An exploration of how young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'

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ABSTRACT

This research project aimed to explore how young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'. This was important because 'family' has played a central role in policy, theory and research concerning young people who have offended; however, children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored in policy and research that concerns them. Following a grounded theory methodology (GTM) a policy document analysis was conducted to explore how the term 'family' has been constructed and defined in policy that concerns young people who have offended. Then, primary data was generated in collaboration with young people to further understand how they conceptualise the term 'family', and in essence, what this word means to them. Using questionnaires and focus groups, this facilitated discussions with the young people to discuss the meaning of 'family' at their own pace and in the presence of peers from a similar background. The young people who participated in this research were chosen due to their offender status in the youth justice system (YJS), however, many of them also chose to self-report experience of being a looked after child (LAC). The young people were drawn from two geographical locations: London and Glasgow.

Key themes that were drawn from the empirical research identified that the young people placed more emphasis on the emotional aspects of 'family life' than on the presence of specific 'family members'. The discussions centred around the importance of love, trust and safety, in determining who should be considered 'family', which was significantly different to much of the previous research reviewed. Therefore, this thesis presents an original contribution to knowledge, that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise the term 'family'. The language used to describe the term 'family' was largely based on their own personal experiences of 'family' and 'family life', which for some of the young people, was significantly affected by their time spent in the care system. The findings from this research not only provide an original contribution to knowledge in the varied and dynamic ways in which young people who have offended choose to describe and define the term 'family', but the findings also complement and add to the emerging but limited evidence-base of research that seeks to place children and young people's voices at the centre.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This thesis provides a detailed literature review, methodology and discussion of findings from a research project that aimed to explore how young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'. This research was important because 'family' has played a central role in policy, theory and research concerning young people who have offended. As such, this thesis presents an original contribution to knowledge, that draws on young people's voices, to demonstrate that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise the term 'family', which goes beyond simply relying on blood ties or who they live with. The language they used to describe the term 'family' was largely based on their own personal experiences of 'family' and 'family life', which for some of the young people, was significantly affected by their time spent in the care system.

Since the beginnings of research in Criminology, family-related risk factors have been considered important in predicting young people's (re)offending[1] behaviour. The main contributing factors identified in relation to family life are being raised in a single-parent family, or a family that has been affected by divorce or parental separation (Rebellon, 2002). Poor parenting is also considered an important factor with lack of supervision, lack of emotional support and lack of discipline all having major impacts on young people's behavioural outcomes (Hoeve et al, 2008). Risks are future projections, based on the past and present (Beck, 1992), and increasingly within youth justice, there is an overwhelming emphasis placed on the need to prevent risks from playing out and resulting in youth (re)offending behaviour.

Furthermore, major social and legislative changes in recent years now play host to a wider variety of family compositions (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004), and so, the relationship between family and youth offending behaviour should be revised. With the changing nature of family life across time and between cultures, there is no universally accepted definition of family (Steel et al, 2012). This lack of consistency in definition

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[1] Risk assessment tools used by the Youth Offending Service (YOS) typically focus on calculating the young person's level of risk of reoffending. However, there is also a focus in wider society on predicting the risk of children first becoming involved in offending behaviour. Therefore, (re)offending will be used as an all-encompassing term.

of key terms in research concerning young people who have offended, has led to questionable conclusions about the impact of family on young people's behaviour with findings that are often at odds with one another (Juby & Farrington, 2001).

Defining Key Terms: young people who have offended

The definition used in this research project for 'young people who have offended' relies on key pieces of legislation. Article 1 (UNCRC, 1989) states that a child is everyone under the age of 18. Section 16 (Children and Young Persons Act, 1963) adjusted the minimum age of criminal responsibility for England and Wales from 8 to 10 years old, where it has remained ever since. The use of *Doli Incapax* for young people between the ages of 10-14 years old within the criminal courts was abolished (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998), holding everyone 10 years old and above fully culpable for their criminal actions. This came at a time when England and Wales were moving into a more punitive era and removed a degree of protection from young children facing criminal prosecutions (Muncie, 2015). Therefore, 'young people who have offended' in this thesis are defined as being between the ages of 10 and 17 years old.

Often, offenders and victims are treated as two separate and mutually exclusive groups within the criminal justice system (Hine, 2013). However, there is a large overlap between the two, which is even more pronounced when considering young people. For the purposes of this research, the young people referred to are within the capacity of their offender status, although the negative and stigmatising label of 'young offender' is not used. Instead, there is a preference to use the more descriptive title of 'young people who have offended' (Case, 2018), which follows the rights and welfare-based approach of 'children first' philosophy regarding youth justice (Haines & Case, 2015).

Rationale and Aims

The defining of key terms used in research are important, otherwise methodological issues arise in the way that these terms may be understood and interpreted by various people involved (Brandon, 2006). However, deciding on a definition for the term 'family' is difficult due to its dynamic and flexible nature with research often failing to capture the complexity of family life (Casper & Hofferth, 2006). Understanding peoples'

conceptions of 'family' has many important implications: for informing research and theories about family life, for developing more reliable measurements of family, and for providing a clearer insight into how views on family have been constructed (Weigel, 2008). It is important to actively engage research participants in the defining of such key terms, prior to the main body of the research being conducted, which is equally important for young people who should be treated with the same level of respect as adult participants would be (Anyan & Pryor, 2002). Article 12 (UNCRC, 1989) states that children have the right to a voice and to have their views considered, particularly in matters that concern them.

Therefore, the aims of the research were concerned with promoting young peoples' voices, and in developing an understanding of how young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'. As previous research on defining family has primarily used laypeople[2] participants (Weigel, 2008; Baxter et al, 2009) it was important to recruit participants from a more specific group. Young people who have offended are an important group to involve in research concerning the concept of 'family', as family risk factors are repeatedly correlated with youth (re)offending behaviour (Farrington, 2015). To further understand why the 'family' environment might be so central in predicting youth offending behaviour, it was proposed that the young people themselves should be involved in discussions about their understanding of the term family. This aimed to not only fill a methodological gap in terms of the research participants who were used (see chapter five for a full discussion on this), but it also followed a 'child friendly' rights-based approach of placing the young people's voices at the centre of the research project, and facilitating their active engagement (Gray, 2016).

