstanding the absence of previous research in Belize on the disproportionate rate of school-excluded young people by ethnicity, studies in the US (Browne et al., 2001; Skiba et al., 2003) and the UK (Daniels and Cole, 2010; Daniel, 2011) have suggested a racial undertone to the practice of school exclusion. Importantly, Skiba et al. (2003) found that fixed-term and permanent school exclusion rates for African American young people exceeded rates for the population in almost every locality examined.

Another important finding with significant implications for the marginalisation of the young men's voices was that all the young men in this study experienced permanent school exclusion as children under the legal adult age between the ages 14 and 17 in the first and second years of a four-year secondary education. Under this circumstance, the young men were not able to navigate the exclusionary process on their own without a parent or guardian, which impeded their agency. Therefore, having already been disadvantaged in this regard, the account of the formal process was mainly provided by the mothers in interviews. As will be shown in this section, the power imbalance between the school and excluded pupils or their parents further marginalised the young men and their parents in favour of the school.

The reasons for permanent school exclusion varied among the young men, including fights, damage to classroom property, possession of a weapon on the school campus, consumption of marijuana, and being criminally charged by police for the possession of an unlicensed firearm. Only one young man was unable to explain his permanent school exclusion because he claimed that no reason was provided to him by the school. Most of the young men experienced school exclusion from one mainstream secondary school, with a couple having been school-excluded from two mainstream schools. Permanent school exclusion for the two young men who were school-excluded from two mainstream schools was characterised by a one-to-two-year gap period in their mainstream educational career, followed by a transitory return to mainstream education, and another period of disengagement caused by permanent school exclusion. This suggests that even a successful transition to another school had implications for social exclusion. Only one young man experienced 'withdrawal without prejudice,' which served as an informal or unofficial exclusion as suggested in the literature on school exclusion (Brodie, 2001; Daniels and Cole, 2010; Evans, 2010).

School exclusion appeared to be one of the main approaches to managing challenging behaviour in secondary schools located within areas of high levels of crime and economic deprivation. As detailed earlier under the sub-section 'Masculinity and School Violence,'(page 211) many of the problem behaviours that resulted in school exclusion were partially a consequence of the interaction between the school and neighbourhood contexts. The schools were either interspersed across Southside neighbourhoods or accepted pupils from Southside, which resulted in the presence of pupils from rival neighbourhoods. Consequently, only one young man's permanent school exclusion was because of poor academic performance. All the others that related to drug use, physical violence, and criminal offending seemed to represent neighbourhood effects of the socially and economically disadvantaged Southside neighbourhoods where the young men came from. The evidence supports previous studies in the Caribbean and the UK that have shown that the neighbourhood in which a school was located influenced how behaviour was managed in the school, with school exclusion being the main approach to address these situations (Meeks-Gardiner et al., 2000; Harris et al., 2006; Gibbs and Gardiner, 2008).

For most of the young men and mothers, the punishment by the school seemed disproportionate to the young men's infractions. This sense of need to punish severely impeded the situational factors or considerations of alternative punishments; therefore, all the young men considered their permanent school exclusion to be unfair. However, research in the US (Skiba and Knesting, 2001) has suggested that fixed-term and permanent school exclusion are used to treat both major and minor incidents at school with severity to set an example.

Appeal Process of Permanent School Exclusion

There was a perception of a lack of due process and fairness during the appeal process that was exacerbated by the insufficient opportunity for the young men to defend themselves against accusations. Consequently, a sense of powerlessness to challenge the decision of the school authority during the appeal process undermined the young men's perception of agency over such a salient life event. For example, some young men reported that their permanent school exclusion was because of carrying weapons in response to credible threats of harm, and others for having to engage in a fight instigated by pupils from rival neighbourhoods. For others, they felt they were labelled by the school based on their neighbourhood which seemed to undermine the willingness of the school to be amenable to explanation or conciliation. The schools were also noted to not consider positive interventions using mediation or counselling services. None of these factors were felt to be in the control of the young men or their families and not being fairly listened to further limited their control and choices. Accordingly, most of the young men or their mothers did not challenge or offer any refutations to the school's decision during the appeal process because they did not believe they could influence the decisions being made about them. Previous research in the UK has likewise suggested that when young people from socially disadvantaged families were excluded, their families were less likely to appeal or have successful appeals against exclusion decisions, especially because of the imbalance of power between the family and the school authority (Pomeroy, 2000; Maguire et al., 2003; McCluskey, 2005; Gewirtz et al., 2005; Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot, 2007).

Most interviews described an appeal process characterised by a power imbalance and lack of transparency that was compounded when the accusers were members of the school authority, such as teachers or principals. They felt that their voices were marginalised, and their accounts were discounted compared to the teachers or other staff. For example, one young man reported an altercation in which a male teacher who was the aggressor was physically hit. However, the power imbalance between the young man and the teacher resulted in an uneven process with only the teacher's account being considered. Notably, McDonald and Thomas (2003) claimed that the power imbalance reflected a hierarchical organisation in schools in which pupils who were at the greatest risk of school exclusion were on the lowest stratum with the least voice, meanwhile, teachers possessed dominance over the interpretation of events and the school controlled the "authoritative discourse" resulting in an unfair competition of reality in which the school determined the parameters of acceptable behaviour.

Drifting Towards and Entrenching of Offending Behaviour

Earlier in the chapter under the sub-section 'Critical Life Events,' I reported on the life events of the young men that were considered critical moments that altered their lives within the context of the family, neighbourhood, and peer group. Accordingly, their experience of permanent school exclusion served as a compounding negative life event. Importantly, the post-school exclusion experiences of the young men suggested that permanent school exclusion, as a critical life event during their transition to adulthood, set into motion a sequence of changes in their lives that started with a feeling of social isolation and a denial of participation in education that interrupted their daily routine, social activities, and life chances. As such, I examine the influence of permanent school exclusion on the offending behaviour of the young men through the accentuation and entrenchment of their offending.

In this section, I reference the significant work of MacDonald (2006) that identified two transitions to a serious, longer-term criminal career among marginalised young people during their transition to adulthood in a locality in England. MacDonald sought to find out how young people's decision-making and cultures and subcultures interacted with socially structured opportunities to create individual and shared paths of transition. The identified pattern for both transitions starts with a "hardening up" of school disaffection into complete educational disengagement through frequent and persistent truancy (p. 7). Importantly, school disengagement occurs simultaneously with engagement with 'street corner society' which further establishes oppositional identities and evolution into criminal careers beyond early to mid-adolescence.

My study and that of MacDonald (2006, p. 7) shared important similarities, but also some differences. Firstly, while my study findings support the notion of school educational disengagement, this transition was not a voluntary "hardening up," but rather an induced process through permanent school exclusion. Therefore, choice was not a shared attribute between our samples, rather an opportunity to participate in education was deprived without a choice. With no statutory support from the school or the Ministry of Education for placement into another school and having mostly disadvantaged lone mothers who were uncertain of how to navigate the education system, educational disengagement, for most, was an exclusionary outcome outside of their control. Ultimately, only two of the six young men re-engaged in mainstream education for a curtailed period following a prolonged gap period.

Generally, the young men's transition was met with behavioural changes driven by frustration and lamentation in response to a sense of the unfairness of the exclusion process and having been marginalised by their schools. Researchers like Williamson (2005) have proposed that understanding exclusion as a process of 'othering' helps to avoid focusing on the behaviour of the excluded, which

can inadvertently lead to blaming the excluded for their exclusion. This is particularly important in recognising that social exclusion is relational, so for the young men, their exclusion compared to their schoolmates did not only result in a loss of status and denial of participation but also changed their daily routine and structure of their lives. The absence of school as a daily activity in the initial stages of the young men's transition away from being pupils resulted in all the young men having additional free time that they did not have as full-time pupils. As a part of this transition, most of the young men experienced an interruption of their daily weekday schedule that was ascribed to them throughout their schooling career.

In the absence of school or employment, the interaction between the young men and their home and neighbourhood increased to fill their free time, with extended periods of low adult supervision since most of their parents or adult family members worked during that time. The impact of the removal of school as an important social environment was therefore felt by the already disadvantaged homes in terms of providing adequate adult supervision. According to different studies in the UK (Pitts and Hope, 1997; France et al., 2005; Estevez et al., 2009), an important impact of school exclusion was the removal of the school which was conceived as a part of the institutional infrastructure and resource that families, particularly families who were incapacitated by the stresses of poverty and their neighbourhood, can draw upon to share the burden of upbringing young men.

Consequently, like MacDonald's (2006) findings, most of the young men in this study suggested that it was at this consequential stage, having been disengaged from mainstream education, that they experienced a fuller immersion in the neighbourhood along with its entrapments. Interestingly, in terms of the social exclusion analysis, the young men's exclusion from school contributed to their simultaneous inclusion into the neighbourhood peer group and environment, which for some was not voluntary before permanent school exclusion. So, MacDonald's notion of engagement with 'street corner society' has some merit to this study, but as suggested earlier in the chapter, these neighbourhood effects, barring stern adult supervision, were already shown to have some influence on the offending behaviour of the young men. Therefore, MacDonald's further finding of an early phase of criminal apprenticeship that was shaped by engagement and learning acquisitive offending, underage drinking, and recreational drug use, was shown in this study to already be a feature of the early offending behaviour of the young men prior to permanent school exclusion. Lyon et al (2000) suggested that most young offenders in the UK who had trouble getting accepted to another school after permanent school exclusion felt that while they had a choice to not offend by emphasising their self-determination as a part of their agency, they lived in difficult and disrupted circumstances like residential areas characterised by crime, violence, unemployment, drug use, and poverty.

Subsequently, MacDonald argues that for many of the young people in his study, this was the extent of their criminal careers, while a minority transitioned to a longer-term criminal career. Admittedly, there are similarities in the early stages of petty offending in early adolescence of both our studies, but a point of departure involves the transition to a serious, longer-term criminal career. For MacDonald's sample, the transition was influenced by regular, dependent use of heroin that led to a career of crime driven by drug dependency. For the young men in my study, it was the increased socialising with neighbourhood peers, some of whom were already serious offenders, likewise out of school and available to socialise during the day and night contributed to unsupervised and unstructured social activities. Their unsupervised socialising in large groups occurred in public places in the neighbourhood and they became a notable feature of the neighbourhood which, like the findings of MacDonald and Shildrick (2007) in the UK, completed the exclusionary transition from school to engagement with "street corner society" (p. 343).

The increased interaction and exclusivity with delinquent neighbourhood peers as described by the young men were considered products of a structural process of social isolation caused by permanent school exclusion that deprived them of the opportunity to socialise with school peers. Life within the marginalised neighbourhood peer group was characterised by idling and all-day recreational marijuana and alcohol use. Similar peer pressure that led to early offending behaviour was present but also evolved to more serious offending behaviour, such as constant and more dangerous fights and altercations, gang involvement, engaging in robberies, and shootings. In the Caribbean context, Albuquerque and Elroy (1999) and Meeks-Gardner et al. (2008) have argued that boys who dropped out of school were easier to be influenced by criminal elements within their community which may heighten their involvement in criminal activity. Hence, the social exclusion associated with limited education and employment opportunities that render children and young people powerless and marginalised helped to contribute to the rise in criminal activity within the Caribbean.

Post-school Exclusion Offending

The previous thematic sections discussed the school exclusion experience of the young men and their subsequent transition from in-school to out-of-school status. The perception of their post-exclusion life further provided a context for their shifting activities as they adjusted over time to their displacement from the school environment to a fuller immersion in the neighbourhood and neighbourhood peer group. The following sub-section provides a closer examination of the post-school exclusion offending behaviour to understand the influence permanent school exclusion had on offending behaviour.

In this thesis, most of the young men were permanently excluded at ages 14 and 15 but were self-reported previous offenders. Notwithstanding the two young men who were criminally charged right before permanent school exclusion, all the remaining young men were criminally charged after permanent school exclusion. The findings from this chronological examination of offending behaviour shared some similarities with the work of Berridge et al. (2001) in the UK that the majority of those who offended in their study, offended after permanent school exclusion. However, Berridge et al. cautioned that a time lag of a year or more for half the sample of those whose offending started after school exclusion made it difficult to establish a causal relationship between permanent school exclusion and offending, despite an onset or an uptake in offending.

The criminal charges for the remaining young men who were charged after permanent school exclusion was for various serious offences, including robberies, burglary, aggravated assault, firearm possession, attempted murder, and murder. The fact that most of the young men, Including the two before permanent school exclusion, were criminally charged for serious and violent offences suggested that their evolution of offending behaviour was significantly influenced by neighbourhood effects of living in neighbourhoods characterised by high levels of violence both before and after permanent school exclusion. The finding further suggested that their previous offending behaviour was antecedent to more serious offending, as supported by previous research findings in New Zealand and research work in the US (Frick, 2004; Odgers et al., 2008).

For some of the young men, their entrenched offending behaviour after permanent school exclusion resulted in a pattern of repeat offending. The self-reports suggested that there was a significant uptake in offending behaviour following their permanent school exclusion which was attributed to an increase in interaction with like-minded neighbourhood friends who were of the same ethnic background, experiencing similar social and economic marginality, including living in poverty and reportedly also having been excluded from school and involved in criminal or gang activities. A similar finding by Day et al (2020) noted that young people attributed their involvement in offending to a lifestyle that involved their association with like-minded peers out of education for long periods outside of their home environment on the street.

Several of the young men were involved in local drug dealing led by a perception that success after permanent school exclusion required involvement in illegal activity because of an unlikelihood of advancing into further education or the legitimate labour market. The experience of limited opportunities as a driver of criminal involvement was proposed as 'innovation' in Merton's Theory of Anomie (Adler et al., 2004), and in terms of the experience after permanent school exclusion among the young men in this study was supported by previous research study findings in Belize and the

219

Caribbean that young people, including those gang-involved, who dropped out of school and were unemployed relied on drug sales for personal expenses and to support the family (Crawford-Brown, 2010; Young, 2019). Likewise, in the UK, Webster et al. (2004) and Pitts (2020) suggested that young people, including those in street gangs, who experienced extreme social exclusion such as structural youth unemployment and school exclusion, filled the demand in the illicit labour market with the financial gains of acquisitive offending eventually seeming more attractive than legitimate employment.

Accordingly, many of the young men were involved in non-violent and violent acquisitive crimes such as burglary, theft, and robbery, related to financial gain as a means of achieving material goals. These acquisitive crimes were attributed to a lack of legitimate opportunities post-school exclusion. Several of the young men, including those who considered themselves to be specialised in committing robberies, referred to an economic logic that made financial gains from acquisitive crimes attractive. This finding corresponded to findings in the UK that credited a dearth of legitimate opportunities as contributing to acquisitive crimes (Webster et al., 2004; Pitts, 2020), but also contradicted the finding of MacDonald (2006) that acquisitive crimes for out-of-school young men were due to boredom and served as a part of an early phase of criminality that was exacerbated by underage drinking and recreational drug use.

This brings to the fore Johnston et al.'s (2000, p. 28) "local economy of crime" which described a criminal economy whose existence in a locality served to support the engagement and participation of residents in criminal activity. Much like the young men in my study, their neighbourhood characteristics of gangs, crime, and drugs seemed to have provided the foundation for their early involvement in petty offending and recreational drug use and their evolution of longer-term, more serious offending behaviour. Support from the mothers when they were detained or incarcerated, though not an endorsement of criminality, may have also indirectly enabled their continued offending through support in overcoming legal hurdles. For others, neighbourhood friends or the gang provided marijuana for drug sale as an illegitimate means of economic participation, which contributed to conflict with competing rival groups and the police that had a major impact on the safety of the neighbourhood.

A salient finding was that most of the young men self-reported that they were involved in other illegal activities of which some were mentioned in the interview and others were intentionally withheld from me as the researcher either at my request or the will of the young men. The self-reported offending by the young men provided evidence to support the theorisation that the 'dark figure" (Bryman, 2012, p. 322) of crime did not form a part of the official crime rate and that the data in the form of criminal

charges that were provided by the Belize Police Department for each of the young men did not constitute the "actual" incidence of offending among the young men (Berridge et al., 2001; Hodgson and Webb, 2005; Bryman, 2008, p. 322).

Gang Involvement and Masculinity

The historical context (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998) of the proliferation of gangs and heightened street crime and violence in the neighbourhoods in which these young men grew up, as discussed earlier under 'Neighbourhood Characteristics,' (page 205) led to an understanding of the influences exerted at the neighbourhood level toward gang membership or involvement (Webster et al., 2006; Gordon et al., 2014). All the young men grew up in a neighbourhood that had a gang (see Figure 1.4, page 17), as is characteristic of most neighbourhoods in the Southside, which contributed to a sense among some of the young men that there was an inevitability of becoming members after permanent school exclusion. Most of the young men reported that involvement or membership in the neighbourhood gang was not mandated prior to permanent school exclusion because older gang members allowed them to go to school unimpeded. Therefore, most of the young men did not identify as gang members before their permanent school exclusion. However, since education was perceived as a failure, their inclusion on the neighbourhood street corners was an accepted fate that dominated their free time as they socialised with friends, smoked marijuana, and returned to their homes late at night.

Incidentally, most of the young men's permanent school exclusions were between ages 14 and 17 during Forms 1 and 2 and coincided with the time that most of them joined gangs. Young (2019) similarly found that most gang-involved young people in Belize City were permanently excluded in Forms 1 and 2 and their average age of joining a gang was 14.5 years with a median of 16 years.

Living in a neighbourhood with a gang without being involved or being a member when rival gangs already stigmatised the male residents, especially those who were not going to school heightened the risk of harm or possible death. Additionally, in the neighbourhood, the gender norm associated with the young men who were out of school or unemployed was that they join the neighbourhood gang. The transition from school was, therefore, characterised by social pressure and suspicion by the local gang members if they did not join. The pressure toward conformity to this gender expectation among their neighbourhood peers showed the power of the peer group and represented the localised models of hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2018; Baird, 2019) that informed their gender identity. Consequently, all the young men in this study self-reported their membership or involvement with a localised gang that was described as 'Bloods' or 'Crips' (Peirce and Veyrat-Pontet, 2013), with only one

of the young men suggesting involvement rather than full membership at the time of the interview. Also, only one young man, whose mother was interviewed, but he was not, joined a rival neighbourhood gang and was consequently unable to visit or reside in the neighbourhood that he grew up in and where his mother lived. The findings supported the sociological theorisation of Baird (2019) in his work on gang transnationalism in Belize that the impacts of social exclusion were gendered and in the context of the Southside of Belize City, it created a "masculine vulnerability" among young men, particularly of the Black ethnic groups, to the transnational Blood and Crip gang culture as a part of their gender identity formation. However, while Baird suggested that gang involvement was in part a male reaction to deprivation, but without a focus on school exclusion, the findings of my study suggested that the neighbourhood and peer environment also contributed to gang involvement in response to a denial of participation in education or employment opportunities. This, of course, draws parallels to other Caribbean studies (Plummer and Geofroy, 2010; Levtov and Telson, 2021), that the denial of participation is linked to added social pressure that is applied to young men of lower education status or unemployed to adopt a certain definition of masculinity compared to those of higher education or employed full-time.

Therefore, the emergence of the gang as a peer group that acted as a powerful influence and reference of approval or disapproval, meant that offending was also perceived as the fulfilment of manhood that galvanised the peer group and enhanced their criminality. The uptake in offending behaviour after permanent school exclusion among the young men in this study, such as street-level drug dealing, acquisitive crimes, and violent acts was partially attributed to their gang involvement or membership along with deprivation in legitimate labour market opportunities. Several research studies across the US, UK, and Caribbean (Chevannes, 1999, 2001; Gordon et al., 2004; Chung and Steinberg, 2006; Plummer et al., 2008; Plummer and Geofroy, 2010; Crawford-Brown, 2010; Dong and Wiebe, 2018) have provided evidence that young men who later join gangs experience an increase in delinquent or offending activity after joining because these delinquent social networks may include older or more aggressive peers who are committed to a particular lifestyle that teach each other new forms of offending and drug dealing.

For most of the young men, their gang involvement or membership and their offending reputation increased their own risk of victimisation through the offending behaviour of others, which underscores that membership in a gang involves proximity to other offenders and criminal events, such as gang fights, where rival gangs are present and in contexts where the probability of retaliation is high (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994). Therefore, their accounts of internecine conflict between their gang and others, especially after their violent acts toward rivals, included attacks and attempts on

their own lives. Young men's role as protectors against rivals, which often required them to reproduce violence, which formed a part of their masculine identity based on bravery, toughness, and willingness to harm rival gang members, usually at the behest of older gang members was consistent with an adherence to a 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1999; Brookman et al., 2011; Berg et al., 2020). The finding also supported previous research findings in Jamaica and the UK where young men were drawn into neighbourhood violence under the pretence that it was reflective of their masculinity and maintained their perceived safety (Gayle, 2002; Gayle et al., 2004; Pitts, 2007; Baird, 2012; Factor et al., 2015).

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AFTER PERMANENT SCHOOL EXCLUSION

This section responds to RQ3 on the manifestation of social exclusion by examining the lives of the young men after permanent school exclusion and how it shaped their exclusion across multiple domains or dimensions of disadvantage. This section, therefore, contributes toward our understanding of multidimensional exclusion that constitutes deep exclusion as an extreme manifestation of social exclusion. The dimensions examined in this section relate to their participation in education and training, economic participation, and social network and social participation as loosely drawn from Levitas et al.'s (2007) Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix. This section is divided into four sub-sections as follows: Participation in Education and Training, Participation in the Labour Market, Social Networks and Social Participation, and Criminalisation and the Criminal Justice System.

Education and Training Participation

In keeping with the discussion on the acquisition of formal educational qualifications through educational attainment and access to education under the domain of 'Culture, Education, and Skills' in the B-SEM, the focus slightly shifts to the effects of permanent school exclusion on the young men's subsequent participation in education and training. The discussion draws on Fahmy's (2006) assertion on the inadequacy of important public and private services to address the needs of young people. My findings suggest that there was inadequate access to educational support services provided to the excluded young men in Belize in terms of a deficit in institutional intervention to prolong their schooling career through placement in another school or educational institution. The lack of meaningful support through intervention by the school, Ministry of Education, or any private organisation after permanent school exclusion to prevent slippage into long-term educational marginality and social exclusion was apparent in this study. This was despite the likelihood that the young men, many of whom were excluded from school for physical fights or altercations, may have

required more support and guidance than other pupils, as supported by research findings of McDonald and Thomas (2003) in the UK.

Importantly, at the time of permanent school exclusion, none of the young men had clearly defined criminal careers that would suggest their complete disengagement from education. The lack of recognition that the socially disadvantaged and marginalised young men needed institutional support may suggest that their problem behaviours may have been more emphasised as an individualised form of "social pathology" in line with the underclass discourse (Fahmy, 2008, p. 282), rather than an emphasis on the underlying processes that contributed to their school exclusion.

The post-school exclusion path to educational re-engagement was characterised by prolonged searches for educational opportunities, rejection, delayed enrolment, and growing disinterest in or disengagement from education. The protracted period away from mainstream education made it difficult for most of the young men to return to schooling or get into an educational institution, with the experience making them reluctant to re-engage in education. Eventually, it became easier for some of them to remain out of mainstream school. As suggested by Visser et al. (2005) and Silver (2007), the growing disinterest may have appeared to be an intentional withdrawal from education, but it was in response to the closing opportunities to re-engage in mainstream education after long periods. Hence, as the opportunities to re-engage in mainstream education closed, some of the young men rationalised their plight to suggest that they were exercising a choice, rather than their choices being constrained. For example, one young man emphasised that his capacity to navigate daily life with the rudimentary knowledge and skills, such as literacy and numeracy, gained during his curtailed educational career were satisfactory for him to survive without being taken advantage of. He, as well as another, challenged the value of higher education in Belize where class and socio-demographic inequality in Belize undermined formal qualifications in the labour market for young Black men.

When left to their resources, only two young men were able to transition to another mainstream school after a gap period of a year and two years, respectively. Both of whom were quickly permanently school-excluded because of conflict with rival pupils, as a reminder of the influence of neighbourhood effects. In addition, despite most of the young men being incarcerated after permanent school exclusion, the interviews uncovered only one case in which formal education in the prison was an option. However, it was short-lived given that there were no institutional arrangements made to ensure the continuation of education after release, further limiting his agency and choice to participate. The social exclusion from education for the young men represented a 'policy vacuum' in which they had limited immediate alternatives and remained out of education for months or years, and for some, a complete cessation (Lloyd-Smith, 1993; Maguire et al., 2003).

224

For those who were interested in seeking other opportunities outside of mainstream education, there was a paucity of training programmes or vocational schools that they could choose from. Most of the young men were eventually enrolled in skills training programmes or vocational schools by their parents or family members but complained that the programmes were unstructured, or the courses were not in line with their training interests. This brings to the fore concerns about constraints on the choices and capabilities of the young men, which caused several of them to briefly settle for what was available before ultimately disengaging. Johnston et al. (2000) similarly found that in a UK sample of marginalised young people, in the absence of vocational or training courses aligned with their interests, the young people took an available course that was eventually viewed as a waste of time before dropping out and seeking employment.

Financial circumstances also influenced the discontinuation of educational or training pursuits for some young men. In several cases, they were unable to enrol in a training programme or vocational school due to unaffordability since they had to pay high enrolment fees, which was unlike the subsidised secondary education. Hence, despite the recognition by some young men or mothers that education could improve their life chances, a lack of economic resources by some families hindered further participation in education. Therefore, those young men dissuaded their mothers from investing further in their education. This was particularly noted when they already had a low expectation of getting a job as a return on education investment. This also contributed to several of the young men stopping training programmes when there were immediate opportunities for a job. The finding that the continuation of education or training was influenced by affordability and the ambivalence towards future returns is supported by research findings in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the UK (Marshall and Caldéron, 2006; Kane, 2008; Gill et al., 2017).

The ages of the young men also influenced their successful enrolment or transition to training programmes or vocational schools. Some were either too old for the prescribed age to return to a mainstream school, or too young to enrol in training programmes or vocational schools. To the institutions, rejection was easier because some young men were viewed as difficult or requiring special attention. This contributed to reticence among some young men about further applying for fear of continued rejection. The rejection of pupils, particularly those perceived as 'troubled' by gatekeepers at school with power or knowledge as a part of their decision to exclude or include, was highlighted in the work of Maguire et al. (2003) in the UK.

Commitment to the training programmes or vocational schools was a challenge for several young men, but the minority who did commit, saw it as another chance to gain formal qualifications and make something of themselves, as supported by previous research in the UK (Webster et al., 2004).

However, a hindrance to the majority who were willing to make that commitment was that the physical proximity of the training programme or vocational school to their neighbourhoods was a safety concern. Levitas et al. (2007) consider the distance to specific services, including youth services, as presented several times in this study, to be a constraint to access to services. Several young men and mothers articulated the challenges associated with enrolling in a training programme or vocational school or having to abruptly end attendance because the distance of the institutions to their neighbourhood heightened the risk for harm. Their accounts were replete with incidents of confrontations to and from, and at the institutions, so many disengaged from the institutions, furthering their educational marginality.

In the end, none of the young men successfully returned and completed mainstream education. While most attempted to or successfully enrolled in training programmes or vocational programmes, only a minority completed the short-term courses. More importantly, the prospect of successful participation in the labour market based on these mostly uncertified training programmes either did not result in jobs or, when acquired, did not provide job security, or reduced economic marginality for the young men. Accordingly, Williamson (1997) refers to young people who are not in employment, education, or training as occupying 'Status Zero,' which means the young people are both missing from formal records and are also lost in the process of transition.

Labour Market Participation

The experiences of the young men in this study as they transitioned from school (or training) into the labour market were important to understand their economic participation after permanent school exclusion. This analysis hinges on the notion that economically disadvantaged young people are significantly more vulnerable to almost all forms of disadvantage included in the B-SEM domains (Bailey et al., 2017). The post-school exclusion lives of all the young men were characterised by either nonparticipation or precarious participation in the labour market. The nature and quality of participation were driven by compounding exclusionary factors related to the lack of educational credentials and constraints on the working age.

A difficult transition into the labour market and income realisation was a direct impact on the economic participation of the young men because of the incompletion of secondary education and lack of educational credentials. The young men's experience without secondary school credentials suggested that the deficits that stemmed from permanent school exclusion translated into labour market constraints and consequent socioeconomic disadvantage. Most employers required applicants to possess a secondary school diploma as a basic criterion for employment. This, of course, became

more problematic and exclusionary when compounded by other exclusionary factors, such as gang involvement or possession of criminal records, which led to cumulative disadvantage. As a result, at the time of the interview, only two young men in the sample (the oldest in their early 20s) had jobs. This was similarly found by Young (2019) in Belize City that gang-involved individuals who had dropped out of school in the early years of secondary school experienced difficulties entering the labour market, with only 10 percent being employed.

Economic participation was also constrained by the ages of the young men at both the time of their permanent school exclusion and the interviews. Firstly, all the young men were under the legal adult age of 18 at the time of their permanent school exclusion, and all but one was under the age of 16 years. Secondly, at the time of the interview, three of the six young men were still under 18. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 138, a person who is between the ages 12 and 14 but engaged in work other than light work, or between the ages 15 and 17 but engaged in hazardous work are all victims of child labour (Perriot 2003). Therefore, it is unsurprising that this legal constraint on the age and nature of work, compounded by a lack of educational credentials, overwhelmed their individual choice to work. In support, Coles et al. (2002) and Brookes et al. (2007) in the UK suggested that young people who were school-excluded were likely to be unemployed between ages 16 and 18, experience lower earnings, and persistent offending between the ages of 18 and 30 was highly correlated with having been school-excluded.

Another interesting consideration regarding constraints on economic participation was Fahmy's (2017) suggestion that a relationship between educational attainment and 'cultural capital' tended to be lacking among socially marginalised populations. In this regard, socially marginalised people are likely not to possess social sensibilities associated with education as an important asset. The premature transition from secondary school did not only deprive the young men in this study of educational credentials but also left them ill-equipped to successfully navigate the labour market. This was particularly noteworthy in the case of a young man who acquired a job at age 17, but his lack of professionalism and appreciation of the decorum needed at a work site caused him to smoke marijuana which resulted in his termination.

Having identified the exclusionary factors that constrained the economic participation of the young men in this study, two related concepts of exclusionary outcomes in the labour market apply to the young men. The first is MacDonald and Marsh's (2000, p. 130) conceptualisation of a "cyclical" transition through the labour market and the other is Bailey's (2016, p. 84) construction of a measure of "exclusionary employment." Both essentially provide an analysis of the root causes of structural disadvantage, including a person's sense of progression in the labour market based on improvements

in pay, quality of work, and job security. Since three of the six young men in my study at the time were still under the age of 18, another was 19, and two were in their early 20s, the discussion related to their early labour market experience. For Bailey, a person experiences exclusionary employment when the job is of low quality or so insecure that the person is not guaranteed to be in employment for a long time; therefore, s/he is not enjoying all the inclusionary benefits of paid work. At the time of the interviews, the labour market experiences for most of the young men were replete with low or unskilled, low-paid manual, marginal work such as maintenance work, construction work, ancillary cleaning jobs, and low-level security. All the young men experienced job instability or insecurity based on little permanence that resulted in easy termination or seasonal job opportunities. Commensurate with the quality of work and level of qualification was the low pay. In Belize, the Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit's (2020) recent statistics suggest that individuals who completed secondary and tertiary education were more likely to participate in the labour force and earned higher average monthly incomes than their counterparts with lower levels of education.

Taking those factors into consideration, overall, it seemed that the young men experienced economic marginality because permanent school exclusion harmed their chances to gain skills and qualifications needed to acquire more than low-skill jobs. Therefore, while Levitas (1998) and Fahmy (2008) from a social exclusion perspective considered paid work as inclusionary, the pattern of economic participation among the young men of my study suggested that, like MacDonald (2008) in the UK and Danziger and Ratner (2010) in the US, ineffective sequences of activities during the transition from school to work, including frequent job movements, instability in the labour force, and recurrent unemployment, meant that young people experienced economic marginality as their status of poor qualification resulted in limited options.

As mentioned earlier, several of the young men pursued training programmes or vocational schooling. However, the study did not provide sufficient evidence that participation in training programmes or vocational school after permanent school exclusion improved the employment prospects of the young men. The interviews suggested that participation in a training programme did not mean the young men would transition into a job afterward, instead most returned to unemployment before some elected to pursue another training programme. Like the findings of MacDonald and Marsh (2000) and Webster and Simpson (2004) only a small minority, and in this study only two of the six young men, received a job because they participated in a training programme or vocational school, while most continued to experience a cyclical pattern of precarious involvement in low-quality work, unemployment, and training programmes.

Levitas (1998) and Bailey (2017) identified several positive benefits associated with paid work, including providing the individual with a social role by serving as a source of identity and self-respect, increasing opportunities for social contact, and reducing the risk of isolation. Since most of the young men in this study experienced a cyclical transition in the labour market with unemployment being the main outcome, several other exclusionary outcomes occurred in contrast to the positive benefits mentioned above. Firstly, some of the young men's experience with rejection in their job search and employment marginality led to a "cooling down" of their job-related confidence and expectations, which lowered their future job prospects because of a hesitation to look for work in anticipation of rejection (Webster and Simpson, 2004, p. 8). Consequently, like previous research findings in the US and UK, the identity formation of the young men was linked to the challenging or rewarding experience in their transition to employment which influenced their long-term occupational goals (Evans, 2007; Vuolo et al., 2014).

Another important point of analysis concerns the prospect that the current pattern of a lengthening record of marginal employment or intermittent employment can make the young men less attractive to employers in the future (Furlong et al., 2003). Johnston et al. (2000, p. 20) refer to "contingency" in the labour market careers of young people where the next step along the career is contingent on what occurred in the previous steps, which may lead to unpredictable or insecure careers being established early with little opportunity to start over or in a positive direction. To that end, gang involvement and gaining an early criminal record obstructed most of the young men's search for secure and decent employment. This meant that not only did their precarious labour market opportunities influence the extent of their criminal and gang activity, including acquisitive crimes, but the accumulation of criminal records also made it increasingly difficult to earn a job. In addition, their increased gang involvement also made it difficult to look for or consider jobs that would require them to leave or work in other neighbourhoods. The interviews were replete with this concern as a constraint on the jobs they can take. Several of the young men and their mothers preferred for them to stay at home and be supported rather than increasing their risk of harm by working, which prolonged their economic dependence on family. This finding is prominently featured in research in Belize and the UK (Pitts, 2001; Coles et al., 2002; Gayle and Mortis, 2010; Farrington et al., 2013). Pitts (2001), for example, suggested that in the UK deepening involvement in neighbourhood gangs and criminality, as well as a first conviction, constrained the physical and social mobility of young men through gainful employment due to fear of harm or violent clashes with other young men if required to work in other neighbourhoods.

Social Networks and Social Participation

Research (Webster et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2017) has argued that age is a major factor in the nature, quality, and influence of social networks and social activities that young people engage in during the transition to adulthood. The detailed description of various social networks and social activities that the young men participated in before permanent school exclusion, as detailed earlier in this chapter, provides context to the changes to access or choice of participation in those social networks, or the formation of new social networks after permanent school exclusion. Social networks and social participation are presented in the B-SEM as two distinct domains under resources and participation, respectively (Bailey, 2017). Throughout the chapter, I have shown how the networks regarding the home, neighbourhood, and peer group related to the experiences of the young men, but a separate examination of social networks enables a discussion on the type of social capital that the excluded young men had access to, and the advantages and disadvantages that longer-term commitment to social networks can have (Webster et al., 2006).

<u>Family Relationship and Support</u>

The home environment was critical to the post-school exclusion transitions of the young men and helped to ameliorate their social exclusion experience. However, there was an observable change in the perception of the immediate family, and in some cases the extended family, toward the young men after permanent school exclusion. The disappointment that emanated from the family and mothers about the educational underachievement of the young men was expressed through intense frustration and chastisement. Some of the young men were viewed as lacking ambition, and in some instances, the mothers believed they would eventually join the neighbourhood gang. The influence of permanent school exclusion on family relationships reported in this study was consistent with previous research findings among African-Caribbean families in England where school exclusion had detrimental effects on the families (Wright et al., 2005).

In the immediate aftermath, some young men responded with self-exclusion by withdrawing from family and friends, followed by frequent reflection on being unable to attend school. Initially, this also contributed to oppositional behaviour and a diminishing relationship between some young men and their mothers because they refused to provide information about their social activities or problems. In many ways, the young men's uncommunicative stance on their problems increased after permanent school exclusion, which led several mothers to bemoan finding out about incidents with rivals or conflict with the police after it had already ensued. This withholding of information by the young men was not based on a lack of trust but an intentional act of fear and concern for the family's

safety due to their deepening gang involvement or membership. Research studies in the UK and US have suggested that the ability to provide maternal support to influence the connection that young men had with peer groups associated with offending behaviour was compromised because of less parental knowledge (Paton et al., 2009; Deutsch et al., 2012).

Despite many of the challenges experienced between the young men and their families after permanent school exclusion, the findings in this study suggest that the family served as an important source of support for the young men that may have helped to offset some of the social consequences of permanent school exclusion. The accumulating disadvantages that the young men faced, including precarious schooling and employment careers, offending and incarceration, and other forms of social exclusion, were met with support from their mothers and siblings.