The main question that was a constant throughout this research project, was quite simply: 'what does the word 'family' mean to you?' With this question guiding the research project. This was subsequently broken down into five research questions:

Research question 1
What role does 'family' play in youth justice policy in England and Scotland?

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[2] The term laypeople is used in research to describe participants who are representative of the general public and have no specialised or professional knowledge on the subject (Collins English Dictionary, 2019).

Research question 2

What theories are relevant to explaining the relationship between 'family' and youth offending behaviour?

Research question 3

How has the concept of 'family' previously been researched? And what was found?

Research question 4

How is the term 'family' used in youth justice policy?

Research question 5

How do young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'?

For the primary data collection that was guided by research question five, two groups of young people were recruited, one in London and one in Glasgow. Initially, the research was intended to be based just in London, with the researcher to be embedded in the setting as a volunteer, and to collect different types of data over a two-year period. However, the difficulty of collecting more data in the London setting led to the decision to include a second setting, and geographical location, into the research project: Glasgow. As such, a range of different 'slices of data' (Urquhart, 2013) were collected. A grounded theory methodology (GTM) was used throughout the project, to draw together the different 'slices of data' that had been collected and to generate a new theory that emerged from the data. As such, the thesis presents to the reader a journey, firstly, a review of the literature, which covers the policy developments in youth justice, the various theories that have been used to explain the relationship between the family environment and youth offending behaviour, and a consideration of previous research that has explored 'the family' as a sociological concept. The second part of the journey was developing a methodological framework for the remainder of the research project, which would consist of a youth justice policy analysis and primary data generated by two groups of young people who have offended. The final part of the journey that is presented in this thesis concerns the main themes that emerged from the data, a discussion of both the data generation process and the findings, and finally, a discussion on the implications for the emerging theory, for both youth justice policy and practice. The following section of this chapter will provide an outline for the thesis.

Outline of thesis

An integral part of the project was to first contextualise and ground the research, by conducting a review of the existing literature and research on the role that 'family' has played in theories for understanding youth offending behaviour, and in the development of youth justice policies. Furthermore, on defining the term family, and how it has been constructed as a main risk factor in predicting youth (re)offending behaviour. Chapter two explores in chronological order, the youth justice policies and political discourses that have been used in understanding and responding to young people's offending behaviour, since the early twentieth century. Throughout history, youth justice policy and social policy concerning children has always had a close eye on the impact of family life on development and behaviour, in particular those young people who have come to the attention of the youth justice system. Much of the focus has been on family types that do not fit the typical nuclear family structure, and those who have experienced multiple problems such as domestic violence, drug abuse, mental health issues and poverty. Increasingly, families that are characterised as being 'lone parent' or 'broken by parental separation' are the central focus of targeted interventions and programmes that aim to prevent youth offending behaviour. Scottish Parliament was devolved in 1998, and so from this time period onwards, there are separate pieces of legislation from both England and Scotland that have been included in chapter two.

Chapter three presents the various theories that have been used and employed in understanding youth offending behaviour, from the early rational choice theory that proposed everyone has free will and actively chooses to engage in offending behaviour, therefore making them fully culpable and responsible for their actions, regardless of age (Muncie, 2015). To more recent theories on gender, which state that young males are more likely to exhibit external responses to adverse experiences such as abuse and neglect, through displays of violence, aggression and criminal behaviour (Bender, 2010). More specific theories that explain the family and parental impact on youth offending behaviour are also explored in chapter three, identifying forms of 'strain' that are generally found within certain family environments (Hay, 2003), and also those young people who are considered 'crossover youth', who have experiences of both the youth justice system and the care system, experience a higher number of risk factors than 'non-crossover youth' (Lee & Villagrana, 2015). As such,

attention has been focused on the ways in which family is understood to impact upon children and young people's behavioural development, and, on the development of antisocial and offending behaviour.

Chapter four explores the ways in which the term 'family' has previously been researched and defined, by both scholars and laypeople. Firstly, considering the different types of relationships that have previously been a focus of research concerning young people, which includes not only the parent-child relationship, but also the two parents and their relationship with one another (married, co-habiting, separated, divorced), and increasingly, the relationships held with 'other' family members, such as siblings and grandparents. In considering 'the family' as a sociological concept, the structure of the household and the variety of features of 'family life' have also been reviewed, with much of the early positivist-type research choosing to measure the concept of 'family' as static and relying on unrealistic categories such as 'two-parent' and 'broken'. Chapter four also considers looked after children (LAC) and how their experiences of 'family' and 'family life' has previously been researched and recorded, with findings often focusing more on the negative associations. Finally, chapter four seeks to unpick the alternative terms and definitions for family that scholars are turning towards during this modern era. Despite the ambiguity in who or what to define as a 'family', there is still a need to specify these limits within certain contexts. As such, it is important to consider how people talk about 'family' to identify the benchmarks that they are measuring against (Baxter et al, 2009). The concept of personal life, rather than family, allows for all forms of relationships and friendships to be acknowledged and moves away from the middle-class, heterosexual family unit that the traditional term 'family' conjures up (Smart, 2007). From a social constructionist perspective, researching the ways in which people 'do family' (Pylyser et al, 2018) through the activities and social interactions they engage in and with whom, rather than a focus on the blood or legal ties between individuals.

Chapter five introduces the methodological approach implemented to explore how 'family' is conceptualised by young people who have offended. Grounded theory methodology was used as a framework for collecting and analysing the data, which was mostly generated by the young people. Being an exploratory piece of research, the 'bottom up' approach used in a grounded theory methodology allows for a theory to be developed from the findings, grounding it in the data. The chapter elaborates on

the aims of the research and describes in detail the ethical issues that were considered during the design of the project and how the different types of data were generated. Individual accounts are provided on each of the settings, in terms of how the data was collected, as this differed slightly in each setting. These accounts guide the reader through the process, drawing on the literature and previous studies from which this research project was developed. Detailed accounts of how the data was analysed then follows. A comprehensive methodology chapter was necessary, as there were multiple steps in this research and some lengthy ethical issues to consider. To ensure the young people's voices are given credibility, the underlying methodological approach should be rigorous and transparent. Prior to the primary data collection, a content analysis was conducted using key policy and legislation that have been published over the last thirty years, and that impact on children and young people who have offended. The purpose of this analysis was to identify how the concept of family has been implemented in policy and whether a clear definition of who or what 'family' relates to is provided in the policy.