The economic disadvantages that featured low or nonparticipation in the labour market hindered the acquisition of legitimate sources of income by the young men and contributed to long-term dependency on the family during their transition to adulthood. Coles (1995) and (Fahmy 2006) refer to 'extended' and 'fractured' transitions in which young people's economic dependency upon their parents continues longer, and status transitions produce uncertain and often unsatisfactory results. In addition, MacDonald and Marsh (2000) argued that most young people who are not in employment, education, or training have no income, allowances, or other financial support, which leads them into longer-term economic dependency on their families. Therefore, the exploration of the home environment suggested that none of the young men were vulnerable to a sudden change in their living environment despite the long-term financial dependency on the family because of unemployment or poorly paid employment, which corresponds with previous research in the UK that the family network's support in lessening the likelihood of young people who have been permanently excluded cascading into a trajectory of long-term deep exclusion (Daniels and Cole, 2010).

Women as Sources of Social Support

Another important social network that needs to be discussed in terms of its role in shaping the post-school exclusion life and response to permanent school exclusion relates to women in the lives of the young men. The interviews prominently featured the positive role that women played in the gender socialisation and social support of the young men. Firstly, most of the young men came from lone-parent households headed by mothers who themselves were economically disadvantaged but tried to maintain stable homes with limited support parenting, if any, while also financially providing for the families. Within the households, there were also some examples of support provided by female siblings who provided supervision and financial support.

Women also played important roles, such as confidantes, supporters, and financial providers. Notwithstanding the deluge of negative life events before permanent school exclusion, many of which helped to shape or precipitated early offending behaviour of some young men, women played a substantive role in the self-reported desistance of some of the young men. Like Johnston et al.'s (2000) findings on desistance in their study in the UK, my study found that the young men who had positive life events that contributed to their desistance either participated in a stable relationship with a partner or had accepted responsibility for others in the form of children or were engaged in legitimate employment. To this end, it was shown that partners contributed to several of the young men's attempts at desistance from crime or gang involvement. There was also an example when a young man's social participation outside of his neighbourhood hinged on his partner who took him to safe places to socialise away from rival neighbourhoods. The interviews suggested that a stable relationship was critically important for social support.

Friendship Network of School Peers

Barry (2002) in the UK addressed social exclusion and the interlink between social isolation, work, and education by suggesting that exclusion prevents persons from sharing common experiences that are the primary feature of social solidarity.

Permanent school exclusion adversely influenced the relationship and interaction between the young men and their school friends. As mentioned earlier, before permanent school exclusion most of the young men in this study had only one year to make school friends, with the minority having two years. Therefore, their friendship formation with other young people who were geographically and possibly demographically varied was severely obstructed. Most of the young men were unable to maintain a friendship group with school friends because they had low social contact and did not see them frequently despite any desire to do so. The frequency and desire to see school friends help to identify circumstances when social contact is constrained. So, friendships that they had taken for granted as a part of their school experience quickly petered out. This was mainly attributed to inaccessibility because the young men and their school friends no longer occupied the same space. The school environment served as a neutral space where the young men could socialise with other young men from neighbourhoods that were considered rivals to their own. Their departure from school meant that they were no longer able to socialise with them freely. This finding supported previous research findings in the UK and Germany that friendship networks were largely derived from the school in which young people regularly participated, and that early departure presented certain advantages or disadvantages (Emler, 2009).

The few young men who maintained friendships with some school friends from different neighbourhoods mostly limited their interaction to social media platforms and occasional coincidental meetings in public places. However, these out-of-school relationships based on reciprocity and trust were rarely tested since most of the young men limited their interaction and social activities to their neighbourhood. As the young men became deeply immersed in the neighbourhood or gang, the interactions outside of school represented a greater threat that required the young men to ensure that they and their school friends from rival neighbourhoods mutually prevented members of their neighbourhood or gang from causing harm. This neighbourhood effect, compounded by permanent school exclusion, constrained their relationship, and reduced their social contact. Studies in the US and the UK have suggested that the loss of neutral ground in the form of the school where young men made and saw friends effectively severed their association with school peers and converted their post-school interaction into more uncertain, more serious, and riskier interactions (Barry, 2002; Sampson and Laub, 2003; MacDonald and Marsh, 2004).

Friendship Network of Neighbourhood Peers and Gang Social Network

Much has been written on the social network of neighbourhood friends and gangs throughout this discussion, but a brief analysis of its importance in terms of exclusion and inclusion is important. The eventual discontinuity of relationships with most school friends closed a network for social support but conversely led to greater interaction with friends from the young men's already disadvantaged and violent neighbourhoods. The inclusion in this social network did not only constitute negative outcomes. This is especially important when considering the level of trauma that most of the young men in this study faced in their neighbourhoods. The interviews suggested that neighbourhood friends helped some of the young men cope with permanent school exclusion and living in their poor neighbourhood based on shared social and economic realities. This emotional and financial support was reflected in different examples, including socialising throughout the day when there was no work, pooling resources to cook as a group, and providing each other with protection and marijuana for sale in the absence of legitimate means of income.

The strong bonds between social networks, such as neighbourhood friends and gangs, also contributed to exclusion, marginality, constraint, entrapment, and criminality. Specifically, social networks of this kind can be restricting, as seen in their inability to socialise with other young men from rival neighbourhoods and can also lead to ignoring or blocking alternative opportunities like being able to work or establishing and maintaining relationships with wider networks. For the young men in my study, this resulted in a limited social network with limited social participation, and an itinerant lifestyle between their neighbourhood and other allied gang-based neighbourhoods in Belize

City. As the necessary social bonds among the young men and some offending neighbourhood friends strengthened to form or transition into gangs and more serious acts of criminal offending, it also alienated and impeded opportunities to positively interact with others outside of those peer groups, further deepening their exclusion. The evidence in this study supports previous research in the UK and the US that strong bonds within neighbourhood-based social networks may help young men cope with challenges in poor communities and provide financial and emotional support, but may also exclude, constrain, lead young men into criminality, and disincentivise them from forming or seeking other networks (Wiesner et al., 2005; Webster et al., 2006).

Blocked Opportunities for New Social Networks

There are two important social and professional networks that most young men in this study did not have an opportunity to engage in after permanent school exclusion: friends from training or vocation and employment-based network. The first is based on the constraints to their education and training pursuit. Since most of the young men's participation in training programmes or vocational schools was precarious, with only a few completing short-term courses, they were not provided the same opportunities for the establishment of new and lasting friendships. This was because the time was too short, or they were drawn to old acquaintances or friends. MacDonald and Shildrick (2007) similarly found that for early school leavers in the UK opportunities for developing friendships at other training or workplaces were not the same because there was not enough time to establish new bonds. However, in a rare instance, a young man in this study attended one training programme and he was referred several times to new jobs, which lends credence that social networks have also been shown to provide access to information on employment opportunities (Wilson et al., 2017).

The social network of most of the young men further deteriorated due to their unemployment or experience with marginal or inconsistent work. For those who were at some point employed, many of the jobs were solitary jobs, such as security guards, cleaners, and ancillary cleaning staff, which diminished their opportunity to socialise or network. The benefits of a social or professional network gained through paid work are well-documented. Employment has been suggested to widen social networks and increase opportunities for social participation and interaction through friendships formed at work (Bailey, 2017), and for poor qualified, or socially disadvantaged young people seeking and receiving employment opportunities through informal social networks (Webster et al., 2006). For example, an informal local network provided legitimate manual work to a young man who had difficulty entering the labour market because he was under the age of 18.

Criminalisation and the Criminal Justice System

Another point of analysis of the young men's offending behaviour was concerning their quality of life based on their experience with the criminal justice system, and criminalisation. Levitas et al. (2007) refer to criminalisation as a domain under the quality of life in the B-SEM, which furthers our understanding of multidimensional disadvantage that can influence social exclusion. Firstly, the study involves only young men who had been criminally charged, therefore, they all had adverse encounters with the criminal justice system. The chronological analysis of their offending behaviour; however, provided greater insight into how those interactions evolved into structural disadvantages based on criminalisation.

The acceleration in offending behaviour among the young men in this study resulted in an equivalent increase in contact with law enforcement. Admission to custodial institutions as sentenced or remanded prisoners was a shared feature of the offending careers of most of the young men. At the time of the interview, three of the six young men were on bail for varying offences in ongoing criminal cases that can result in long-term imprisonment if convicted.

Researchers like Rodger (2008) have argued that in the UK there is an overarching attempt to manage interaction and protocols of behaviour in a neighbourhood or community by 'criminalising social policy' using civil law as a control mechanism to target anti-social behaviour while simultaneously identifying behaviours of incivility as a social problem. This is significant when considering labelling and stigmatisation in Belize through the statutory designation of "special areas" with "crime-ridden" status by the then Ministry of National Security (Amandala, 2012; Great Belize Productions, 2012) and the designation of Southside as a State of Emergency area by the Ministry of Home Affairs (Blease, 2018; Great Belize Productions, 2020; 2021; 2022). In an enabling legal environment, reports of the young men in this study suggested that the police stigmatised their disadvantaged, low-income neighbourhoods to justify harassment by routinely targeting and detaining young men and their friends for criminal investigation. This stigma, warranted or not, served to disrupt their lives and at times resulted in unfair arrests, detention, criminal charges, and incarceration. For example, one young man having been remanded and released from a young offender's institution after almost a year was criminally charged for a murder that occurred in his neighbourhood. He would be remanded for almost a year before his eventual exoneration. However, the process of criminalisation helped to shape how the police interacted with him to the point that he was intentionally rearrested immediately upon release without merit, despite the adjudication of the court. This experience of transparent discrimination typifies the experiences of most of the young men in this study through a revolving door between them and the police and the wider criminal justice system.

For others, criminalisation manifested in occasions of police harassment and abuse, and denial of their rights by arbitrarily arresting them for unrelated crimes, or even worse, arresting them with the intent to raise the suspicion of another gang or a faction of a gang that the arrestee was a person of interest in a murder of a friend or loved one. In doing so, the police sought to criminalise and devalue their lives by pitting one group against the other with the eventual outcome of a violent inter-gang conflict. This was a consequential finding because it suggested that the role of criminalisation in their lives made them substantially more vulnerable to harassment, discrimination, and harm when faced with targeted police interaction. Emler (2009) suggested a relationship between labelling from the criminal justice system and the reputations and peer associations of young people. He posits that labels resulting from involvement in the criminal justice system do not result in the individual living up to the labels, but instead are more likely to reinforce already established reputations.

The young men's interaction with the criminal justice system had other wide-reaching implications. Being stuck in a cycle of criminalisation, the interaction with the criminal justice system, for some young men, reduced their future life chances by undermining their education or employment prospects. For example, one young man attributed the hindrance to his attempt to return to school after permanent school exclusion to a criminal charge and court proceedings that required him to attend court hearings regularly and report to a designated police station that was in the territory of a rival gang. Another felt that despite his avoidance of criminal charges after his first, the police's continued harassment and targeting adversely impacted his life chances by undercutting his career goal to join the Belize Police Department when the desired employment opportunity arose after permanent school exclusion. He was unfairly arrested, detained, and released for a shooting that he did not commit. Unfortunately, he missed the opportunity to meet with the relevant party to explore the job prospect.

Conclusion

This discussion set out to examine the extent of the influence of permanent school exclusion on the offending behaviour and the multidimensional disadvantages experienced in the post-school exclusion lives of the young men in this study, in the context of the wider literature. The study indicated that permanent school exclusion served as a critical life event that set into motion a dynamic process of social exclusion that limited the choices and capabilities of the young men of this study and impacted their future life chances. By drawing on the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM), the study was able to examine and uncover an extreme manifestation of social exclusion through multiple forms of exclusion across several domains of disadvantage that constituted the young men's experience of deep exclusion after permanent school exclusion.

The analysis in this study suggests that there were important links between the experience of permanent school exclusion and other processes and interactions occurring within the social environments of the young men, in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development. The home environment while having greater influence during the childhood of the young men was supplanted by the neighbourhood, peers, and school as they aged into adolescence, thereby, exerting greater influence on their social outcomes. The multiple disadvantages associated with the home environment served as early risk factors for offending for most of the young men, including most homes, being lone parent headed, low parental supervision, and low income, which played a significant role in the denial of economic resources at an early age. Living and growing up alongside peers who were demographically and geographically similar with a common experience of economic marginality in neighbourhoods that had a shared historical reality of cumulative disadvantages and social exclusion, such as poverty, high rates of violence, a proliferation of gangs, and stigmatisation, shaped the opportunities and life chances of the young men in this study. The interactions between the young men and their neighbourhood peers as they grew older were guided by a localised hegemonic masculinity that galvanised their collective identity and provided the foundation for their involvement in early offending behaviour. Their individual and familial experiences of critical life events, which mostly featured bereavement and personal loss, further shaped their realities.

For these reasons, permanent school exclusion that deprived the young men of access to education and the opportunity to acquire formal educational qualifications, not only served as another critical life event but also set into motion a dynamic process of social exclusion that limited the choices and capabilities of the young men and impacted their future life chances. This induced disengagement from mainstream education contributed to an exclusion from the school environment that obstructed their formation of friendship groups with other young people who were geographically or demographically different from themselves and their neighbourhood friends but also alienated them from an environment that moderated their involvement in early risk-taking and offending behaviour. Simultaneously, permanent school exclusion facilitated greater inclusion into a neighbourhood peer group and environment of similar social and economic marginality, which over time reinforced and entrenched their offending behaviour, and for most, resulting in uptake and evolution to more serious offending behaviour.

What followed permanent school exclusion was a complex and multidimensional process of social exclusion across multiple domains that resulted in severe negative consequences for their quality of life and future life chances, particularly in relation to their participation in education and training, the

labour market, social networks, and their experience of criminalisation. Firstly, the post-school exclusion path to educational re-engagement was characterised by prolonged searches for educational opportunities that translated to protracted periods away and unsuccessful completion of mainstream education among all the young men, as well as limited success in enrolment and completion of short-term training programmes or vocational schools. The shortcomings were driven by several exclusionary factors, including financial and age constraints, and the distance to institutions that served as a constraint to access because of the risk of harm. In the end, most young men did not receive employment based on their participation in training programmes or vocational school and most continued to experience a cyclical pattern of precarious involvement in low-quality work, unsecured, unemployment, and training programmes, which did not reduce their economic marginality. Therefore, the young men's participation in the labour market was characterised by either nonparticipation or precarious participation influenced by compounding exclusionary factors related to lack of educational credentials and constraints on the working age.

A concurrent process of exclusionary outcomes occurred as the young men's offending behaviour and gang involvement evolved and increased. Their quality of life was severely and adversely impacted through the process of criminalisation based on their experience with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Admission to custodial institutions as sentenced or remanded prisoners was a shared feature of the offending careers of most of the young men, with three of the six young men being on bail for varying offences in ongoing criminal cases that can result in long-term imprisonment if convicted. Consequently, being stuck in a cycle of criminalisation, the interaction with the criminal justice system, for some young men, further marginalised them in their pursuit of other educational or training, and employment opportunities, and made them vulnerable to harassment, stigmatisation, and discrimination by law enforcement.

Lastly, the social network of most of the young men further deteriorated after permanent school exclusion. Since most of the young men's participation in training programmes or vocational schools was precarious, with only a few completing short-term courses, they were not provided the same time and opportunity for the establishment of new and lasting friendships. Likewise, their experiences with exclusionary employment through marginal or inconsistent work, or unemployment restricted them from expanding their social network that can provide support and information on other employment opportunities. Additionally, the inclusionary and strong bonds that the young men had with their neighbourhood friends after their exclusion, also helped to shape their disengagement from alternative opportunities like being able to work or establishing and maintaining relationships with wider networks. Nevertheless, the family as the proximal influence and most enduring social network

continued to be a consistent source of social support to the young men despite their experience of economic disadvantages and long-term dependency caused by low or nonparticipation in the labour market or possession of legitimate sources of income.

The final chapter of this thesis is the conclusion that provides a final analysis, a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the study, and the implications of the study findings to policy and practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the main research findings in response to the research questions. This chapter summarises the key findings and explores the implications for policy and practice concerning young men in Belize who experience permanent school exclusion and offending behaviour. It is divided into five sections: Summary of Main Research Findings, Implications for Policy and Practice, Study Contributions and Limitations, Areas for Future Research, and Concluding Thoughts.

Summary of Main Research Findings

This study aimed to examine the influence of permanent school exclusion from secondary school on the offending behaviour and experience of wider forms of social exclusion among young men within the context of the social environments of the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school in Belize City. To accomplish this aim, three research questions were explored:

RQ1 How do the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school influence the life course of young men experiencing permanent school exclusion?

The role of the social environment in the lives of the six young men was examined through the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's Theory and Social Exclusion Approach. The findings suggested that the home, neighbourhood, peer group, and school were important influences on the young men as they progressed through childhood and early adolescence. Importantly, during their childhood, multiple disadvantages associated with the home environment served as early risk factors for offending since most homes were lone parent headed with little or no presence of fathers or father figures. This influenced the consistency of parenting, supervision, quality of life, and access to economic resources. For most, these early challenges were accompanied by critical life events such as bereavement and the personal loss of paternal figures and family members who played important roles in social support, discipline, financial stability, and influence on their early aspirational outlook.

In terms of Bronfenbrenner's Theory, the notion that the home served as a proximal influence in which young men experienced their most enduring interactions during childhood was suggested to be supplanted by the neighbourhood and peer groups during early adolescence. Living and growing up alongside peers who were demographically similar with a common experience of economic marginality in neighbourhoods that had a shared historical reality of cumulative disadvantages and social exclusion, such as poverty, high rates of violence, a proliferation of gangs, and stigmatisation, shaped the opportunities and life chances of the young men in this study. Therefore, much of the

gender identity among the young men was formed around a collective masculinity identity shaped by exposure to violence and gang activity in the neighbourhoods that contributed to a normalisation of early offending behaviour. This neighbourhood effect also complicated pupil interactions within the school environment. The findings suggested that while the school moderated some of the neighbourhood effects, such as risk-taking and offending, the schooling experience was still adversely affected by neighbourhood-based rivalries that resulted in a hostile environment and subverted the role of the school as a safe space.