Chapter six provides the findings from the content analysis of key policy documents and legislation that impact on children and young people who have offended. The chapter analyses three types of documents: general legislation that impacts on children and young people, specific youth justice policy, and key youth justice policy reports. The main aims of conducting this qualitative content analysis of policy documents were to identify what the document or legislation says regarding children and their families and then to analyse what definition, if any, is provided for the key terms used (such as 'family', 'parent', 'parental responsibility'). This policy analysis was an important part of the research process, as it reinforces the argument that children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored in policy that concerns them, thus supporting the need for research that generated data *in collaboration with* young people who have offended.

Chapter seven provides a detailed account of the data generated during the primary research. This chapter is split into two sections: the first covers data collected in the London-based setting, and the second covers data collected in the Glasgow-based setting. The section on London begins by presenting findings from the anonymous questionnaire on family life, which was completed by both staff and young people at a youth offending team (YOT) based in London. This questionnaire was intended as an

initial starting point, to provide a comparison of youth justice practitioners and young people who have offended, to see if there was a marked difference in how they understood the concept of family. Following on from this, a focus group was conducted with a small group of young people from the YOT, to discuss in further detail what the concept of 'family' meant to them. The data generated here was observational field notes, as the young people were extremely wary and conscious about having the discussion audio taped (something which is discussed in more detail in chapter five). The second section in chapter seven provides a detailed account of the data generated in the second focus group that was conducted with a group of young people in Glasgow. The participants in Glasgow were all young people who have offended, and who were also taking part in a long-term project concerned with recording experiences and voices of young people who had been through the Scottish Children's Hearing System. As such, all the young people in the room disclosed that they had both experience of the care and youth justice system in Scotland. The focus group discussion not only generated observational field notes (again, a result of wariness by the young people about having the discussion audio recorded), but also drawings that the young people chose to make, to better represent and express their thoughts on what the term family meant to them.

Chapter eight provides a discussion on the main themes from all 'slices of data' generated, including the findings from the primary research and findings from the policy analysis. As part of the discussion, a consideration is given to the influence and impact of the media (including social media) on young people's understanding of the term 'family'. With many different portrayals found in the media, it is possible to consider that young people's expectations about family life may well be influenced by external factors, which creates tension between their expectations and their lived realities. The importance of trusting young people to offer reliable representations of their lived experiences is well demonstrated through the vital data that was generated as part of this research project. Chapter eight also includes some important reflections from the researcher, in terms of specific challenges that were faced throughout the research project, including gaining and maintaining access to the young people through various gatekeepers.

Finally, chapter nine draws together all the main findings and conclusions. An account is offered as to how the research findings and conclusions may contribute to the wider

community, in informing policy and practice with young people who have offended. This research commenced in an exploratory manner, but then developed into something more critical and empirically founded. With a good foundation to work from, the findings and conclusions drawn from this research highlights the importance of trusting young people to engage and fully participate in research. It further highlights the need to develop more flexible methods to conducting research *with* young people who have offended, rather than *on* them. With this research taking a multidisciplinary approach, it allowed for multiple forms of data generation, collection and analysis to take place. Being able to draw on literature and research methods from multiple disciplines equipped the researcher with the necessary tools for working flexibly and dynamically in response to the needs and welfare of the young people who were engaging with the research project. Lastly, policy and practice implications are explored, based on the conclusions drawn from this research project. With the field of youth justice in the United Kingdom heading towards a more 'positive youth justice' approach (Case, 2018), it is intended that the findings from this piece of research can contribute towards and complement some of the ongoing discussions surrounding the future of the youth justice system.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research topic and provided a brief context and explanation as to why it is important. The research questions and rationale that were developed as part of the research project were outlined, and an explanation for why the phrase 'young people who have offended' was adopted throughout the research project, as opposed to the term 'young offender', was also provided. Finally, an overview was given for the structure of the thesis, demonstrating the journey and progression of the research project. The next chapter starts at the beginning of the journey, by providing a brief history of the role that 'family' has taken in youth justice policy over time.

CHAPTER TWO – THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN YOUTH JUSTICE POLICY

Introduction

This chapter will provide a brief history of youth justice policy over time, drawing attention to the role that 'family' has taken within this policy. Throughout history, youth justice policy and social policy concerning children has always had a close eye on the impact of family life on development and behaviour. Predominantly, the focus on the 'family' is concerned with the parent(s) and the living conditions of the child in question. As such, the term 'family' covers a wide range of people and attributes that are all understood to have an impact on the child's behaviour whether this be a negative or positive impact. Typically, youth justice policy that incorporates 'family' focuses on the negative or dysfunctional aspects of family life and parenting with targeted programmes and court orders to improve these unwanted behaviours. Despite this focus much of the policy reviewed (see chapter six) fails to provide a clear definition of who or what 'family' is actually referring to. Many of the more recent pieces of policy and government initiatives have a clear and explicit target audience, and as such, give a good indication to the reader as to the expectations surrounding family life and parenting that the government hold and aim to promote. Much of the policy and government initiatives that feature in this chapter not only lack a clear definition of 'family' but also fail to draw on children and young people's experiences and voices regarding family life. In this regard they are at odds with Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) which states that all children have the right to have their own views and opinions heard and considered in matters then concern them. Predominantly, policy has focused on deprived families and families considered to be single parent and/or 'broken' by separation or divorce and, whilst this is typically implicit, has rested on an assumption of what constitutes a 'proper' family. This chapter will present in chronological order, some of the most important policies and initiatives that have been implemented in society over the past century that concern children and young people and their families, and the political rhetoric that has surrounded 'family life'.

The chapter will begin at the start of the twentieth century, with the emergence of both the concept of 'youth' and subsequently the 'youth crime problem', where some of the earlier policies focused on reforming children and their parents. The chapter will then continue into the second half of the twentieth century, as issues surrounding

unemployment rose and widespread protests and riots occurred. Also, during this time period, Stanley Cohen's book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972 – republished 2011) was based on his study of 'deviant groups' in society. Cohen focused on the impact of the public and media reaction to certain groups, with youth subcultures taking centre stage of his discussions. The chapter will then cover the time period from the mid-1990s to 2010, when the New Labour government came to power. This signalled an important move towards a more punitive and responsibilising approach to young people and their parents. Between Charles Murray's 'underclass theory' and Tony Blair's 'broken Britain' rhetoric, policy and new initiatives emerged throughout the New Labour ministry which targeted those families deemed to be feckless and undeserving, 'broken' by parental separation and characterised by anti-social behaviour. A brief overview of the Scottish devolved parliament has also been included here, to explain why the Scottish Children's Hearings system was introduced and how it differs from the English youth justice system. This is important to include, as the empirical research conducted as part of this project, involved young people from both London and Glasgow, and so, an understanding of both systems was required. The chapter then moves into the Coalition government time period, which continued the 'broken Britain' rhetoric, implementing further projects such as the Troubled Families initiative which aimed to 'turn around' 120,000 families who were identified as being 'troubled'. As the government transitioned to the Conservative ministry from 2015, the government's austerity programme continued, with more than £30 billion in spending reductions across housing, welfare and social services, which also impacted a great deal on youth-related services, both in terms of justice and welfare. The chapter concludes by bringing the reader to the current day (2021), with new standards for the English youth justice system being published in early 2019. The standards set out a 'child first' approach with expectations for the way children and young people should be treated and supported when they encounter the youth justice system in England and Wales (YJB, 2019). The first section focuses on explaining how 'youth crime' came to be defined and how it developed as a 'problem' in the first part of the twentieth century.

Emergence of a 'youth crime problem'

The concept of youth and the need for separate systems for child and adult offenders became a prominent feature of the criminal justice system in the early part of the

twentieth century. The *Children Act (1908)* introduced a separate 'juvenile court' and with it, the official understanding that children were to be treated differently to adult offenders. An increasing focus on young people and their nuisance behaviour picked up pace throughout the First World War, with the media reporting on 'hooligans' running riot, due to absent father figures and mothers spending more time away from the home, being employed in the munitions factories. The lack of parental supervision and school discipline were cited as being contributory factors to the emerging 'juvenile crime epidemic' (Muncie, 2015). By the 1930's, England and Wales were facing the Great Depression, a period of significant economic downturn on a national scale, which brought with it extremely high rates of unemployment and increasing rates of crime. Focus turned to the role that children and young people played in the high levels of crime, with preferred solutions being identified as improving their home conditions and family life. As such, the *Children and Young Person's Act (1933)* created Home Office approved schools, which replaced both reformatory and industrial schools, but still with the aim of housing children identified as being both criminal and beyond parental control. With the increased visibility of children and young people on the streets, the government wanted to be seen to be 'doing something'.

With the main political discourses and responses to young offenders being of a more welfare-based approach during the early twentieth century the focus fell upon parents and their abilities in successfully socialising and teaching their children right from wrong. Two important governmental committees were established during the first half of the century, with the intention of reviewing policy and practice regarding young offenders. The Molony Committee, established in 1925, was tasked by the Home Secretary to investigate the treatment of young offenders. The recommendations that the committee made, formed the basis for the *Children and Young Person's Act (1933)*, and placed the welfare of children and young people as the centre focus for the juvenile courts. As such, the courts were to broaden their remit to also include making decisions regarding family socialisation and parental behaviours (Goldson & Jamieson, 2002). The second governmental committee to be established, was the Ingleby Committee in 1956, by the Conservative government. Their purpose was to undertake a review of juvenile justice, policy and practice, and to address key issues that were raised. A report was published in 1960, detailing their findings and recommendations, which impacted on the *Children and Young Persons Act (1963)*

and *(1969)*. Continuing the welfare-based approach, the 1963 Act placed emphasis on the care and protection of children by raising the age of criminal responsibility from 8-years to 10-years. Further to this, the 1969 Act placed favour with care and supervision orders made by probation officers and social workers, as opposed to more punitive orders imposed by the juvenile courts. Moreover,

> "in a political climate where the needs and vulnerabilities of children were gaining importance, so parents were being held incrementally responsible if their children offended, as this behaviour was perceived as a failure of socialisation and effective parenting" (Case, 2018: 149)

As such, towards the second half of the twentieth century, the responsibilisation of parents was increasingly being felt, in both policy and practice, with the focus being placed more on families who did not meet the typical nuclear family structure of married parents and several children, all residing within the same household. Having explored the first part of the twentieth century, and how 'youth crime' came to be defined as a problem, placing an emphasis on young people and their parents, the next section focuses on explaining how the rise of 'youth subcultures' and studies on 'gang culture' from America, contributed to the increasing moral panic that was created around youth crime.

The rise of youth subcultures

Policy in the latter part of the twentieth century continued to place a heavy emphasis on the 'family' and in particular, the role of parenting deficits on young people's offending behaviour. As the notion of 'failing' and 'inadequate' parents impacted on both policy and practice, the tone began to change from one of advice and support for parents, to one of responsibilisation and punishment (Drakeford & McCarthy, 2000). Throughout much of the 1960s, through to the 1980s, British society experienced a rise in newly formed youth subcultures. With Stanley Cohen's famous study being published in 1972, which concerned the exaggerated media portrayal of the 'mods' and 'rockers', young people and the social groups they were forming came under increasing scrutiny by the media, public and politicians. As Cohen (2011) identified, the moral panic that was subsequently created by the media fuelled a series of discussions surrounding the underlying causes for such delinquent behaviours.

Around the same time, American criminologists were studying the rise of violent and dangerous youth gangs in large cities, such as New York and Chicago. Adding fuel to an already established, and growing concern held by the public and politicians alike, the approach towards young offenders and their families became increasingly punitive in the subsequent years. So much so, that Margaret Thatcher, during her time as British Prime Minister, called for a return to 'Victorian values' as a way of re-establishing some sense of discipline, responsibility and morality that was believed to be taking over society (Dennis, 1993). It was the more permissive behaviours of the 1960s and 70s that led certain politicians and advocates to focus the attention, once again, upon the 'disintegration of family values' and morals as being the primary cause of young people's delinquent behaviours. The introduction of the *Divorce Reform Act (1969)* saw increased attention being paid to the 'pathological' family types, those who were now becoming 'fatherless' families. With improved ease to divorce a spouse, there were growing concerns as to the impact this would likely have on children's behavioural outcomes. Terminology such as 'broken' families began to enter the political rhetoric, with a surge in research studies confirming the detrimental effects of growing up in this 'type' of family structure (Farrington, 1995).