The differential power relations between the school and young men that resulted in their permanent school exclusion and denial of participation in education also adversely impacted the lives of the young men by setting into motion a dynamic process of social exclusion that limited their choices and future life chances. A curtailed schooling career driven by school policy was compounded by pressure toward conformity to a gender expectation among neighbourhood peers that young men who were out of school or unemployed should join the neighbourhood gang. Additionally, the discontinuity of relationships with most school friends closed a network for social support but conversely led to inclusion in the neighbourhood social network that helped some of the young men cope with permanent school exclusion and living in their poor neighbourhood based on their shared social and economic marginalisation. However, the bonds between neighbourhood friends and gangs also contributed to exclusion from other social networks that further contributed to stigmatisation and social marginalisation. Despite the social and economic marginalisation characterised by low or nonparticipation in the labour market and closing opportunities for education or training, the home environment remained a critical factor in the post-school exclusion transitions of the young men. The accumulating disadvantages that the young men faced after permanent school exclusion were ameliorated by the family and women in the young men's lives who played important roles, such as confidantes, supporters, and financial providers, to attenuate the effects of wider social exclusion. For some young men, their involvement in stable intimate and family relationships contributed to self-reported desistance.

RQ2 What are the implications of permanent school exclusion on criminal offending in young men?

Bronfenbrenner's Theory and the Social Exclusion Approach provided a lens to examine the evolution of the young men's offending behaviour before and after permanent school exclusion. The findings suggest that a complex relationship between the home, neighbourhood, and school contributed to all the young men offending before permanent school exclusion. Home factors, like parental supervision and the experience of critical life events, like the bereavement of parental figures who had disciplinary and breadwinner roles, adversely affected the quality of life of most young men from an early age.

Those who had stable supervision to limit or restrict their early interaction with neighbourhood peers and exposure to neighbourhood factors, such as violence, offended later than those who did not.

Living in neighbourhoods characterised by social and economic marginality, including the presence of early offending peers, gangs, crime, and drugs provided enduring interactions outside of school, which seemed to have influenced their early involvement in petty offending and recreational drug use during early adolescence. In addition, the self-reported offending among neighbourhood friends during early adolescence seemed to have been perceived as a rite of passage and expression of masculinity. Within that context, it would suggest that these activities were understood as normal parts of growing up in disadvantaged and marginalised neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood peer group, therefore, reinforced their early involvement in non-violent offending behaviour, such as socialising and visiting entertainment venues while under the legal adult age, underage drinking, recreational marijuana use, and theft, and for some, violent acquisitive crimes, such as robbery. The early offending behaviour resulted in two young men being criminally charged before permanent school exclusion.

From a social exclusion standpoint, the policy of school exclusion provided the schools with an institutional and structural advantage in removing undesired pupils. However, school exclusion played an important part in the evolution of offending behaviour since it was suggested to compound the issues of social and economic marginality and early critical life events. As a social environment that moderated some of the neighbourhood effects, such as risk-taking and offending, an unintended consequence of out-of-school fixed-term school exclusion was its contribution to early offending by removing the young men from the school environment and relocating them to their homes and neighbourhood. This structural disadvantage that changed the social environment of the young men was further complicated by permanent school exclusion, which served as a compounding negative critical life event that set into motion a sequence of changes in the young men's lives. The sequence started with a feeling of social isolation and denial of participation in education that interrupted their daily routine and contributed to unsupervised and unstructured social activities with neighbourhood peers, some of whom were already serious offenders.

The deprivation of choice complemented by no statutory support from the school or the Ministry of Education for placement into another school resulted in disengagement from mainstream education and social isolation from school peers. As a consequence of permanent school exclusion, both neighbourhood and peer factors became the dominant influences that led to an evolution of more serious offending behaviour, such as constant and more dangerous fights and altercations, gang involvement, engaging in robberies, and shootings. All the remaining young men were eventually criminally charged with various serious offences, including robberies, burglary, aggravated assault,

firearm possession, attempted murder, and murder, after permanent school exclusion. For some of the young men, their entrenched offending behaviour after permanent school exclusion resulted in a significant uptake in offending behaviour, gang involvement, and a pattern of repeat offending.

RQ3 How does social exclusion manifest in young men who have experienced permanent school exclusion?

This question examined the transitions of the young men after permanent school exclusion in accordance with the Social Exclusion Approach loosely drawn from Levitas et al.'s (2007) Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix. Permanent school exclusion served as a critical life event and denial of participation in education, which set into motion a dynamic process of social exclusion across multiple domains or dimensions of disadvantage that limited the choices and capabilities of the young men of this study and impacted their future life chances. The denial of the acquisition of formal educational qualifications through access to education and educational attainment attributed to permanent school exclusion was reinforced by difficulties to re-engage in mainstream education. The post-school exclusion path to educational re-engagement was characterised by prolonged searches for educational opportunities, rejection, delayed enrolment, and growing disinterest in or disengagement from education. In the end, none of the six young men successfully returned and completed mainstream education.

While most attempted to or successfully enrolled in training programmes or vocational programmes, only a minority completed the short-term courses. Education and training opportunities outside of mainstream education were complicated by multiple factors, including a paucity of training programmes or vocational schools to select from, unaffordability, age constraints, and unstructured programmes, or unavailability of courses in line with their training interests, which led to several disengaging. More importantly, the prospect of successful participation in the labour market based on these mostly uncertified training programmes, either did not result in jobs or, when acquired, did not provide job security, or reduced economic marginality for the young men. Only two of the six young men received a job because they participated in a training programme or vocational school, while most continued to experience a cyclical pattern of precarious involvement in low-quality work, unemployment, and training programmes.

The labour market experience for most of the young men was based on either nonparticipation or precarious participation in the labour market. This experience was driven by compounding exclusionary factors related to a lack of educational credentials and constraints on the working age because all the young men were under the legal adult age of 18 at the time of their permanent school exclusion. Their labour market participation was based on low or unskilled, low-paid manual, marginal

work such as maintenance work, construction work, ancillary cleaning jobs, and low-level security. All the young men experienced job instability or insecurity based on little permanence that resulted in easy termination or seasonal job opportunities. This exclusionary employment when the job is of low quality or so insecure that the person is not guaranteed to be in employment for a long time was further complicated when compounded by other exclusionary factors, such as gang involvement or possession of criminal records, which led to cumulative disadvantage.

Being stuck in a cycle of criminalisation, the interaction with the criminal justice system, for some young men, increased their stigmatisation while it simultaneously reduced their future life chances by undermining their education or employment prospects. It also contributed to deepening but exclusionary entrenchment into neighbourhood peer and gang social networks. These contemporaneous disadvantages further deteriorated chances to expand social and professional networks due to their unemployment or experience with marginal or inconsistent work that could increase opportunities for social participation or provide access to information on employment opportunities. Consequently, most of the young men were unable to acquire legitimate sources of income and experienced long-term dependency on their families.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The study findings suggest that interventions should consider policy changes that address the factors in the social environment that influence the schooling experiences of young men to reduce the risk of permanent school exclusion, potential entry to offending or transition to more serious, longer-term criminal offending, and wider social exclusion. This is particularly important given that all the young men in this study experienced social and economic marginality after permanent school exclusion, which contributed to uptake in offending behaviour and gang involvement while under the legal adult age of 18.

Education Policy

i. Behavioural difficulties were highlighted as one of the main reasons for fixed-term and permanent school exclusion. The Belize Education and Training Act mandates the National Council for Education to establish a Student Welfare Committee to address issues related to pupil protection, non-participation in school, health and well-being, and other support services. Likewise, the Education (Amendment) Rules 2012 identifies the District Education Councils as responsible for the appointment of the Exceptional Populations and Student Welfare Committee to address the issues of pupil well-being, enrolment and attendance, and nonparticipation. These Committees should be convened, if not already, to consider school exclusion as an issue of well-being and non-participation and provide

counselling support to deal with behaviour problems exhibited by pupils before the situation reaches a crisis point.

ii.   It is clear from the accounts of the young men and mothers in this study that the Ministry of Education was not involved in the permanent school exclusion process. The Education and Training Act, 2010 Section 3(2a) purports that the function of the Ministry of Education is to "establish and set national education goals and policies." Further, the Act provides under Section 40(1b) that a function of the Managing Authorities (MAs) of government, government-aided and community schools, which the young men in this study attended, is to formulate policies to efficiently address student discipline and behaviour. However, the Act does not explicitly limit the policies of the MAs except for a caveat under Section 51(1) that the policies may be subject to guidance from the Ministry. Since each MA can formulate policies and internal regulations for student discipline, the policy and practice of permanent school exclusion are likely to vary and result in diverse approaches and outcomes. For example, the unwritten informal school exclusion practice of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' should be addressed by the Ministry of Education, and guidance provided for the reporting of permanent school exclusion processes and statistics.

iii.   Data on permanent school exclusion or 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' is not currently collated at the school or national level. There is a lack of understanding of the total number and demographic profile of the young people (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) affected by permanent school exclusion and 'Withdrawal without Prejudice.' The lack of this information limits proper policy evaluation that may help to improve the school-home interaction and allow for additional preventative work to occur as difficulties with young people are raised.

iv.   Young people who experience permanent school exclusion should receive statutory support from the Ministry of Education to fill the 'policy vacuum' that excludes them: as those in this study experienced when they had limited immediate alternatives, such as skills training schemes or vocational schools, and remained out of education for protracted periods, and some, a complete cessation. The description of the experience of the young men and mothers suggested that the focal concern of the process was the school and there was little effort made to elicit the views of the young people who would invariably be adversely affected by permanent school exclusion. This inequitable process should be replaced with a process of representation and a right to appeal decisions at different levels in pursuit of Article 28(2) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to ensure that school discipline is administered consistently with the young person's human dignity.

v.   The findings suggested that for several of the young men in this study, out-of-school fixed-term exclusion facilitated more free time in their homes and neighbourhoods where less adult supervision

was available, which contributed to offending. It is recommended that this type of school exclusion be evaluated to promote the use of in-school fixed-term school exclusion as a part of the behavioural and discipline management system and to discourage criminal offending by enrolled pupils.

vi. The young men's perception of their schooling experience was often connected with the subjective worth they attached to how they were treated by specific teachers and school principals. Positive interactions were mostly attributed to female teachers, while male teachers were often viewed as aggressors. Negative interactions with male teachers contributed to oppositional conduct toward school and adult authority. Caribbean literature suggests that there is a deficit in male representation in schools; therefore, there is a need for training of male teachers to foster constructive relationships with male pupils who are coming from socially marginalised households and neighbourhoods to contribute to positive gender identity formation as positive male role models.

Social Exclusion-related Policy

i. There is a policy link between educational exclusion and social exclusion. Particularly, school exclusion undercuts the educational opportunities of young people and harms their prospects of gaining skills and credentials that may be needed to acquire more than low-skill jobs. The Education and Training Act, 2010 refers to Technical and Vocational Education and Training but does not provide any transition mechanism for young people who experience permanent school exclusion. This is exacerbated by the existing gap between the mandatory school age of 14 and the eligibility enrolment age of 17 for adult vocational programmes. The recent closure of this gap by lowering the eligibility age to 15 years to enrol in Level 1 will help to support early school leavers like the young men in this study.

ii. There is a need for a family policy that provides support to families in difficult neighbourhood settings. Many of the challenges identified in this study related to sole mother households struggling financially without fathers or positive male role models to shape the young men's masculinity identity formation. Since school fees at the secondary school level are usually higher than at the primary school level, there should be more subsidies or fee waivers for pupils from lone-parent households. Parenting support should also be considered before permanent school exclusion to prevent contributing to social disadvantages experienced among young people from difficult family and neighbourhood backgrounds.

<u>Offending-related Policy</u>

i. The school was identified by the young men as an important social environment that attenuated offending behaviour to a large extent and provided a refuge from some neighbourhood factors. Retaining the presence of young men in school, especially those who have a history of school-related violence or documented neighbourhood problems, may facilitate recognition of warning signs of possible later offending. Therefore, disciplinary action at the school level should consider improving the home-school relationship and fostering social skills or conflict resolution through restorative justice approaches to address the culture of masculinity and its relationship with offending and attitudes toward education, as a part of their curriculum or school programmes.

ii. Most of the young men in this study self-reported offending behaviour before permanent school exclusion but were not criminally charged. It may be prudent that schools in Belize develop mechanisms to promote the use of self-reported data to inform policy. The development of anonymised instruments or mechanisms to capture self-reported offending data may assist in tailoring interventions for young men at risk of permanent school exclusion and may limit the escalation of their offending.

iii. The findings suggest that in the wake of permanent school exclusion young people interacted with a base core of out-of-school young people in their neighbourhoods, many of whom themselves are socially excluded, previously offended, and are seasoned gang members. There is a need for neighbourhood youth clubs or youth services equipped with community youth officers who understand the neighbourhood factors that influence young people to provide alternative options to offending or joining gangs. Permanently excluded young men who are incarcerated and released should be provided with access to ICT and on-site or online education programmes to complete their secondary school education in prison.

iv. Women (mothers, intimate partners, siblings, and teachers) are cited in this study as a positive source of social and emotional support by occupying important roles such as confidantes, supporters, and financial providers as the young men experienced closing opportunities, including permanent school exclusion, low labour market participation, and offending. Likewise, at the institutional level, female teachers were complimented for their support of the young men, which translated to positive teacher-pupil relationships. It is, therefore, recommended that policy intervention at the family, school, and youth service levels ensure the inclusion of women as a stable foundation in the lives of offending and gang-involved young men.

Study Contributions and Limitations

Overall, the main aims of this study were met. The study provided a detailed examination of the influences on offending behaviour and social exclusion in a group of permanently excluded young men. Having interviewed six young men and five mothers, the findings discussed their lived experiences in their home, neighbourhood, peer group, and school environments. There were no previous studies that explored the social outcomes of permanently excluded young men in Belize; therefore, this study empirically contributes new knowledge to the body of literature in Belize.

Much of the previous international research studies cited in the Literature Review and Discussion chapters explored the link between school exclusion and criminal offending or social exclusion: however, this was not a specific focus of the Caribbean literature. Previous Caribbean research focused on school dropout or non-participation in education and the relationship with offending or social exclusion. On the other hand, my study concentrated on a group of school-excluded young men using a critical life event of permanent school exclusion while examining how the processes and interactions within their social environments helped to influence their offending and wider social exclusion after permanent school exclusion. This empirical and theoretical contribution of new knowledge to the body of Caribbean literature is significant.

The use of the qualitative design facilitated analysis at both the surface and depth levels to explain the young men's offending and social exclusion experiences. The methodological contribution of the study is that it privileged the voices of the young men, as a part of a 'hard to reach' sample given their detachment from school and involvement in the criminal justice system, in the presentation of interview data with quotes in their native Creole dialect. The qualitative approach ensured an understanding of the multiple realities and variations in the contexts of the lives of the young men from different secondary schools and different influences from their homes, peer groups, and neighbourhoods. This was further supported by the inclusion of parents as additional data sources on the interaction between the young men and their social environments. As such, the sample provided very good insights into lived experiences and offending outcomes as initially proposed.

Analysing the data on the young men through the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development allowed for a fuller understanding of their experiences within the context of the proximal influence of the home and distal influences of the neighbourhood, peer group, and school. I did not find any previous research that combined Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and Social Exclusion Theory as analytical tools to offer insight into permanent school exclusion as a critical life event and its influence on offending and wider social exclusion. Therefore, the theoretical contribution to strengthening the theories was through the generation of a

theoretical framework for understanding the range of interacting influences that impact the transitions after permanent school exclusion as a critical life event.

Lastly, the selection of Belize City as the site of the study was of critical importance for a first-time study on this topic given that it is the largest urban centre in Belize with about a fifth of the country's total population, the largest distribution of urban secondary schools, and the highest homicide rate. Additionally, Belize City is characterised by significant social and economic challenges that can negatively influence the social outcomes of young people, including crime and violence. These documented characteristics contribute to our understanding of the nature of their social environments, including their families, peer groups, and neighbourhoods. Hence, this study empirically contributes context-specific knowledge to inform policy considerations when addressing issues of crime and violence among young people in Belize City.

On the other hand, there were some limitations of the research beyond my control which should also be acknowledged. Gaining access to participants in this study proved to be challenging probably for several reasons.

It was very possible that the exploration of permanent school exclusion and the subsequent uncovering of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' during my fieldwork, which was not an established policy of the Ministry of Education but an unwritten practice of exclusion by many secondary schools, influenced the recruitment process. Some schools may have been concerned with potential reputational damage if a link between permanent school exclusion and offending was established in this study; therefore, it may have resulted in the nonresponse to recruitment letters by some schools, and retraction of participation approval by other schools. The recruitment challenges consequently resulted in a change in research design from a mixed-method study to full qualitative research.

Another possible limitation of the study was that the refusal of access to the schools precipitated a reliance on data from youth-based organisations, which may have influenced the locality from which the young men in this study came as they were primarily based in the Southside. The initial sampling design considered the selection of secondary schools based on their geographic location in the 'Northside' and 'Southside.' Hence, youth services may have targeted more young people from the Southside of Belize City than the Northside, and the findings, while not seeking to be representative, nevertheless do not reflect the wider city.

The change in both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study meant that I was unable to identify the proportion and demographic characteristics of pupils who experienced permanent school exclusion within four years and the subsequent nature of their offences if any. In addition, the fact

that teachers or any educational staff did not participate in this study limited the gathering of multiple perspectives that was based on the theoretical significance of the school environment to the experience of the young men. The importance of teachers as representatives of the school environment in this study was based on their knowledge and interaction with the pupil.

Overall, however, the study sample of young men and mothers provided detailed accounts of their experiences with permanent school exclusion, transition points in offending and social exclusion, as well as the nature of interactions within their social environments.

Areas for Future Research

There are several potential areas for further research stemming from this study.

This study has significant implications for young men who have been 'Withdrawn without Prejudice' as a form of informal exclusion. The description of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' given by school principals and vice-principals during my fieldwork suggested that it was inextricably linked to permanent school exclusion since the removal of the pupil is initiated by the school and if the pupil does not enrol in another school, it can lead to similar exclusion outcomes. There was one case of 'Withdrawal without Prejudice' in this thesis. His withdrawal from school resulted in a two-year gap period from mainstream education. This gap period was characterised by unemployment and entrenchment in offending and gang involvement. His return to mainstream schooling was short-lived since he was permanently excluded because of his involvement in a fight on his first day. While the informal exclusion contributed to his gap period from mainstream education, future research should consider the relevance of this practice to offending behaviour and the social exclusion experience.

Another area of research is the significance of ethnicity to permanent school exclusion and the concomitant social exclusion experience. All the young men in this study were Black (Creole or Garifuna ethnicity). Since I was unable to obtain the school exclusion data on characteristics of permanently excluded pupils to complete RQ1, future research should examine the intersectionality and the interplay between poverty, ethnicity, and gender on permanent school exclusion.

Also, the low participation of schools in the study limited the analysis of the frequency and patterns of school exclusion, and pupil demographic characteristics, as initially proposed in RQ1. It is, therefore, possible that the input of teachers and school principals could have improved my understanding of the school-related factors and policies across schools that influenced the experience of the young men. Their involvement could have also helped to identify a profile for high or low-excluding schools in Belize City.