However, towards the end of the twentieth century, and after a series of significant child-welfare cases being exposed, focus on an international level turned towards improving children's rights, ensuring their welfare and wellbeing were of upmost importance. In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) established the expected baseline for all children's rights, from every day to those children and young people who experience episodes in the care and criminal justice system. The overarching theme of the 54 articles that form the UNCRC, are focused on the protection, provisions and participation for all children. Article 1 of the UNCRC (1989) states that, "a child means every human being below the age of 18 years" (1989: 4). These articles have been ratified and embedded in most country's human rights charters and legislation, including in England, Wales and Scotland. Having explored the second half of the twentieth century, and how the emergence of youth subcultures and American studies on gangs contributed to the increasing moral panic surrounding young people, the next section focuses on exploring the impact of 'new labour' and the introduction of the crime and disorder act (1998) on youth crime and justice.

New Labour and the Crime and Disorder Act (1998)

The 1990s in Britain saw a resurgence of the dysfunctional family rhetoric, spear-headed by Charles Murray and his 'underclass' theory (see chapter three for a full review of this theory). In general terms, the work by Murray in the early 1990s, set the precedent for the increasing view of responsibilisation of both young offenders and their parents. With the birth of 'New Labour' came a renewed sense of penal populism, and the need to be seen to be 'doing something' that would benefit society. In the lead up to the general election, New Labour included in their political manifesto that they intended to be "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime" (Blair, 1995: 1). However, the primary focus of this approach was to be implemented through social responsibility, and by default, would hold parents more accountable for their 'bad parenting skills' and inability to 'properly' socialise their children. As opposed to the government and other organisations taking responsibility for failing the nation's children and their families, through budget cuts to crucial services and the lack of adequate communication between multiple agencies who were dealing with the same family. Throughout the political campaign, families, and parents in particular, were held fully accountable for the anti-social and criminal behaviour of children and young people, which was portrayed to be rising and considered to be a serious problem. Despite this, a review of the literature shows that the term 'family' was rarely defined, with the label 'parents' often being used interchangeably with 'family'. This implies that although much of the talk regarded 'families', in actual fact they were really referring to the parents of the child. This was subsequently confirmed in the implementation of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)* which saw new parenting orders being introduced as part of the broader anti-social behaviour order campaign.

In support of Tony Blair's tough approach to young offenders and their parents, Jack Straw who was appointed Home Secretary in 1997, drew on his personal experiences of growing up in relative poverty, to develop a "less than tolerant attitude" (Case, 2018: 186) towards young people and their families. Adopting a realist and responsibilising approach to youth offending, based on the rational choice theory, New Labour's strategies signified what is commonly thought of as the 'punitive turn' in youth justice (Muncie, 2015). The report published by the Audit Commission in 1996, titled *Misspent Youth* provided a comprehensive review of the youth justice system in England and Wales. It was commissioned by the outgoing Conservative government and provided

a damning report of the inefficiency of multi-agency working and the slow processing of young people through the justice system. As such, one of the first papers published by the New Labour government of 1997 was in response to the Audit Commission report. Titled *No More Excuses: a new approach to tackling youth crime*, the White Paper built on the recommendations for improvement, as listed in the *Misspent Youth* report. Importantly, the responsibilisation approach is strong throughout much of the White Paper, and although it acknowledged that deprivation is a significant factor which affects children and young people who engage in anti-social and criminal behaviour, it is argued that this should not be used as an excuse. Instead, the report emphasises that children and their parents should take responsibility for their delinquent behaviour and involvement with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the paper proposed that a major focus for preventing youth crime should be placed on predicting those children and young people who are deemed to be more at risk of engaging in offending behaviour. The formalising of the youth justice system and the formation of the youth justice board (YJB) would ensure that 'good practice' could be identified and disseminated amongst the newly established youth offending teams (YOTs). Much of what was included in this White Paper, written and published under the New Labour ministry, was formally and speedily implemented as part of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)*.

As part of this new Act, the focus on tackling the youth crime 'problem' would be one of prevention, with the aim of making the system more effective, efficient and economical. The way in which this focus on prevention would be implemented, was through a more risk-based approach, which was based largely on the findings from the *Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development* (Farrington, 1995), whereby key risk factors that were highly correlated with youth offending behaviour had been acknowledged. Certain traits and aspects of family life were identified as being highly predictive of youth offending behaviour, and in particular, children from the Cambridge study who had experienced 'broken homes' or periods of separation from their parents, were more likely to progress to become involved in criminal behaviours. Furthermore, the parents of these children were likely to hold low-skilled jobs or be unemployed, and demonstrated authoritarian or uninterested child-rearing practices (Farrington, 1995). As such, a heavy focus of the responsibilisation approach towards young people's parents resulted from such findings and to the negative impact family life can

have on children's offending behaviours. This was reflected in the introduction of the new parenting orders, which were proclaimed to provide support and guidance to parents whose children had themselves received either an anti-social behaviour order, or criminal sentence. Although not issued under criminal law, the parenting order could be issued by the court under recommendation by the local youth offending team. The order could require parents to attend a parenting programme for up to three months, which if breached, could result in the parent(s) being summoned to court for further conviction, including either a fine or community penalty being issued (Family Lives, 2021).

The Sure Start programme, introduced by the New Labour government in 1999, had the general aim of reducing disadvantage in children from low-income families, by engaging their parents in a range of services that were to be offered in low-income areas. Although not related to the youth justice system, or having an explicit focus on young offenders, the Sure Start programme was open to all families in the areas considered to be low-income. The logic behind the Sure Start programme, and investment in services for early years children and their families, was based on findings from the US, which had shown that "high-quality early years services reduced juvenile crime rates, hence saving huge amounts of money on criminal justice services" (Eisenstadt, 2011: 11). As part of the overhaul and modernisation of many systems in England and Wales, and in particular the aims of the Youth Justice System to be more economical, investment in programmes that would save money in the long-term were supported. After only a few years, this programme was expanded, which saw Sure Start Children's Centres opening from 2004 onwards. In part, this was as a result of the *Every Child Matters* paper published in 2004 (DfES, 2004), which recommended that children and their families required access to more integrated and 'joined-up' services. This was coupled with positive feedback from parents that had accessed the Sure Start programme, stating that the service had "made a difference" (Bouchal & Norris, 2014: 6). The early children's centres that were opened in 2004, were targeted to the 20% most deprived communities in England and expanded on previous services to also include childcare. As such, the subsequent children's centres were combined with existing buildings and services, such as schools and nurseries, to aid in the development of the services on offer. Having explored the impact of 'new labour' and the *Crime and Disorder Act* (1998) had on youth crime and justice, the

next section focuses on explaining the establishment of a separate Scottish Parliament, which occurred at the same time as the *Crime and Disorder Act* (1998) was being implemented in England and Wales.