The young men in this study were from Southside neighbourhoods in Belize City. The well-documented description of the Southside of Belize City in terms of socioeconomic status, crime and violence, and gang proliferation, as included in several chapters in this study, may differentially influence the offending and social exclusion experiences and social environments of young men. Future studies may consider a comparative approach as was initially included in the research design of this study.

Lastly, most of the young men were still adolescents at the time of the interview and those who were oldest suggested desistance from offending due to employment stable relationships and child-raising. These findings warrant additional qualitative research into the long-term experiences with offending and social exclusion in the later subsequent years of permanently excluded young men.

Concluding thoughts

The accounts of the young men about their childhood and adolescent experiences within the various social environments were compelling and highlighted the importance of the processes and interactions that influenced their life course. Their experience with permanent school exclusion provided evidence that critical life events can have significant effects on the nature, direction, and outcomes of young people's transition to adulthood by constraining their choices and capabilities from a young age. The acceleration of their criminal offending, both in seriousness and frequency, provided support to the theorisation that adaptability to life events is influenced and linked to the social environments that young people find themselves in. More importantly, the timing in which young people experience critical moments and life events can close or open opportunities as shown through the diminishing structural opportunities of the educational and labour market prospects and limited social networks. As the opportunities available to these young men quickly diminished, most embedded themselves deeper into their violent and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, peer groups, and gangs, which led to a cycle of offending and accumulation of criminal records that limited their life chances and social outcomes.

The findings of this research will hopefully inform policymakers on the plight of permanently excluded young men and shed light on the complex array of issues that contribute to offending in Belize City. There is also hope that social institutions like schools recognise their importance as a critical social environment in the lives of young people residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in which they operate. As we have seen, permanent school exclusion is often a precursor to wider social exclusion and the knock-on effect is often unmanageable, so schools and policymakers should try earnestly to retain our young men in schools and give them the best chance for a positive and productive future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Overview of Initial Research Design

Four research questions were initially proposed for this study that reflected a mixed-method research design. These research questions were formulated to represent quantitative and qualitative inquiries based on the need to acquire descriptive data on the characteristics of the permanently excluded young men, followed by in-depth interviews of their lived experiences before and after permanent school exclusion. The first question represented a quantitative inquiry while the others were qualitative.

RQ1 What are the characteristics of young men who are permanently excluded from secondary school?

RQ2 How do the family, neighbourhood, peer group, and school influence the lives of young men experiencing permanent school exclusion?

RQ3 What are the implications of permanent school exclusion on criminal offending in young men?

RQ4 How does social exclusion manifest in young men who have experienced permanent school exclusion?

The challenges in accessing secondary schools as recruitment sites to collect exclusion data made it impossible to successfully address RQ1. This eliminated the quantitative inquiry and rendered the inquiries as qualitative, thereby changing the research design from a mixed-method to a qualitative study. It also influenced the sampling and recruitment approach. As a matter of information and reflection on my effort, flexibility, and adaptability,

To explore the research problem, a mixed-method research design was considered the best fit to enhance the explanatory power by blending both quantitative and qualitative approaches for a deeper and richer interpretation (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2006). Notably, the mixed-method design included a qualitative study as the principal method to address research RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 based on a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of the young men through qualitative interviews (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2010).

The descriptive-analytical capacity of the quantitative approach to conducting group comparisons (Castro et al. 2010) between permanently excluded young men from school data on exclusion would have allowed me to explore the extent of permanent school exclusion (RQ1). It would also have

allowed me to conduct group comparisons from the police data between those young men who were permanently excluded and those who were criminally charged. Subsequently, I would have conducted a qualitative study on the permanently excluded young men who had been criminally charged for deeper analysis, which would have also included their parents and educational staff as key actors in the school exclusion process (Creswell 2014).

Sample Design

The sampling design of the study was to be constructed on a nested relationship in which members of the wider quantitative sample were selected as participants of the qualitative study sample (Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2007). The mixed-method sampling model was as follows:
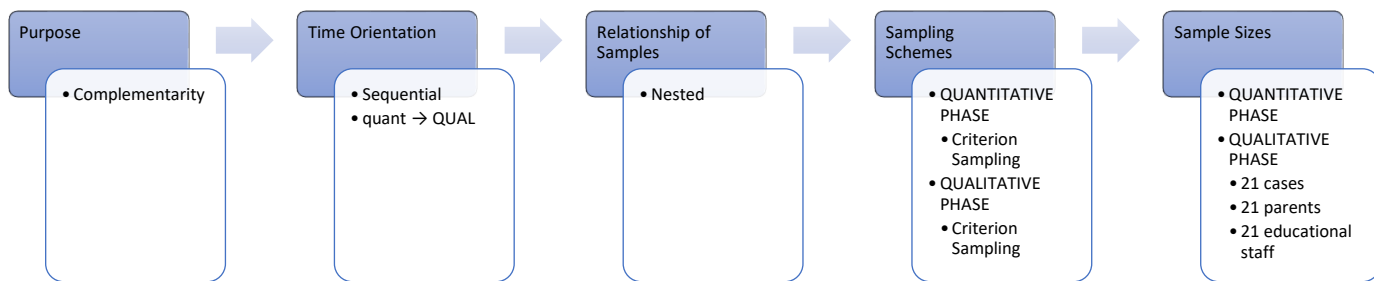
Figure 4.1: Mixed-Method Sampling Model

The initial sampling design of the study considered co-educational secondary schools that had male sub-populations as research and recruitment sites. There was a total of 13 secondary schools identified in Belize City, with 11 being co-educational. Of those 11 secondary schools, seven were selected to be included in the study based on two important contexts: Managing Authorities (MAs) and geographic location. There were seven MAs (as described in Chapter 1) under which secondary schools were administered in Belize City, so it was considered important to have schools from each to include variation. Of the 11 schools, five were on the Northside and six were on the Southside. This distinction was made because of the socioeconomic boundaries, higher rates of poverty, a concentration of criminal gangs, and other issues described in Chapter 1 (Gayle and Mortis 2010). This consideration was critical to the study given the theoretical proposition that the social environments of the family, neighbourhood, peer group and school influenced the lives of young men. Therefore, the combination criteria of MAs and geographic location reduced the school sample to seven secondary schools – see Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Sample of Secondary Schools by Geographical Location and MA

Secondary School	Geographic Location	Management Authority
School A	Southside	MA 1
School B	Southside	MA 2
School C	Southside	MA 3
School D	Northside	MA 4
School E	Northside	MA 5
School F	Northside	MA 6
School G	Northside	MA 7

The sampling scheme for participants of the quantitative phase was criterion sampling based on being permanently excluded from one of the selected secondary schools within the past four years. After the group comparisons of permanently excluded young men and satisfying research Q1, the next step was to develop a dataset to send to the Belize Police Department for cross-reference with those who had been criminally charged. The linking of these two datasets would create a new dataset of young men who had been permanently excluded from school and criminally charged.

Ethical approval for this initial study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol based on the initial research design (see Appendices 1 and 2). However, issues related to access based on school gatekeepers challenged the completion of the initial research design in its entirety and during the fieldwork, which extended to 11 months rather than the expected 5 months, I had to seek re-approval from the REC two additional times because of changes to the research design. The first was to include youth-based organisations in Belize City as recruitment sites to supplement the data received from the schools (see Appendix 3). The second was to have the youth-based organisations help with recruitment by directly contacting the young men and informing them of the study (see Appendix 4).

The absence of data from the other five schools presented several challenges. Firstly, because I was unable to gather data from the other schools, I did not have enough school exclusion data to conduct a comparison with the police offending data. Secondly, each school represented a Managing Authority, which meant that the representative data required to complete the objective of research RQ1 would not be achievable. Thirdly, any other source of data other than the schools would not be accurate in terms of total permanent school exclusion. I would also not be able to interview the educational staff as initially designed because the school had to identify and approve the staff's participation. Lastly, the pool of young men to recruit a qualitative study sample would be too small

since it was only two schools. Therefore, from this point onward in this thesis, I will discuss the revised research design based on the qualitative study approach.

Appendix 2

Recruitment Letter to School and LMA

Dear X,

I am a Belizean studying at the University of Bristol in England and working on a research study to understand the role that expulsion from secondary school plays in the criminal offending and social exclusion of boys and young men, and how their family, friends, school, and neighbourhood shape their lives.

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bristol and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. Therefore, you can be assured that all information regarding any individual or school will be anonymised and held in the strictest of confidence.

For the purposes of the study, I am seeking to link information on boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school in the past four years with information of boys and young men who have been criminally charged for a crime so that I can investigate the extent of offending among those boys and young men. Thereafter, I am asking certain boys and young men who have been expelled and have been criminally charged for a crime if I can speak to them and their parents. I would also like to speak with teachers or administrative staff who are knowledgeable of the school career and expulsion of those boys and young men.

I would be very grateful if your school would participate in the study. Participation in the study involves firstly, providing access to information on boys and young men expelled from your school over the last four years. The review of the information would be arranged at a time of your convenience and would be of minimal disruption to your daily schedule. Secondly, I would be grateful if you can contact the boys and young men on my behalf who have been identified for potential participation in the study. Finally, when the boys and young men to be interviewed are identified, access to a staff that is familiar with their experience will be important.

I would greatly appreciate your participation and assistance in this study. The participation of your school will enhance our understanding of how boys and young men respond to expulsion from

secondary school in Belize City, youth offending and how to deal with it. The findings of the study will also be disseminated to the school upon completion in whichever way you feel would be more helpful.

Can I arrange to visit or call you? If so, please kindly contact me at gn16099@bristol.ac.uk or 610-1867.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Kind Regards,

Greg Nunez
PhD Candidate

University of
BRISTOL

School for Policy Studies

8 Priory Road

Bristol BS8 1TZ

Tel: +44 (0)117 954 6755

bristol.ac.uk/sps

November 14, 2018

Deborah Domingo

Chief Executive Officer

Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture

Belmopan, Belize

Dear CEO Domingo,

Re: Endorsement of Research Study

I am a Belizean studying at the University of Bristol in England and working on a research study to understand the role that expulsion from secondary school plays in the criminal offending and social exclusion of boys and young men, and how their family, friends, school, and neighbourhood shape their lives.

For the purposes of the study, information on boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school in the past four years will be linked with information of boys and young men who have been criminally charged for a crime so that I can investigate the extent of offending among those boys and young men.   Thereafter, I am asking certain boys and young men who have been expelled and have been criminally charged for a crime if I can speak to them and their parents. I would also like to speak with teachers or administrative staff who are knowledgeable of the school career and expulsion of those boys and young men.

I would be very grateful if the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture would endorse the study and grant me the permission to include seven secondary schools in Belize City in the study. The review of the information would be arranged at a time of the schools' convenience and would be of minimal disruption to their daily schedule. The participation of the Ministry and the schools will enhance our understanding of how boys and young men respond to expulsion from secondary school, youth offending and how we deal with it. The findings of the study will also be disseminated to the Ministry upon completion in whichever way you feel would be more helpful.

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bristol. Therefore, you can be assured that all information regarding the schools, young people and their families will be anonymised and held in the strictest of confidence.

I would greatly appreciate your participation and assistance in this study. Can I arrange to visit or call you? If so, please kindly contact me at gn16099@bristol.ac.uk or 610- 1867.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Kind Regards,
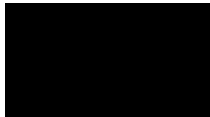
Greg Nunez
PhD Candidate

Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture

My Ref. SEC/84/18(65)

November 29th, 2018

To Whom it May Concern

The Ministry of Education endorses the participation of the selected secondary schools and any unit of the Ministry of Education that can inform the research proposed by PhD candidate, Mr. Greg Nunez, of the University of Bristol.

The Ministry believes that this research which seeks to provide a better understanding of the role that expulsion from secondary school plays in the criminal offending and social exclusion of boys and young men, can be invaluable in informing the review and evaluation of existing policies and practices. We are satisfied with the ethical provisions for anonymity and look forward to the receipt of the findings.

Your facilitation of this study will be appreciated.

Sincerely,

(DEBORAH DOMINGO) (MRS.)

Chief Executive Officer (for Education)

West Block, Belmopan

Tel: (501) 822-2380/0385/2698

Belize

Fax: (501) 822-3389

Central America

E-mail: moeducation@moe.gov.bz

Website:www.moe.gov.bz

Appendix 5

Dear X,

I am currently studying at the University of Bristol in England and working on a research study to understand the role that expulsion from secondary school plays in the criminal offending and social exclusion of boys and young men, and how their family, friends, school, and neighbourhood shape their lives.

I would be very grateful if your organisation could help me identify boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school in the past four years. The participation of your organisation will enhance our understanding of how boys and young men respond to expulsion from secondary school, youth offending and how we deal with it.

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bristol and is endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. Therefore, you can be assured that all information regarding the schools, young people and their families will be anonymised and held in the strictest of confidence.

I would greatly appreciate a meeting with you and key persons from your organisation who can assist in this process, at your earliest convenience, preferably early next week.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Appendix 6

January 15, 2019

George Lovell
Chief Executive Officer
Ministry of National Security
Belmopan, Belize

Dear CEO Lovell,

Re: Endorsement of Research Study

I am a Belizean studying at the University of Bristol working on a research study to understand the role that expulsion from secondary school plays in the criminal offending and social exclusion of boys and young men, and how their family, friends, school, and neighbourhood shape their lives.

For the purposes of the study, I am seeking to link information on boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school in the past four years with information of boys and young men who have been criminally charged for a crime so that I can investigate the extent of offending among those boys and young men. Thereafter, I am asking certain boys and young men who have been expelled and have been criminally charged for a crime if I can speak to them and their parents. I would also like to speak with teachers or administrative staff who are knowledgeable of the school career and expulsion of those boys and young men.

I would be very grateful if the Belize Police Department (BPD) would participate in the study and assist me in the first stage with information on the criminal charge records of boys and young men who have been expelled. The review of the information would be arranged at a time of your convenience and would be of minimal disruption to your daily schedule. The participation of the BPD will enhance our understanding of how boys and young men respond to expulsion from secondary school, youth offending and how we deal with it. The findings of the study will also be disseminated to the BPD upon completion in whichever way you feel would be more helpful.

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bristol and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. Therefore, you can be assured that all information regarding any individual or school will be anonymised and held in the strictest of confidence.

I would greatly appreciate your participation and assistance in this study. Can I arrange to visit you or call you? If so, please kindly contact me at gn16099@bristol.ac.uk or 610- 1867.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Kind Regards,

Greg Nunez
PhD Candidate

Appendix 7

Recruitment Letter to Young Person

Dear X,

I am a Belizean studying at the University of Bristol in England and working on a research study to understand how expulsion from secondary school influences the committing of crimes by boys and young men, and how their family, friends, school, and neighbourhood shape their lives. This research is being carried out independently from your school or any other authority in Belize. The school you went to has merely agreed to contact you on my behalf.

You have been invited to take part in the study because you were expelled from school and were also charged for a crime. I would be grateful if you can help me with your views and experience. It is up to you if you want to take part and it is okay to say no. If it is okay with you, I would like to have a discussion with you at a time that suits you. We can arrange to meet at your home if you feel comfortable or if you would like to meet elsewhere, we can organise another venue to have the discussion.

Nothing that can identify you, including your name or the school you went to, will be used in the write up of the study. If you can help me, the information sheet attached to this letter explains more about the study. You will be asked to complete a consent form and your parents will be asked to complete a parental consent form for you take part if you are under 18.

To preserve your name and identity, please contact me directly and not the school that you attended. If you can help me, please call or text me at 610- 1867.

Kind Regards,

Greg Nunez

PhD Candidate

Appendix 8

Recruitment Letter to Parent/Guardian

Dear X,

I am a Belizean studying at the University of Bristol in England and working on a research study to understand the role that expulsion from secondary school plays in the criminal offending of boys and young men, and how their family, friends, school, and neighbourhood shape their lives. This research is being carried out independently from your son's school or any other authority in Belize. The school he went to has only agreed to contact you and him on my behalf.

I would be grateful if you could take part in this study because you are the parent or guardian of _____ who was expelled from secondary school. I would also like to speak to your son but only with your approval. I would be happy if both of you could take part since you can help in my understanding of this issue and contribute to the success of this research study. If it is okay with you, I would like to have a discussion with you at a time of your convenience. We can arrange to meet at your home if you feel comfortable. If you desire a different location, we can organise another venue.

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bristol. Therefore, you can be assured that all your information and responses will be held in the strictest of confidence.

I would greatly appreciate your participation and assistance in this study. You and your son's participation will help to increase our understanding of how boys and young men respond to expulsion from secondary school, youth offending and how we deal with it. Attached to this letter is an information sheet that provides further information on the study. You will be asked to complete a consent form before taking part and a parental consent form to have your son take part if he is under 18.

To keep you and your son's identity unknown, please contact me directly and not the school that he attended. If you can help me, please call or text me at 610- 1867.
Kind Regards,

Greg Nunez
PhD Candidate

Appendix 9

Participant Information Sheet for Young Person

Introduction

My name is Greg Nunez and I am a Belizean studying at the University of Bristol in England. I am asking if you can take part in my project, so please read this information sheet before you to take part and feel free to ask any questions.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am trying to understand why boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school also get charged for criminal offenses. You are in a position to help in my understanding of this issue and contribute to the success of this project. I would very much like to know your opinion.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study will help us to understand how boys and young men respond to expulsion from secondary school, youth offending and how to deal with it by hearing your views and life experiences.

Do I have to take part?

I would be grateful if you would take part in the study, but the decision to take part is entirely up to you. If you want to take part, you will also be asked to sign a consent form. The consent form explains your role in the study but also that you can stop at any time you choose. You can also decide to not have what you said included in the study up to two weeks after our discussion.

If you decide to take part, we can agree on a date to meet that is convenient for you. If it is okay with you, I would like to record the discussion to help me remember what was said.

Where will the discussion be held?

If it is okay with you, I would like to have the discussion at your home so that you can be comfortable and safe. If you feel you would be more comfortable at another location, we can arrange for a suitable and safe place to have the discussion.

Will my name and what I say be revealed to others?

I will be the only person who knows your name and all information collected. Your name will not be connected to what you say. Everything you say is confidential but if I learn that someone is at risk of serious harm then I may have to tell someone about it.

What happens after the research is completed?

A summary document of my main results will be provided to you if you would like. Parts of the study may be used in future research, publications, and presentations to other professionals. The data for this study will be kept for a minimum of 20 years in a secure facility at the University of Bristol.

What if I have concerns?

If you need to know more information about the study, please text or call me at 610-1867. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bristol, so if you have any complaint or concerns about the way you are treated during the study you can contact my supervisor Christina Pantazis through email c.pantazis@bristol.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 10

Participant Information Sheet for Parents/Guardians

Introduction

My name is Greg Nunez and I am a Belizean studying at the University of Bristol in England. I am asking if you can take part in my project, so please read this information sheet before you take part and feel free to ask any questions.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am trying to understand why boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school also get charged for criminal offenses. It also explores how their family, friends, school, and neighbourhood shape their lives.

You have been invited to take part in the study because as a parent/guardian you are aware of his childhood, school career and life before and after expulsion from secondary school.   Your son has been invited to take part in the study because he has been expelled from secondary school and has also been charged for a crime. Therefore, you are both in a position to help in my understanding of this issue and contribute to the success of this project.

Do I have to take part?

I would be grateful if you would take part in the study but the decision for you and your son to take part is entirely up to you. If you want to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form approving you and your son's participation. The consent form explains your role in the study but also an option to withdraw from the study at any time you choose.   You and your son can also withdraw from the study up to two weeks after our discussion and any data collected will be immediately destroyed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study will help us to understand how boys and young men respond to expulsion from secondary school, youth offending and how to deal with it by hearing your views and life experiences.

What is my role?

If you choose to take part, we can decide on a date to meet that is convenient for you.   If it is okay with you, I would like to record the discussion to help me remember what was said.

Where will the discussion be held?

If it is okay with you, I would like to have the discussion at your home so that you and your son can feel comfortable and safe. If you feel you would be more comfortable at another location, we can arrange for a private, suitable and safe place to do it.

 Will our names or identities and what we say be revealed?

I will be the only person who knows your personal information and all information collected during the discussion will be anonymised, which means your names will not be connected to your responses. All the information will be kept private and confidential; therefore, it will not be shared with anyone. It is important for you to know that everything you say is confidential but if I learn that someone is at risk of serious harm then I may have to tell someone about it.

What happens after the research is completed?

A summary document of my main results will be provided to you and your son if you would like. Parts of the study may be used in future research, publications, and presentations to other professionals. The data for this study will be kept for a minimum of 20 years in a secure facility at the University of Bristol.

What if I have concerns?

If you need to know more information about the study, please text or call me at 610-1867. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bristol, so if you have any complaint or concerns about the way you are treated during the study you can contact my supervisor Christina Pantazis through email c.pantazis@bristol.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 11

Young Person's Interview Protocol (Interview 1)

Hi _____ Thank you for agreeing to take part in this discussion. Before we start, can you please complete the consent form that I sent to you with the letter? Also, I just have a few reminders before we start. I would like for you to feel comfortable and be honest as you can. Your name will not be revealed and everything we talk about will be confidential, but if I learn that someone is at risk of serious harm then I may have to tell someone about it. You do not have to respond to a question that makes you feel uncomfortable. If at any time you feel tired, you can ask for us to stop.

For today, we will discuss your experiences before expulsion from school, including some things about your family, friends, neighbourhood, and school. Are you okay with me recording the discussion for my memory? It will allow us to have a conversation without me having to write things down.

If you don't have any questions for me, are you ready to start?

Personal

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. How old are you?
3. What high school did you go to? What was the last high school that you attended?

School

Perception of school
4. How would you describe your feelings toward school? What did you like? Dislike?
5. How do you think you were treated by teachers or staff at school?

Academic Performance
6. How would you describe your grades at school?

7. Do you think your grades were always this way? If it changed, what would you say was the reason?

School attendance and truancy

8. What was your attendance like at school?
9. Did you ever skip school? If yes, how often? What were the reasons?

Exposure to school violence

10. Have you ever witnessed someone getting bullied or intimidated by others at school?
11. Have you ever been hurt by others at school?

Problems at school

12. Did you have any specific problems or difficulties with other students or staff at school? If you did, what were they?
13. Did you get into trouble at school before expulsion? What kind of trouble?
14. How did the school handle the situation?

Experience with exclusion

15. Have you ever been suspended from school? If yes, how many times? What were the reasons?
16. How many times have you been expelled from school? What were the reasons?
17. Do you think that being expelled was fair? Could it or should it have been avoided?
18. Can you describe the appeal process you went through, if any?

Family

Family structure and cohesiveness

19. How would you describe the way your family get along?

Parental support and relationship

20. How easy is it to talk to your parents about problems?
21. How do your parents react to you when you get into trouble?

Parental Supervision

22. How would you describe the way your parents supervised you when growing up?

23. What were you allowed to do after school in the evenings? What did you do on weekends?

24. Were there other family members who supervised you? Like your siblings or grandparents?

Residential stability

25. Have you always lived in this house? If not, do you remember all the places you lived?

26. Have you ever lived away from your family? E.g. with foster parents or hostel? For how long?

Family economic status

27. How easy or hard was it for your family to get the things you needed when you were growing up?

28. Was there any time that you felt hungry but there was nothing to eat in your home? How often?

Parental and family criminality

29. Has anyone in your house ever been in trouble with the police? Do you know what for?

Family violence

30. Have you ever seen or heard members of your family quarrel or fight?

Negative family life events

31. Has your family experienced any major problem that changed how your family lived? E.g. Homelessness, drug addiction, unemployment, death, imprisonment?

Peers

Social and emotional support

32. Are your friends from your neighbourhood? School?

33. What do you and your friends do together?

Delinquency in friends (Association with deviant peers)

34. Have you ever gotten into trouble with your friends?

35. Do you know if any of your friends have been arrested by the police? Do you know what for?

Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood characteristics
36. Is there a name that your neighbourhood goes by??
37. Can you describe your neighbourhood to me?

Neighbourhood support
38. Are there people in your neighbourhood or organisations that help you or your family when you are in need?

Exposure to neighbourhood violence
39. How much time do you spend playing outside your home or hanging around in public places in your neighbourhood?
40. How safe do you feel in your neighbourhood? Why?
41. Do you see any violence in your neighbourhood?
42. Do you think exposure to neighbourhood violence has an influence on you?
43. What would you say is the worst experience in your neighbourhood?

Thank you for participation. I know it was a long discussion and we covered many issues that you have experienced. Please let me know if you have any concerns about what we have discussed. Would you like an information leaflet that provides information on agencies and organisations that can provide you with support if you have concerns?

Appendix 12

<div align="center">

Young Person's Interview Protocol (Interview 2)

</div>

Hi _____ Thank you for agreeing to a second discussion. Do you still agree to this discussion being recorded like the first? I would like to remind you that you do not have to respond to a question that makes you feel uncomfortable or if the discussion becomes overwhelming, you can ask for us to stop.

In our last interview, you told me about yourself and your family, your life growing up and your school experiences. This second interview focuses on your life experiences after expulsion from school to this point.

If you don't have any questions for me, are you ready to start?

Social Exclusion

Perception of life post exclusion

1. How would describe your life after expulsion? Did it change?
2. What were your ambitions for the future before expulsion? Has that changed?

Education and training prospects

3. Did you get any education support did you get after expulsion? From the Ministry of Education? School? Any other organization?
4. Did you try to get back into another school after expulsion?
5. Did you try to get into any training institutions after expulsion?

Employment prospects

6. Are you working at the moment? If not, what are you doing?
7. How did you find it getting a job after expulsion? If you experienced difficulties, what were the reasons?

Other social service prospects

8. Are there any services you wanted to access but you couldn't?

9. What factors prevented you from accessing these services?

Social life

10. How has expulsion affected your social life?

11. What is the most notable change that has occurred in your social life since expulsion?

Family relations

12. How did expulsion affect your family or how you interacted with them?

13. What is the most notable change that has occurred within your family since expulsion?

Peer relations

14. Did expulsion affect your friendship with school friends?

15. Do you hang out with friends from school or your neighbourhood after expulsion?

16. Was there any notable change that occurred with your friends since expulsion?

Neighbourhood relations

17. Did your interaction in your neighbourhood changed after expulsion?

18. Since expulsion how do you spend your time in your neighbourhood?

19. Do you spend time in other places?

Offending

History of delinquency

20. Did you do get into any trouble before expulsion?

21. Are they the same type of trouble you got into after expulsion? If it is different, how so?

22. Were you ever arrested or charged before expulsion? Are you willing to explain?

23. Were you ever arrested or charged after expulsion? Are you willing to explain?

24. Did expulsion in any way affect how you view or commit crimes?

25. Are you willing to say if you have ever been convicted of a crime?

Family and other support

26. Does your family know you get into trouble?

27. How does your family handle when you are in trouble?

Moral disengagement

28. Have you tried to stop getting into trouble?
29. What would help you to stop?

I would like to express my gratitude for your help in this study. This was the last of the two discussions. Would you like an information leaflet that provides information on agencies and organisations that can provide you with support if you have concerns?

Appendix 13

Parent/Guardian's Interview Protocol

Hello _____ Thank you for agreeing to take part in this discussion. Before we start, can you please complete the parental consent form for your son and the consent form for yourself that I sent to you with the letter? Also, I just have a few reminders before we start. I would like for you to feel comfortable and be honest as you can. Your name will not be revealed and everything we talk about will be confidential, but if I learn that someone is at risk of serious harm then I may have to tell someone about it. You do not have to respond to a question that makes you feel uncomfortable. If at any time you feel tired or overwhelmed, you can ask for us to stop.

Are you okay with me recording the discussion for my memory? It will allow us to have a conversation without me having to write things down.

We will start with some questions about yourself and your family that allows me to have a better understanding of your situation, then move into more complex questions about your child's life growing up, and his experiences in school and after.

If you don't have any questions for me, are you ready to start?

Personal

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your family?

School

Schooling history

1. Can you tell me about any issues that your son might have had with teachers or staff at school?
2. How do you think he was treated by the school?
3. Were you aware if he was ever accused of bullying other students? Was he ever a victim of bullying?
4. Were you called or visited the school when he got into trouble?

Experience with exclusion

5. Did he ever get suspended from primary school? How many times? Secondary school? Do you remember the reasons?

6. Did he ever get expelled from primary school? How many times? Secondary school? Do you remember the reasons?

7. Do you think that being expelled was fair? Could it or should it have been avoided?

8. Can you describe the appeal process you went through if any?

Social Exclusion

Perception of life after exclusion

14. How did your son react to being expelled?

15. How would describe your son after expulsion?

Education and training prospects

16. Did he try to get back into another school after expulsion?

17. How long did it take for him to get into another school after expulsion?

18. Did he receive any kind of education support after expulsion from the Ministry of Education, school, or other organisations?

19. Do you know if he tried to access any other full-time or part-time education or training institutions for young people expelled from school?

Employment prospects

21. Is he currently working?

22. How easy or difficult has he found getting a job? Why do you say that?

23. Do you think that being expelled has affected this? How long did it take for him to get a job after expulsion?

Family relations

24. How did you react to his expulsion from school?

25. How did expulsion affect your family life and how you get along with him?

Peer and neighbourhood relations

28. How would you describe his friends at school? Did you see a change after expulsion?

29. How would you describe his friends in the neighbourhood? Did you see a change after expulsion?

Family

Family structure and cohesiveness

35. How would you describe the way your family get along?

Parental support and relationship

37. How would you describe your relationship with _____?

38. Does he talk with you about problems?

39. Does he talk to you when he is in trouble?

Parental Supervision

40. What was he allowed to do after school in the evenings? Weekends?

Residential stability

42. Has your family ever had to live somewhere else other than this house?

43. Has _____ ever lived away from your family? E.g. with foster parents, hostel? How long? Can you say why?

Family economic status

44. Was it hard or easy providing for your family when he was growing up?

45. Did you have difficulty paying his school fees or providing things he needed?

Family violence

47. Has he ever witnessed or heard any arguments and fighting between adults or other children in the house?

48. Do you know if violence in the home has ever affected his schooling?

Neighbourhood

48. Can you describe your neighbourhood to me?

49. Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? Why?

50. Do you feel that children are safe in your neighbourhood?

51. Do you think the neighbourhood has an influence on him? What kind?

Offending

History of delinquency

54. Did he ever get into trouble when he was younger?

55. What type of trouble did he get into when he was younger?

56. Are they the same type of trouble when he was older?

57. Was there a difference in the trouble he got into before and after expulsion?

58. What is the most notable change you saw in the trouble he got into since expulsion?

59. How does your family respond to him when he gets in trouble?

Thank you for participation. I know it was a long discussion and we covered many issues that you and your son have experienced. Would you like an information leaflet that provides information on agencies and organisations that can provide you with support if you have concerns?

SPS RESEARCH ETHICS

APPLICATION FORM: STAFF and DOCTORAL STUDENTS

- This proforma must be completed for each piece of research carried out by members of the School for Policy Studies, both staff and doctoral postgraduate students.
- See the Ethics Procedures document for clarification of the process.
- All research **must** be ethically reviewed before any fieldwork is conducted, regardless of source of funding.
- See the School's policy and guidelines relating to research ethics and data protection, to which the project is required to conform.
- Please stick to the word limit provided. **Do not attach** your funding application or research proposal.

Key project details:

1.	**Proposer's Name**	Greg Sankofa Nunez

2.	**Proposer's Email Address:**	*gn16099@bristol.ac.uk*

3.	**Project Title**	*Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City*

4.	**Project Start Date:**	*19/09/2016*	**End Date:**	20/09/2020

Who needs to provide Research Ethics Committee approval for your project?

The SPS REC will only consider those research ethics applications which do not require submission elsewhere. As such, you should make sure that your proposed research does not fall within the jurisdiction of the NRES system:

http://www.nres.nhs.uk/applications/approval-requirements/ethical-review-requirements/

If you are not sure where you should apply please discuss it with either the chair of the Committee or the Faculty Ethics Officer who is based in RED.

Currently NRES are not expected to consider applications in respect of activities that are not research: i.e. clinical audit, service evaluation and public health surveillance. In addition REC review is not normally required for research involving NHS or social care staff recruited as research participants by virtue of their professional role. Social care research projects which are funded by the Department of Health, must always be reviewed by a REC within the Research Ethics Service for England. Similarly research which accesses unanonymised patient records must be reviewed by a REC and NIGB.

Who needs to provide governance approval for this project?

If this project involves access to patients, clients, staff or carers of an NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation, it falls within the scope of the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social. You will also need to get written approval from the Research Management Office or equivalent of each NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation.

When you have ethical approval, you will need to complete the research registration form:

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/study-notification.html

Guidance on completing this form can be found at: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/guidance.pdf. Contact the Research Governance team

(http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/people/group/red/1602) for guidance on completing this form and if you have any questions about obtaining local approval.

Do you need additional insurance to carry out your research?

Whilst staff and doctoral students will normally be covered by the University's indemnity insurance there are some situations where it will need to be checked with the insurer. If you are conducting research with: Pregnant research subjects or children under 5 you should email: insurance-enquiries@bristol.ac.uk

In addition, if you are working or travelling overseas you should take advantage of the university travel insurance.

Do you need a Disclosure and Barring Service check?

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). Criteria for deciding whether you require a DBS check are available from:

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about

You should specifically look at the frequency, nature, and duration of your contact with potentially vulnerable adults and or children. If your contact is a one-off research interaction, or infrequent contact (for example: 3 contacts over a period of time) you are unlikely to require a check.

If you think you need a DBS check then you should consult the University of Bristol web-page:

http://www.bris.ac.uk/secretary/legal/disclosure/crbhome

5. If your research project requires REC approval elsewhere please tell us which committee, this includes where co-researchers are applying for approval at another institution. Please provide us with a copy of your approval letter for our records when it is available.

N/A

6. Have all subcontractors you are using for this project (including transcribers, interpreters, and co-researchers not formally employed at Bristol University) agreed to be bound by the School's requirements for ethical research practice?

Yes		
No/Not yet		Note: You must ensure that written agreement is secured before they start to work. They will be provided with training and sign a detailed consent form.
Not applicable	**X**	

7. If you are a PhD/doctoral student please tell us the name of your research supervisor.

Christina Pantazis, David Berridge

Has your supervisor seen this final versions of your ethics application?

Yes	**X**
No	

8. Who is funding this study?

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK

If this study is funded by the ESRC or another funder requiring lay representation on the ethics committee and is being undertaken by a member staff, this form should be submitted to the Faculty REC.

Post-graduate students undertaking ESRC funded projects should submit their form to the SPS Committee.

9. Is this application part of a larger proposal?

No	**X**	
Yes		

If yes, please provide a summary of the larger study and indicate how this application relates to the overall study.

10. Is this proposal a replication of a similar proposal already approved by the SPS REC? Please provide the SPS REC reference number.

No	**X**	
Yes		

If Yes, please tell us the name of the project, the date approval was given and code (if you have one).

Please describe any differences (such as context) in the current study. If the study is a replication of a previously approved study. Submit these first two pages of the form.

ETHICAL RESEARCH PROFORMA

> The following set of questions is intended to provide the School Research Ethics Committee with enough information to determine the risks and benefits associated with your research. You should use these questions to assist in identifying the ethical considerations which are important to your research. You should identify any relevant ethical issues and how you intend to deal with them. Whilst the REC does not comment on the methodological design of your study, it will consider whether the design of your study is likely to produce the benefits you anticipate. **Please avoid copying and pasting large parts of research bids or proposals which do not directly answer the questions.** Please also avoid using *unexplained* acronyms, abbreviations or jargon.

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1.   IDENTITY & EXPERIENCE OF (CO) RESEARCHERS: Please give a list of names, positions, qualifications, previous research experience, and functions in the proposed research of all those who will be in contact with participants

Greg Nunez

PhD Candidate (Researcher)

Functions in proposed research

- The applicant has substantial research training, experience and expertise, especially in the areas of sociological and anthropological studies. The applicant also has extensive training and experience in managing small and large projects on behalf of the Government of Belize.
- The applicant has UK Disclosure and Barring Service clearance (May 2017), which will allow him to conduct all fieldwork and contact with study participants, regardless of their ages.