Scotland Act (1998): Establishment of Scottish Parliament

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a brief history of the role that 'family' has taken in youth justice policy over time. Up until this point in history, 1998, Scotland was part of the UK Parliament. In September 1997 there was a referendum conducted in Scotland, enabling the people to vote for devolution. In 1998, the Scottish Parliament was established when the *Scotland Act (1998*) was passed by the UK Parliament. This allows the Scottish Parliament to pass laws, known as 'Acts of the Scottish Parliament', which are specific to Scotland. This section is important in this chapter, as part of the primary research (see chapter seven) was conducted in Scotland. Therefore, an understanding of their history in terms of youth justice policy is necessary. The work of the Kilbrandon Committee in 1964 published a report, which proposed a welfare approach with children and young people who come into conflict with the law (Kilbrandon Committee, 1964). Unlike in England and Wales, the care and justice system for young people in Scotland was combined into one, established as the *Children's Hearings System.* The fundamental principles of this combined system are that children and young people who commit offences and who need care and protection are supported (CYCJ, 2019). Decisions are made by members of the children's panel, who are specially trained volunteer members from local communities in Scotland. The Children's Hearings System was developed in response to the recommendations made by the Kilbrandon Committee (1964), where these recommendations highlighted that decisions on what action should be taken with children and young people should be removed from the courts and placed within a newly developed hearing system with the primary focus being on the welfare of the child or young person. It was stated that there are far more similarities than differences between young people who offend and those who need care and protection (Whyte, 2004). As such, a new system was required in order to deal with all young people who are experiencing problems, whether this be offending behaviour or abuse and neglect.

Hearings take into consideration the individual, their family, social and educational background. As such, there is a large emphasis placed on the active participation of children and their families in Children's Hearings (CYCJ, 2019). The most recent amendments to the Children's Hearings system were published through the *Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act* (2011). This Act reiterates the requirement to place the welfare of the child as the 'paramount consideration' (s.25) throughout the hearing process, and the individual's childhood. Importantly, and in line with Article 12 (UNCRC, 1989), if the child wishes to, they are provided with the opportunity to express their own views during the children's hearing. This 2011 Act actually replaced large parts of the *Children (Scotland) Act (1995)*, and has brought together in one place, all legislation that is relevant to the Children's Hearings System. Families play a central role in the Children's Hearings process, and parents or those holding 'parental responsibilities' are expected to attend the hearings with the young person (see chapter six for a full analysis of how 'family' and 'parental responsibilities' feature in this legislation).

The *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014)* was implemented, in part, to ensure that children's rights were properly incorporated and considered at all levels, but in particular, in policies and legislation that concern them. In contrast to what was occurring in youth justice policy in England and Wales (see next section 'Coalition Government 2010-2015), Scotland was ensuring that children's rights were fully embedded in policy and practice, placing an emphasis on children and young people's welfare. One of the main aims of this Act (2014) was to improve the services that support children and their families. This saw the introduction of a national programme called *Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)* which not only placed a clear definition of child wellbeing in legislation, but it placed responsibilities on public bodies for improving the delivery of services and for reporting on how they were improving the outcomes of the children and families that they were supporting. This is seen in contrast to the Coalition Government in England and Wales, which was still focused on a rhetoric of 'responsibilisation' and holding parents accountable for their children's offending behaviour, rather than seeking to improve services and hold public bodies accountable. In particular, both young people who had offended, and children who were 'looked after' by the State, were all given equal consideration and rights under this Act.

In keeping with the child welfare approach, Scottish Parliament raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12, under the *Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act (2019).* This means that children under the age of 12 cannot be referred to the Children's Hearings system for criminal behaviours or be prosecuted in the criminal courts. However, it is still possible that they be referred to the Children's Hearings system on the grounds of concerns over welfare or safety (CYCJ, 2019). The *Children (Scotland) Act (2020)* further reinforces the child welfare approach, ensuring that compliance with the UNCRC in family court cases is met, and in particular, that contact between looked after children and their siblings is maintained where possible and deemed appropriate by the local authority. A political rhetoric on child welfare is further established in the Act (2020) through the focus on considering the young person's welfare and the need to protect them from abuse or the 'risk of abuse' (s. 1). As such, emphasis is placed on parents and those with 'parental responsibilities' in terms of protecting children and young people from harm. To some extent, this is reminiscent of what has been stated in English Parliament regarding children who offend and their parents (see chapter six for full analysis of these). Having explored the impact of the devolved Scottish Parliament on youth justice, the remainder of this chapter will return to focus on youth justice policy in England and Wales and explore how 'family' has played a significant role.

Coalition Government 2010-2015

Much of the already-established rhetoric on troublesome youth and inefficient parenting continued into the conservative / liberal democrat Coalition ministry from 2010. The Sure Start programme continued to grow, with the Coalition government introducing further initiatives to prevent antisocial behaviours and youth crime. In essence, when David Cameron stepped into power as Prime Minister in 2010, he rebranded Tony Blair's earlier promises. Instead, David Cameron spoke about the 'big society' and the need to 'fix' society, that

> "…the causes of crime in this supposedly 'broken society' were family breakdown, welfare dependency, debt, drugs, alcohol abuse, inadequate housing and failing schools" (Case, 2018: 238)

Subsequently, the government published a Green Paper, titled *Breaking the Cycle (MoJ, 2010)*, which set out recommendations for improving safety and security of the public. This was to be actioned through swift and effective punishments for offenders, but with a focus on rehabilitation to reduce reoffending. The paper set the intentions as focusing specifically on tackling youth offending behaviour, as "the young offenders of today will become the prolific career criminals of tomorrow" (MOJ, 2010: 1). The paper presented a very punitive approach, one of tough sentences, consistency and identifying 'what works' in terms of both punishment and rehabilitation. Chapter five of the paper specifically dealt with youth justice and provided details on preventing youth offending through effective sentencing and improving accountability of the youth justice system. Equal weight is given to both preventing youth offending behaviour and in protecting the public from young offenders. For preventing youth offending behaviour, the paper identifies that the quality of work with parents by the youth offending teams should be improved, and in particular, hold parents more accountable if they fail to 'face up to' their responsibilities as parents. Section 233 states that improving parenting skills is key in improving 'life chances' of young people and in turn, reduces reoffending.