Qualifications

- Successful completion of Postgraduate Diploma in Social Research Methods (based on completion of 120 credits - Philosophy and Research Design; Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods in the Social Sciences; Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods in the Social Sciences; Further Qualitative Research; Further Quantitative Research; and Researching Child & Family Welfare) (University of Bristol)
- M.Sc. Sociology with a specialization in Social Anthropology (University of the West Indies)
- B.Sc. Sociology/Social Policy and Administration (University of the West Indies)

Research experience

- *Aggression in Boys of Late Primary and Early Adolescence and its Manifestation in School Violence in Kingston, Jamaica* (M.Sc. Dissertation; mixed method study, 2013)
- *Revivalism and Cultural Views of Healing in Jamaica* (A qualitative study of alternative approaches to health care of the syncretic religion, Zion Revivalism, 2013)
- *Burial Ceremonies* (An ethnographic study of the social and economic value of death and burial ceremonies in Spanish Town, Jamaica, 2013)
- Gayle, H., James, M.E., Nunez, G. and Johnson, K.: *The Status of Males of Trinidad and Tobago: An Examination of Social Participation and Violence* (Research on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012)
- Nunez, G., Richards, S., Gordon, L., Spencer, V. and Thompson, K.: *Back Road: Love it or Leave it* (An ethnographic study of the sex trade in Portmore, Jamaica, 2011)
- Catzim-Sanchez, A., Lovell, J., Barnett, C., et al.: *Youth and Community Transformation Project* (qualitative researcher, 2011)

Other relevant experience

- Field Researcher for Wellbeing in Secondary Education (WISE) Study by the Bristol Medical School: Population Health Sciences of University of Bristol (June 2018)
- Field Researcher for Project Respect Study by the School of Social and Community Medicine of University of Bristol (June-July 2017)
- Adjunct Lecturer (Research Methods; Introduction to Sociology) at the Faculty of Management and Social Sciences of the University of Belize (August 2013-December 2014)
- Research Assistant at the Department of Sociology, Psychology, and Social Work of the University of the West Indies (September 2011-May 2013)
- Tutor (Qualitative Research) at the Department of Sociology, Psychology, and Social Work of the University of the West Indies (January-May 2013)

Research-based training and certificates

- *Mixed Methods Training* course for PGRs (May 2018)
- *Introduction to NVivo for Qualitative Analysis* by the Bristol Doctoral College, University of Bristol (October 2016; April 2018)
- *Facing the Risks of Research* (June 2017)
- Project Management for Researchers by the Bristol Doctoral College, University of Bristol (January 2017)
- *SPSS 23 Statistics Package: Getting Started (for Researchers)* by the Bristol Doctoral College, University of Bristol (December 2016)
- *Building Research Partnerships: Patient and Public Involvement in Health and Social Care Research* from People in Health West of England, University of the West of England (October 2016)

Professional training and certificates

- *Partnership for Peace: A Violence Intervention Programme* Facilitator's Training by Women's Department on behalf of United Nations Development Fund for Women (2015)
- *Advanced Counselling* by University of the West Indies, Open Campus Belize (November-December 2014)
- *Introduction to Counselling* by University of the West Indies, Open Campus Belize (July-August 2014)
- *Training of Trainers on Psychosocial Support (Crisis Events and Psychosocial Support; Stress and Coping; Loss and Grief; Community-based Psychosocial Support; Psychological First Aid and Supportive Communication; Supporting Volunteers and Staff; Violence Prevention)* by the Psychosocial Centre of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (January-February 2014)
- *SCAIS Life Skills Facilitation (Self Esteem, Conflict Resolution, Anger Management, Independent Living, Skills Program)* by Community Rehabilitation Department on behalf of the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation (2011)

Consultancies

- Presenter of *Exclusion of Boys from School in Latin America and the Caribbean and its Social Cost of Violence* at the World Youth Conference and Guest Speaker at the Youth Award ceremony on behalf of the Department of Youth Services (November 2017)
- Co-Facilitator with Dr Herbert Gayle (Anthropologist of Social Violence) for *Training of Inner City Practitioners of Belize in Social Violence* on behalf of the Department of Youth Services (August 2016)
- Facilitator at the Belize Police Department Communication Training; presented *Community-based Policing and the Social Impact on Crime and Violence* (May 2015)
- Moderate and produce official Report for *San Pedro Youth Forum* for Youth Week 2015 on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture (December 2015)
- Facilitator of *Violence Prevention* at Belize Red Cross Volunteer Retreat (2014)

2.	**STUDY AIMS/OBJECTIVES [maximum of 200 words]:** Please provide the aims and objectives of your research.

Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to understand the influence that permanent exclusion from secondary school has on the experience of criminal offending and social exclusion in boys and young men in Belize City. Using the Life Course Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development the study will explore how processes within the school, family, peer group and neighbourhood shape their life course and developmental outcomes.

General Objective

To examine the contextual factors and processes associated with criminal offending and social exclusion in boys and young men who are permanently excluded from secondary school in Belize City.

Research Questions

Four research questions are formulated to represent the quantitative and qualitative inquiries.

1. What are the characteristics of young people who are permanently excluded from secondary school?

2. How do the school, family, peer group and neighbourhood influence the life course of boys and young men experiencing permanent exclusion from secondary school?

3. What are the implications of permanent exclusion from secondary school on criminal offending in boys and young men?

4. How does social exclusion manifest in boys and young men who have experienced permanent exclusion from school?

RESEARCH WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

(If you are undertaking secondary data analysis, please proceed to section 11)

3.	**RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLING STRATEGY [maximum of 300 words]:** Please tell us what you propose to do in your research and how individual participants, or groups of participants, will be identified and sampled. Please also tell us what is expected of research participants who consent to take part (Please note that recruitment procedures are covered in question 8)

The proposed study is a mixed method research based on a *sequential* design to achieve *complementarity* of the quantitative and qualitative approaches adopted. Secondary analysis in the quantitative phase will inform the detailed case studies in the qualitative phase. The sampling design will be constructed on a *nested* relationship; therefore, the qualitative sample will be selected from the quantitative sample of boys and young men.

First, 7 secondary schools in Belize City will be purposively sampled to represent each Local Management Authority with male sub-populations. Second, a quantitative sample of boys and young men who have been

permanently excluded from secondary school at any point within four years will be selected. Thirdly, a purposeful random qualitative sample based on permanent exclusion and having been charged with a criminal offence will be selected. This will be achieved through a a tripartite classification of criminal offence (major, moderate and minor). A case per classification and 3 cases per school will result in a total sample size of 21 cases.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a *retrospective life history approach* will be conducted on the 21 cases. The first two interviews will be treated as pilot interviews and may be included in the final sample depending on data quality and only with permission from the participants.

For each case, a parent and staff will be selected for semi-structured interviews; hence, 21 parents and 21 staff will be included in the study. The sample of parents and education staff will be selected through Criterion Sampling. The former will be based on an emphasis on the primary caregiver and the latter on their involvement in the exclusion process and knowledge of the boys and young men's school career.

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4. **EXPECTED DURATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY:** Please tell us how long each researcher will be working on fieldwork/research activity. For example, conducting interviews between Feb 12 – July 2016. Also tell us how long participant involvement will be. For example: Interviewing 25 professional participants X2 for a maximum of 1 hour per interview.

It is anticipated that the research activity, which includes secondary data analysis and interviews, will take place between September 24, 2018 – March 7, 2019.

Interviewing 21 boys and young men twice for approximately 120 minutes in total.

Interviewing 21 parents and 21 education staff for approximately a maximum of 90 minutes in total.

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5. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND TO WHOM: [maximum 100 words]** Tell us briefly what the main benefits of the research are and to whom.

The study proposes a benefit to policy makers, educators and practitioners who interact and serve young people, especially at-risk males in Belize City, with a critical understanding of the contextual factors that influence their developmental outcomes. Following completion of the research, the applicant will disseminate findings to policy makers via a summary document.

Participants will have an opportunity to have their views, voices and lived experiences represented at multiple levels in the policy discourse in Belize, including family, education and security-based policies. Following completion of the research, the applicant will disseminate findings to participants via a summary document.

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6. **POTENTIAL RISKS/HARM TO PARTICIPANTS [maximum of 100 words]:** What potential risks are there to the participants and how will you address them? List any potential physical or psychological dangers that can be anticipated? You may find it useful to conduct a more formal risk assessment prior to conducting your fieldwork. The University has an example of risk assessment form: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policies/

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED
Example 1: Participants may be upset during the interview *Example 2: A participants may tell me something about illegal activity*	*Example 1: If a participant gets upset I will stop the interview at that time. I will give participants information about support services at the end of the interview.* *Example 2: The information sheet and consent form will warn of the limits of confidentiality and I will have a confidentiality protocol (submitted to the committee).*
Self-reporting may result in details of illegal activity	The limits of confidentiality will be explained and the confidentiality protocol (submitted) will be followed.
Participants may be upset during or after interview	Questions that may invoke negative feelings will be avoided. The demeanour of the participants will be monitored and if appropriate the participants will be reminded of their right to decline response and ask if they wish to continue. Participants will be provided with a list of support services at the end of each interview.
Safety of participants who may engage in gang activity	Interviews will be conducted at the homes or a predetermined safe venue, e.g. community centres.

*Add more boxes if needed.

7. **RESEARCHER SAFETY [maximum of 200 words]:** What risks could the researchers be exposed to during this research project? If you are conducting research in individual's homes or potentially dangerous places then a researcher safety protocol is mandatory. Examples of safety protocols are available in the guidance.

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED
Example 1: Interview at the participant's home.	*Fieldwork safety protocol will be followed. A colleague will know the start and approximate finish time of the interview. If there is no contact from the researcher, they will ring the researcher. If no contact is made the confidential address details will be accessed and the police informed.*
Interview at young person's home	The researcher safety protocol (submitted) will be followed. During the early recruitment process, the school will be asked if they perceive a risk of violence to the researcher. Potential participants will be asked basic questions about their homes and neighbourhoods, and where it suggests safety concerns, there will be a change of venue, e.g. community centre.
Interview with participants under the age of consent at their homes	The presence of a caregiver in the household during the interview, though not in the interview, will provide access to another adult that the participant trusts.

Participants' possible involvement or residence in gang neighbourhoods	The researcher will consult with the police prior to the start of fieldwork to identify areas that may be in conflict or hostility during the designing of the interview schedule.
	The researcher will reduce risk by not carrying valuable items or wearing colours or symbols associated with gangs during fieldwork.
	An alternative venue will be arranged where necessary.
Possible custodial care of participants	Arrangements will be made with the relevant authorities of the Kolbe Foundation or other custodial institutions for adequate supervision and security if interviews are sought with young people who are locked-up.

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8. **RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES [maximum of 400 words]:** How are you going to access participants? Are there any gatekeepers involved? Is there any sense in which respondents might be "obliged" to participate (for example because their manager will know, or because they are a service user and their service will know), if so how will this be dealt with.

Recruitment will occur at both the institutional and individual levels. At the institutional level, access to the schools, case files, and education staff requires approval from the Ministry of Education, the Local Management Authorities (LMAs) and the school management. In addition, access to records of criminal charges from the Belize Police Department (BPD) will require approval from the Commissioner of Police. Records of criminal charges will be used for this study because Belize has a low crime conviction rate, making criminal charges as intended prosecution a more reliable measure. Written requests will be made to all relevant authorities. In possible cases where participants are in custodial institutions, such as prisons and youth facilities, access to both participants and site will be sought.

At the individual level, the qualitative sample will be accessed through contact details from school records. The schools will be asked to send *recruitment letters* to an oversample of potential participants on the researcher's behalf. The researcher will post the letters. Potential participants will be asked in the recruitment letters to contact the researcher directly by text or call (this will be a project mobile phone, not a personal one), not the school, to preserve anonymity of the final sample. Attached to the recruitment letters will be the Participation Information Sheet (PIS) to provide information about the study. It will be made clear that the research is being carried out independently from the school or other authorities to help ensure successful recruitment of participants.

The participation of the boys and young men is dependent on their parents also agreeing to participate in the study; therefore, refusal of the parents to be a part of the study will disqualify the boys and young men. Parental forms will be provided to parents for their acceptance or refusal of participation for themselves and their sons, if under age 18. Where refusals occur, replacements will be sought from the remaining positive responses until the sample of 21 cases is satisfied. The boys and young men will also be asked to complete consent forms for acceptance or refusal of participation. Education staff will be recruited based on information provided in the case files of the boys or young men. The consent forms of the education staff requests that the names and identities of the boys and young men are kept confidential from anyone, including other staff and the school management.

9.	**INFORMED CONSENT [maximum of 200 words]:** How will this be obtained? Whilst in many cases written consent is preferable, where this is not possible or appropriate this should be clearly justified. An age and ability appropriate participant information sheet (PIS) setting out factors relevant to the interests of participants in the study must be handed to them in advance of seeking consent (see materials table for list of what should be included). If you are proposing to adopt an approach in which informed consent is not sought you must explain in detail why this is not considered to be appropriate. If you are planning to use photographic or video images in your method then additional specific consent should be sought from participants.

The PIS will outline the details of the study and the responsibilities of the researcher and the participants. It will be sent to the potential participants along with the recruitment letter to facilitate an informed decision to participate. Written consent will be sought in person through the consent form at the initial meeting with the participants and parents. *Parental consent* will be sought for all respondents under the age of 18. The inclusion of the boys and young men in the case study is dependent on their parents' participation; therefore, where consent is missing, the cases will not be included.

As a priority, participants will be informed of their right to voluntary participation and freely-given informed consent. This includes participants who may be faced with power imbalances in consenting to participate such as boys and young men under the age of consent, possible cases of incarcerated boys and young men, and education staff who are employed by the schools. Participants will also be informed of the limits to confidentiality (i.e. risk of harm to self and others) and their right to withdraw at any time.

Please tick the box to confirm that you will keep evidence of the consent forms (either actual forms or digitally scanned forms), securely for twenty years.	X

10.	If you intend to use an on-line survey (for example Survey Monkey) you need to ensure that the data will not leave the European Economic Area i.e. be transferred or held on computers in the USA

Please tick the box to confirm that you will not use any on-line survey service based in the USA or outside the European Economic Area (EEA).	X

11.	**DATA PROTECTION**: All applicants should regularly take the data protection on-line tutorial provided by the University in order to ensure they are aware of the requirements of current data protection legislation.
	University policy is that "personal data can be sent abroad if the data subject gives unambiguous written consent. Staff should seek permission from the University Secretary prior to sending personal data outside of the EEA".
	Any breach of the University data protection responsibilities could lead to disciplinary action.
	Have you taken the mandatory University data protection on-line tutorial in the last 12 months? https://www.bris.ac.uk/is/media/training/uobonly/datasecurity/page_01.htm

Yes	**X**
No	

Do you plan to send any information/data, which could be used to identify a living person, to anybody who works in a country that is not part of the European Union?
See http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/the_guide/principle_8.aspx)

No		
Yes	**X**	If **YES** please list the country or countries:
		Belize

Please outline your procedure for data protection. It is University of Bristol policy that interviews must be recorded on an encrypted device. Ideally this should be a University owned encrypted digital recorder (see http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/transcription/)

It is University of Bristol policy that data is stored in an anonymised format for future use by other researchers (see http://data.bris.ac.uk/). What level of future access to the anonymised data will there be:

- Open access
- Restricted access - what restrictions?
- Closed access - on what grounds?

The recruitment letter, PIS and consent form make a request for the interviews to be recorded. If the participant decides against recording, the interview will be manually written. All recording approved interviews will be recorded with a personally owned encrypted recorder (Philips VTR5200). Due to the nuanced Creole dialect in Belize that most individuals speak, the recordings will be transcribed by the researcher. Therefore, there will be no concerns about the transfer of data to a third party.

Data will be transferred in the first instance to the researcher's personal laptop which will be encrypted by the IT desk service of the university prior to the start of fieldwork in Belize. Upon the completion of the fieldwork and return to the UK, the data will be transferred to the secure server of the University of Bristol and subsequently deleted from the researcher's personal laptop. The laptop will have adequate password protection and 'autolock' features to prevent undue access. There will be no additional users of the device. As a security measure, the device will be properly secured and will not be a part of any field visits. In addition, any loss or theft of the device will be immediately reported to my supervisors and the IT Services. All other guidelines proposed by the University's Mobile and Remote Working Policy will be adhered to.

The data will be anonymised and stored as closed access because the qualitative interviews, may hold key explanations or descriptions that can be used to re-identify participants. In addition, self-reported offending may be incriminating for participants whose identity are uncovered by less careful third parties.

12.	**CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**	**Yes**	**No**
	All my data will be stored on a password protected server	**X**	
	I will only transfer unanonymised data if it is encrypted. (For advice on encryption see: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/device/)	**X**	

If there is a potential for participants to disclose illegal activity or harm to others you will need to provide a confidentiality protocol.	**X**
Please tick the box to **CONFIRM** that you warned participants on the information and consent forms that there are limits to confidentiality and that at the end of the project data will be stored for 20 years on appropriate storage facility. https://www.acrc.bris.ac.uk/acrc/storage.htm	**X**

Please outline your procedure for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

The Confidentiality Protocol (submitted) will be followed. The consent form and PIS will convey the limits to confidentiality (i.e. risk of harm to self and others), but it will be reiterated before each interview, as well as at the point at which the participants are likely to share sensitive information. When confidentiality needs to be broken, the participant will be informed of the necessary breach and the relevant authorities that need to be contacted.

The consent form and PIS will also convey that all data will be anonymised. At the early stages of recruitment, the schools will send out recruitment letters to potential participants from an oversample on behalf of the researcher. However, the recruitment letter asks the potential participants to contact the researcher directly instead of the school as a further attempt to provide anonymity to interested participants. Pseudonyms will be used for each participant, school, and data that can lead to re-identification of the participant will not be used.

Please proceed to question 15.

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

13. Secondary Data Analysis

Please briefly explain;

(1) What secondary datasets you will use?
(2) Where did you get these data from (e.g. ESRC Data Archive)?
(3) How did you obtain permission to use these data? (e.g. by signing an end user licence)
(4) Do you plan to make derived variables and/or analytical syntax available to other researchers? (e.g. by archiving them on data.bris or at the UK Data Archive)
(5) Where will you store the secondary datasets?

Two secondary datasets will be used for this study: permanent exclusion data from schools and records of criminal charges from the BPD. The former will be collated from written or digital records of schools since it is not readily accessible as disaggregated data to identify cases. The latter will be based on police records from the Joint Intelligence Coordinating Centre of the BPD. None of the datasets are from academic sources.

There are two foreseeable challenges with the use of these sensitive secondary data. Firstly, the anonymisation of the data from the onset will be a challenge because the collection of the permanently excluded data will be a collation effort rather than a prepared dataset. So, it is unavoidable that the researcher will be exposed to the identity and details of permanently excluded boys and young men as collation occurs to complete the study. Secondly, data linking of the records of criminal charges and permanent exclusion data (both of which are highly sensitive) will require knowledge of the identities of the individuals. The researcher recognises the challenges with having access to sensitive data; however, since the researcher will be the only one who will know the identities of the boys and young men and is only interested in those who have been permanently excluded from the schools identified within a four-year timespan and have also been criminally charged, the researcher will not be seeking access to the charge records of those who do not fit this criteria. The researcher's access to sensitive data will be further reduced as the data is limited by offending type and further reduced to an oversample that will form the recruitment pool of the qualitative phase. Therefore, complete anonymisation of the secondary data will occur after the successful selection of the qualitative sample.

Permission to use the permanent exclusion data will be sought from the Ministry of Education, the LMAs and the school management. Access to records of criminal charges from the BPD will be approved by the Commissioner of Police. Recruitment letters will be sent to LMAs, schools and BPD for their participation. Upon approval, a request for data to the LMAs, schools and BPD will be completed.