In 2012, the Coalition government launched a new initiative, aimed to 'turn around' 120,000 families in England that were identified as being 'troubled'. As such, the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) overall aim was to provide better support and access to services to those families who were considered most in need. The process for identifying these families was based on a list of six problems, and families that demonstrated at least two of the six problems would be eligible for inclusion in the programme. The only definition provided for 'family' in this programme, was part of the eligibility criteria, that identified "each family must include dependent children and/or expectant parents" (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2020: 16). Furthermore, problems that could identify a family as being eligible included: Parents or children who were involved in criminal or antisocial behaviour, children who had not been regularly attending school, children who would benefit from improved life chances and additional support from early years, families that were experiencing homelessness or financial difficulties, families that had been affected by domestic abuse and violence, and parents and children who had a range of physical and mental health needs. The design of this programme was intended to take a whole family

approach, with each family requiring an individual approach specific to their needs identified during assessment. Once 'significant and sustained progress' has been made by the whole family, their allocated practitioner may prepare a closure statement, which details the work that was undertaken and the improvements that have been made.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (2014) report, *Understanding Troubled Families*, further supports the method of working within a whole family approach to tackling some of the most significant problems. It states that,

> "individuals within families do not operate in isolation and the problems of one will affect another, reinforcing each other and therefore likely to build up and lead to a family becoming dysfunctional" (2014: 5).

Despite this programme, on the surface, aiming to provide better support for struggling or 'troubled' families, the underlying aim of the programme was to make a more efficient and economical system, which in the long-term would save the taxpayer's money. The government believed this new programme to be a long-term investment, and as such, local authorities could receive funding of up to £4,000 per family that demonstrated 'significant and sustained improvement'. In turn, the underlying causes of crime would be efficiently tackled. This whole family approach demonstrated the move towards a more trauma-informed process for dealing with underlying causes of antisocial and offending behaviour, particularly with young people and their families. Having explored the impact that the Coalition government had on youth justice policy, the next section focuses on explaining how 'family' featured in youth justice policy during the Conservative ministry, bringing this chapter to the present day (2021).

Conservative Government 2015-Present Day (2021)

As the government transitioned from a Coalition to a Conservative ministry in 2015, support for the Troubled Families Initiative continued, with the programme expanding to involve more families. This was due to provisional evaluations showing a marked improvement in outcomes for the families who had already participated (Department for Communities & Local Government, 2016). In particular, findings summarised in the 2016 report suggest that satisfaction level was high amongst families that participated, in that they felt more confident and optimistic moving forward and being

able to cope better in the future. Furthermore, their self-reported financial capabilities were also improved as a result of participating in the Troubled Families Programme (TFP). Conclusions drawn recommended that the programme continue, and that more significant impacts and outcomes are likely to become evident over a longer period of time, as the programme itself becomes more established. The most recent report, published in 2020 (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2020), titled *Improving Families' Lives*, states in the introduction that the one-year extension granted to the TFP, reflects "…the government's belief that a strong society needs strong families" (2020: 7). In terms of improving offending outcomes, findings from the report (2020) demonstrate a reduction in cautions and convictions of family members, particularly those families who were eligible for the programme on the basis of problems related to crime and antisocial behaviour.

Despite the expansion of the Troubled Families Programme, austerity cuts and policies were still in place from 2010-2019, after an extended period of economic recession. These budget cuts were applied to all sectors, including social care services, pensions and benefits, and also some privatisation of NHS hospitals and services. The impact of these cuts was experienced most by lone parents and pensioners, signifying that it was the more vulnerable groups in society that were to be disadvantaged most by the austerity policies implemented (Ginn, 2013). In particular, Sure Start centres faced closure, cuts to legal aid and refuges for victims of domestic violence and poverty were proposed, and child benefits were frozen. In short, many of these closures and cuts would disproportionately affect women with dependent children, even more so those who were lone parents. Having explored the impact of the Conservative government on youth justice policy, and the role of the 'family' in this, the next section focuses on explaining the latest developments in the approach being implemented by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) in their most recent publication of their strategic plan.

Child-First Approach and the YJB Strategic Plan 2019-2022

Finally, the more recent policy developments from the last few years, have not only acknowledged the importance of attending to children and young people's welfare and wellbeing needs, but are heading towards a 'child first' approach. In an attempt to

move away from the New Labour 'punitive turn' and being 'tough on crime', the aims of the Youth Justice Board, as detailed in their most recent *Strategic Plan* (2019), set a new vision for the youth justice system. The focus is still on preventing youth crime, but rather than holding the child and by extension their parents, fully responsible, the approach is to be one,

> "that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their own strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society" (YJB, 2019: 3)

The 'child first offender second' principle, as it has become known, takes a more positive approach towards young people who offend. Moving away from the punitive and responsibilising rhetoric of the New Labour and Coalition governments, towards one of support and welfare. Drawing attention to the negative impacts that 'offender' labels can have on young children (see chapter three for full review of the labelling theory) and the development of their own self-identity, this new positive youth justice approach is increasing in support. Spear headed by professors Stephen Case and Kevin Haines, this movement has been developing for over 20 years, but is finally being adopted into the latest youth justice board strategic plan. In their review of youth offending plans and interviews conducted with managers and practitioners from youth offending services, Smith and Gray (2019) identified three models for practice, one of which was 'children and young people first'. The services that best fit this typology placed emphasis on prioritising the well-being of children and young people and less on their status as offender, providing a more holistic and integrated support service, as opposed to targeting young people who offend.