Since the dataset is not from an academic source or archive that can be accessed by other researchers outside of Belize and due to concerns of anonymity based on probable re-identification, the data will be stored as closed access. The anonymised permanent exclusion data and arrest records will be encrypted and stored on the researcher's encrypted personal laptop while in Belize for fieldwork. It will be transferred to the university's protected server upon completion of fieldwork and deleted from the laptop.

DATA MANAGEMENT

14. Data Management

It is RCUK and UoB policy that all research data (including qualitative data e.g. interview transcripts, videos, etc.) should be made freely and openly available for other researchers to use via the data.bris Research Data Repository and/or the UK Data Archive. This raises a number of ethical issues, for example you MUST ensure that consent is requested to allow data to be shared and reused.

Please briefly explain;

1) How you will obtain specific consent for data preservation and sharing with other researchers?
2) How will you protect the identity of participants? e.g. how will you anonymise your data for reuse.
3) How will the data be licensed for reuse? e.g. Do you plan to place any restrictions on the reuse of your data such as Creative Common Share Alike 2.0 licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/uk/)
4) Where will you archive your data and metadata for re-use by other researchers?

Both the PIS and consent form discuss the conditions for data preservation, including the time and location. They also provide clear explanation on anonymity of the data. Therefore, consent for data preservation and sharing will be initiated from the first stages of recruitment and secured when the consent form is completed.

The identity of participants will be protected using pseudonyms and data that can result in the re-identification of the participants will not be stored. However, the data will be stored as closed access due to concerns of the safety and probable re-identification of the participants.

Please proceed to question 15.

PLEASE COMPLETE FOR ALL PROJECTS

15.	**DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS [maximum 200 words]:** Are you planning to send copies of data to participants for them to check/comment on? If so, in what format and under what conditions? What is the anticipated use of the data, forms of publication and dissemination of findings etc.? .

Participants, schools, LMAs, Ministry of Education and BPD will be provided with a printed summary document outlining the major findings of the study. The PIS also has the mobile number of the researcher and the email address of his primary supervisor should the participants have concerns about the study. The consent form also provides an option for participants who may desire an electronic copy of the completed thesis after it has been graded and approved by the university.

The participants will be informed in the PIS about the proposed future uses of the data and study. This includes publications in part or whole of the study in future research, publications and presentations.

16.	**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**: Please identify which of the following documents, and how many, you will be submitting within your application: Guidance is given at the end of this document (appendix 1) on what each of these additional materials might contain.

Additional Material:	NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS
Participants information sheet (s)	3
Consent form (s)	3
Confidentiality protocol	1
Recruitment letters/posters/leaflets	6
Photo method information sheet	0
Photo method consent form	0
Support information for participant	3
3rd party confidentiality agreement	0

Interview Protocol	4
Researcher Safety Guidelines	1

Please DO NOT send your research proposal or research bid as the Committee will not look at this

SUBMITTING AND REVIEWING YOUR PROPOSAL:

- To submit your application you should create a <u>single PDF document</u> which contains your application form and all additional material and submit this information to the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email to sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk

- If you are having problems with this then please contact the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email (sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk) to discuss.

- Your form will then be circulated to the SPS Research Ethics Committee who will review your proposal on the basis of the information provided in this single PDF document. The likely response time is outlined in the 'Ethics Procedures' document. For staff applications we try to turn these around in 2-3 weeks. Doctoral student applications should be submitted by the relevant meeting deadline and will be turned around in 4 weeks.

- Should the Committee have any questions or queries after reviewing your application, the chair will contact you directly. If the Committee makes any recommendations you should confirm, in writing, that you will adhere to these recommendations before receiving approval for your project.

- Should your research change following approval it is <u>your responsibility</u> to inform the Committee in writing and seek clarification about whether the changes in circumstance require further ethical consideration.

Failure to obtain Ethical Approval for research is considered research misconduct by the University and is dealt with under their current misconduct rules.

Chair: Beth Tarleton (beth.tarleton@bris.ac.uk)

Administrator: Zaheda Tariq (sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk)

Date form updated by SPS REC: February 2016.

Appendix 15

From: David Gordon

Sent: 08 November 2018 19:01:45

To: GREG NUNEZ; Zaheda Tariq

Cc: SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox; Christina Pantazis; David Berridge

Subject: Re: URGENT: Ethics application: SPSREC17-18.C37

Dear Greg Nunez

Thank you for responding to the concerns of the SPS Research Ethics Committee members and for revising your interview materials accordingly. I have now reviewed the changes you have made and you now have ethical clearance for your research.

Good luck with the work.

Regards

David Gordon

_____

Dave Gordon

Bristol Poverty Institute

Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research

University of Bristol

10 Woodland Road

Bristol BS8 1TZ, UK

Appendix 16

From: GREG NUNEZ

Sent: 09 April 2019 07:18

To: SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox <sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk>

Cc: Christina Pantazis <C.Pantazis@bristol.ac.uk>; David Berridge <David.Berridge@bristol.ac.uk>

Subject: Ethics Application_Greg Nunez

Good Day Beth,

My initial application to the Ethics Committee in August 2018 was approved in November 2018. Since then, great effort was made to contact the secondary schools in Belize City for them to participate in the study. After several months of attempts, including emails, calls and visits, only 2 of the 7 secondary schools provided data. The other schools either opted not to participate or prevented access to the data.

I am, therefore, resubmitting my ethics application with minor revisions to the recruitment approach for your consideration. These revisions have been discussed and agreed upon with my supervisors.   In the areas highlighted in the attached application form, recruitment from youth organisations is introduced and explained. Data from the youth organisations will help to supplement the data collected from the 2 participating schools.

I submit this ethics application for your review and I look forward to any feedback. Thank you for your consideration.

From: Beth Tarleton <Beth.Tarleton@bristol.ac.uk>

Sent: 29 May 2019 10:44

To: GREG NUNEZ <gn16099@bristol.ac.uk>

Subject: Re: Response from SPS REC

Dear Greg

Thanks so much for your detailed response and explanations. Please take this email as confirmation of an amendment to your ethical approval for your study:

Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City (paper ref. SPSREC/18-19/035)

Hope it all goes well and you get the sample you need.

best wishes

Beth

Appendix 17

From: GREG NUNEZ <gn16099@bristol.ac.uk>

Sent: 27 June 2019 15:15

To: Beth Tarleton <Beth.Tarleton@bristol.ac.uk>

Cc: Christina Pantazis <C.Pantazis@bristol.ac.uk>; David Berridge <David.Berridge@bristol.ac.uk>

Subject: Re: Response from SPS REC

Hi Beth,

My application to the Ethics Committee was recently approved on May 29, 2019, for my study: *Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City* (paper ref. SPSREC/18-19/035).   In that application, I outlined the significant challenges I have experienced in accessing my sample. I proposed the use of organisations that work with young people as recruitment sites since I was facing low participation from secondary schools. This has proven to be fruitful in some instances, especially in custodial institutions. However, the use of formal recruitment letters to young people who have offended (in some cases major crimes) has not proven to be the most effective approach to recruitment.

Therefore, as I am currently awaiting responses from young people, while also considering the time element, I am bringing this to your attention because most of the organisations who have community officers are willing to interface with the young people who are more likely to be in their communities but less responsive to formal letters. Can this approach be considered?

From: Beth Tarleton <Beth.Tarleton@bristol.ac.uk>

Sent: 02 July 2019 08:33

To: GREG NUNEZ <gn16099@bristol.ac.uk>; SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox <sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk>

Cc: Christina Pantazis <C.Pantazis@bristol.ac.uk>; David Berridge <David.Berridge@bristol.ac.uk>

Subject: Re: Response from SPS REC

Dear Greg

Thank you for providing the further information regarding your refined recruitment strategy for your project. Please take this email as confirmation of an amendment to your ethical approval for your study:

Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City (paper ref. SPSREC/18-19/035)

I hope this strategy is successful.

Best wishes

Beth

Appendix 18

Recruitment Protocol

Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic: *Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City* (paper ref. SPSREC/18-19/035) and the probable deterrence that formal recruitment letters may have on boys and young men who have been permanently excluded from secondary school and have also been criminally charged, there is a need to consider alternative approaches to recruitment. As such, this brief recruitment protocol outlines the scope and role that the organisations will operate in on behalf of the researcher.

1. The organisations that work with young people who are eligible to participate in the study are being asked to mail recruitment letters to identified boys and young men and to interface with those who visit the organisations or whose home addresses or personal contact are known.

2. For those boys and young men who are hard to reach via telephone or direct access, recruitment letters with Participant Information Sheets (PIS) will be enclosed and mailed to their home addresses by the organisations on behalf of the researcher.

3. The boys and young men whose telephone contact are known or are accessible to the community officers of the organisations will be contacted on the researcher's behalf. The officers will be adequately briefed on the study and what to say to the boys and young men. They will also be provided with copies of the PIS that provides a detailed explanation of the study.

4. As mentioned in the PIS and will be communicated to the officers, the young men interested in participating in the study will liaise with the researcher after their first interface with the officers. The officers will not need to be involved after the initial contact. All finalisations and consent will be addressed by the researcher to preserve the anonymity of the final sample.

Appendix 19

Researcher Safety Guidelines

Researching individuals or groups linked to crime and violence or living in high-crime areas can pose physical, emotional and ethical dangers to researchers and therefore necessitates special attention and care. The following safety protocol addresses the foreseen safety and security concerns of the study based on risks linked with being in possibly probable dangerous settings and close proximity to young people who have been criminally charged before.

1. The researcher will limit contact with participants by providing access to only the university issued email and a local mobile number to be used for the study.

2. The researcher will conduct a risk assessment during the recruitment process to identify any probable safety concerns that the participants may pose. The schools will be asked basic questions on their knowledge of the potential participant in the first stage of recruitment when letters are being sent out to potential participants to identify any risks to safety. Additionally, potential participants will be asked basic questions about where they live and if they would feel safe having the discussion there upon the first contact. In cases where the assessment suggests safety concern, a change of venue to a public place (e.g. community centre) will be planned.   The researcher will also collaborate with the Belize Police Department to identify areas that may be in conflict or hostility during the designing of the interview schedule and assessment of the participant and his environment.

3. Since the social landscape of Belize City, especially in the Southside, is characterised by a concentration of gang activity, during the assessment of the individual, the neighbourhood will be an important feature. The researcher will reduce risk by not possessing valuable items or wearing particular colours or symbols associated with gangs during fieldwork.

4. The use of reliable transportation (taxi) will be used to and from the home of the participant.

5. During the interviews at the homes of the participants, an adult that the participant trusts will be requested to be at the home. Interviews in bedrooms will be avoided.

6. In the instances of custodial care, if any, arrangements will be made with the relevant authorities of the Kolbe Foundation or other custodial institutions during the designing of the interview schedule to plan for security concerns, including supervision and adherence to institutional regulations.

7. During the interview, the researcher will seek to gain trust and establish rapport with the participant with a series of introductory questions before engaging in more specific topics. Care will also be taken to not ask questions that can upset the participant. Careful observation of body language and demeanour will be made during the interview so that questions that seem to have undesirable effects can be avoided.

8. Other safety measures will include access to a mobile phone with a programmed contact of emergency, the possession of the university photo I.D., and the alerting of a trusted colleague of my pending interviews and subsequent check-ins in Belize City (Nelma Mortis) who has experience in research on social violence.

9. After each interview, any emerging issues will be recorded and addressed with my supervisors.

10. Lastly, the researchers mental and psychological health is critical to the process. Therefore, challenging situations will be discussed with supervisors or escalated to support services.

Greg Nunez

August 27, 2018

Young Person's Consent Form

Project title: Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City

Researcher: Greg Nunez

Please
tick each
box if you agree

1. I understand that this research study is about boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school and have also been charged for a crime before. I understand that anything said in our discussion will be used only for this study.

☐

2. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet provided. I understand what I am being asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given.

☐

3. I understand that my real name or personal details will not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher or used in any reports written about this research.

☐

4. I understand that the discussions will be private and confidential, so nothing that can identify me will be used I also understand that if I say something that suggests the risk of serious harm to myself or to others, the researcher may need to pass this on to someone else. I understand that this

☐

will only be done after a discussion with me about how that information would be shared.

5. If I agree, I understand that our discussions will be recorded, and typed up later. The recordings and written record of them will be kept safe for 20 years until no longer needed.

6. I understand that my taking part is my choice and that I can stop our discussion at any time and ask for what I have said to be withdrawn up to two weeks after the interview. Once I inform the researcher, any data collected will be immediately destroyed.

7. I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to take part in this study.

Signed: _____

Name: _____   Date: _____

I would like to receive some information about the results of the research when it is finished

If there are any concerns contact: Christina Pantazis, c.pantazis@bristol.ac.uk**,**
School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, 8Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UQ

Appendix 21

<center>**Parent/Guardian's Consent Form**</center>

This form must be signed by a parent or guardian of participants under 18 years of age that are a part of this research study.

Project title: Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City

Researcher: Greg Nunez

Please

tick each

box if you agree

1. I understand that this research study is about boys and young men who have been expelled from secondary school and have also been charged for a crime before. I understand that anything said in our discussion will be used only for this study.

2. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet provided. I understand what my son and I are being asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given.

3. I understand that my real name and my son's real name or personal details will not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher or used in any reports written about this research.

4. I understand that the discussions will be private and confidential, so nothing that can identify me, or my son will be used. I also understand that

if I, or my son, say something that suggests the risk of serious harm to others, the researcher may need to pass this on to someone else. I understand that this will only be done after a discussion with me about how that information would be shared.

5. If I agree, I understand that our discussions will be recorded, and typed up later. The recordings and written record of them will be kept safe for 20 years until no longer needed.

☐

6. I understand that my taking part is my choice and that I can stop our discussion at any time and ask for what I or my son have said to be withdrawn up to two weeks after the interview. Once I inform the researcher, any data collected will be immediately destroyed.

☐

7. I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to take part in this study.

☐

Signed: _____

Name: _____   Date: _____

I freely consent for my son _____ to take part in this study.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

I would like to receive some information about the results of the research when it is finished

☐

If there are any concerns contact: Christina Pantazis, c.pantazis@bristol.ac.uk**,**

School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, 8 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UQ

Appendix 22

Confidentiality Protocol

Confidentiality is fundamental to research and is essential to the trust between researcher and participants; therefore, it should only be breached in very exceptional circumstances. This protocol details the approach the researcher will take to maintain the confidentiality of the participants during the study.

1. Information that can identify individual participants will not be used or disclosed.

2. Both the consent form and participant information sheet explain the limits of confidentiality. This will be verbally reiterated before each interview.

3. Breaching confidentiality in this study would only be required in the event of the divulgence of information that suggests the risk of serious harm to the participant or others. In this context, compelling reasons for breaking confidentiality may include disclosing abuse in or outside of the home or plans to seriously harm others.

4. This reiteration will also be extended during the interview when it appears a participant is about to divulge sensitive information that will require a breach of confidence as listed above. The participant will be reminded of the limits to confidentiality and provided with an option to continue, skip the question, or stop the interview.

5. Should there be an instance where confidentiality is called into question, the researcher will contact his primary supervisor (Christina Pantazis) for advice on whether it requires a breach and the steps that need to be taken.

6. The participant will be informed when confidentiality needs to be broken. I will discuss with the participant the reasons that necessitate the breach and explain the steps to be taken. The participant will have an opportunity to recommend a person that they would like to be informed first such as a parent, but the relevant authorities will still need to be contacted.

7. Since the researcher is not able to determine the outcome of the process after breaking confidentiality, no such indication will be made to the participant. The participant will be provided with the details of supporting agencies, including that listed in the participant information sheet and the debriefing statement and support sheet.

8. The researcher will store and dispose of confidential information in accordance with the Data Protection Act, including storing data in encrypted format on the university's password protected server.

Greg Nunez

August 27, 2018

Appendix 23

<u>**Debriefing Statement and Support for Young Person**</u>

Project title: Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City

Researcher: Greg Nunez

Thank you for your participation!

Your involvement in this study has been extremely useful and has helped to increase my understanding of the role expulsion played in you being charged for a crime. It has also made clearer the role that your family, friends, school, and neighbourhood play in shaping your life.

If you would like a summary document outlining the major findings at the end of the study, please let me know. If you have any concerns or require further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at gn16099@bristol.ac.uk or 610-1867.

Also, if you no longer wish to be a part of the study, feel free to contact me to withdraw from the study up to two weeks after our discussion.

Support after interview

If you feel that you need assistance with any concerns, anxiety, or distressed feelings because of the discussion, the following agencies and organisations can be contacted for help or support.

- **Belize Community Counseling Centre:** they provide a safe space for young people to discuss any problems that they may be facing. You can call them at 223-1406 or email recept.bcccc.crd@humandev.gov.bz.

- Conscious Youth Development Programme: they help young people from different areas of Belize City who may be experiencing difficult problems or situations. You can call them at 203-3084 or email secretary.cypd.crd@humandev.gov.bz.

- **Family Support Services:** they can provide support for you and your family. You can call them at 227-7451 or email secretary.hsd@humandev.gov.bz.

Appendix 24

<u>**Debriefing Statement and Support for Parents/Guardians**</u>

Project title: Permanent exclusion of boys and young men from secondary school and its influence on their offending and social exclusion in Belize City

Researcher: Greg Nunez

Thank you for your participation!

You and your son's involvement in this study have been extremely helpful and has increased my understanding of how expulsion from school influences criminal offending in boys and young men. It has also made clearer the role that the family, friends, school, and neighbourhood play in shaping your son's life.

If you would like a summary document outlining the major findings at the end of the study, please let me know. If you have any concerns or require further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at gn16099@bristol.ac.uk or 610-1867.

Also, if you or your son no longer wish to be a part of the study, feel free to contact me to withdraw from the study up to two weeks after our discussion.

Support after interview

If you feel that you or your son need assistance with any concerns, anxiety, or distressed feelings because of the discussion, the following agencies and organisations can be contacted for help or support.

- **Belize Community Counseling Centre:** they provide a safe space for young people to discuss any problems that they may be facing. You can call them at 223-1406 or email recept.bcccc.crd@humandev.gov.bz.

- Conscious Youth Development Programme: they help young people from different areas of Belize City who may be experiencing difficult problems or situations. You can call them at 203-3084 or email secretary.cypd.crd@humandev.gov.bz.

- **Family Support Services:** they can provide support for you and your family. You can call them at 227-7451 or email secretary.hsd@humandev.gov.bz.

- **Community and Parent Empowerment Programme:** they provide services, useful information and skills to parents to help them take care and protect their children. You can call them at 227-7451 or email secretary.hsd@humandev.gov.bz.