The YJB identifies the increasing population of children and young people in the youth justice system with multiple and complex needs, as being one of the main factors for adopting this new approach to preventing (re)offending behaviour. Underlying this approach is one of a trauma-informed practice, which is reminiscent of previous risk-factor approaches adopted in the late 1990s. As such, there is still a focus on some of the main risk factors that were identified, predominantly concerning the family, peers and school. However, in contrast to previous approaches used, and in line with the 'child first' ethos, all elements will be informed by children and young people's views (YJB, 2019). That being said, a recent review conducted by Bateman (2020) has

concluded that despite this move by the YJB towards a 'child first' ethos, there are still some concerns held by academic commentators. Specifically, Bateman (2020) draws attention to the continued use of the term 'offender' throughout the YJB Strategic Plan, "suggesting that the government has yet to appreciate fully the ramifications of the shift in philosophy" (2020: 4), and the need to move away from this negative and stigmatising language. Furthermore, that there is no explicit reference made to the inclusion of rights or best interests of the child during the decision-making process, which is a key principle identified in the 'child first' approach. As this thesis has developed, so has the understanding that the main findings from the primary research complement this 'child first' approach (see chapter eight for full discussion).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief history of youth justice policy over time, drawing attention to the role that 'family' has taken within this policy. The concept of 'family' has played a central role in much of the political rhetoric over the years, even though what 'family' means has changed significantly. This repeated focus on the family in youth justice policy over time requires a more critical review to uncover how the 'family' is actually constructed in policy. As such, a youth justice policy analysis was carried out as part of the research project (see chapter six for detailed findings), to further demonstrate how definitions of the 'family' are constructed in policy and law, and to consider whether children and young people's understandings and experience of 'family' are drawn upon. The next chapter presents a review of existing literature that explains the relationship between family and youthful offending, drawing on theories and research.

CHAPTER THREE – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY AND YOUTHFUL OFFENDING

Introduction

This chapter will provide a review of existing literature that contributes to the understanding of the relationship between 'family' and youthful offending. The purpose of this chapter is to review existing theory and research in order to summarise the 'state of knowledge' regarding the relationship between 'family' and youthful offending. The application of the findings from the primary research with young people who have offended will help to further understand how 'true' the social construction of 'family' in research is, in relation to the young people's lived experiences of family. It is also important to consider these theories and key pieces of research within the broader context of how they have informed and been adopted in youth justice policy and practice. Furthermore, they will be revisited in chapters six, seven and eight, during presentation of the findings and reflective discussion, in order to assist with interpretation of the empirical data. 'The family' has always played a significant role in explaining young people's development more generally, and youth offending behaviour more specifically. Predominantly, the focus has been on the relationship between the young person and their biological parents. Increasingly, the focus has widened to also include other 'family' members, including siblings and grandparents. A great deal of attention has been paid to the breakdown of the family and the short- and long-term impacts this may have on a young person's behaviour. As such, there has been an expansive amount of empirical research conducted to test these theories and to support the correlation between certain family types and the prevalence of antisocial and/or youth offending behaviour. The most relevant theories are discussed in detail throughout this chapter, to highlight the importance 'family' plays in explaining youth offending behaviour, with examples of empirical research in support of them.

Social Control Theory

The first theory that deserves attention is the social control theory because it seeks to understand and explain the ways in which choices are made by young people and considers the influence that other factors, such as family relationships, may have over

these decisions (Church et al, 2009). Social control theory is largely based on notions from the neo-classical rational choice theory and is formed from the concept that individuals make rational decisions whether to engage in criminal behaviour or not, whereby individuals weigh-up the costs of involvement against the benefits gained from committing the offence. During the 1990s and the New Labour ministry, policy and practice relevant to dealing with young people who had offended took a strong responsibilising approach, placing full responsibility on the young person and their parent(s). This demonstrated how elements of the social control theory have been adopted into youth justice policy; namely through the new ASBOs and parenting orders that were introduced through the Crime and Disorder Act (1998). Social control theory has developed this basic concept further to also include psychological and sociological explanations of behaviour (Case, 2018). In contrast to strain and learning theories, which try to explain why young people engage in antisocial and offending behaviour, control theories attempt to explain why they do not engage in criminal or antisocial behaviour (Miller & Steiner, 2014).

Historically, children only came to assume a more central place in the family as birth rates began to fall. During the period of 1880 to 1930, this decline in birth rates naturally led to the reduction in the size of families, with extended family households also becoming less common (Hopkins-Burke, 2016). Increasingly, children were cast in a double bind, being seen as in need of support and control, surveillance and regulation began to permeate most aspects of their lives, including the previously very private sphere of family life (Muncie, 2015). As the focus and concern with children's lives increased, so did the expectations that the family should be held responsible for appropriate socialisation and discipline of their children (Hopkins-Burke, 2016). From an interactionist perspective, it is through the socialisation processes that core social values are internalised, which is key in the maintenance of social order (Muncie, 2015). One way in which the internalisation of social values can be demonstrated is through self-control. Individuals who score low on self-control scales have been highly correlated with antisocial and/or offending behaviours. It is thought that the processes involved with decision making are closely linked to developmental levels of self-control, reflecting a throw-back to earlier rational choice theories. Importantly, it has been suggested that the low levels of self-control one holds, have resulted from ineffective parenting during childhood (Case, 2018). Therefore, social control theory

states that parents have a significant influence over their children's youth offending behaviour, which is enacted directly using supervision and punishment, and indirectly through the socialisation processes that have instilled pro-social behaviours in the child. This understanding of parental influence over their child's behaviour is reflected in key youth justice policy which introduced parenting orders, placing more responsibility on parents. Furthermore, the introduction of the Sure Start programmes in the late 1990s were heavily influenced by the social control theory and associated research which demonstrated the importance of parental influence over children's' behaviours.

The degree to which the socialisation processes are successful largely depends on the quality of the relationship held between the parent(s) and the child. Research has found that poor or non-existent relationships can significantly impact on these socialisation processes which help to instil a sense of moral right and wrong (Hirschi, 2002). Family cohesiveness and emotional support from parents or other family members have been identified as significant protective factors for children and young people (Lietz et al, 2018), which are particularly important for children and young people who are more at-risk of exposure to criminogenic environments. However, the degree to which core values are internalised and converted into self-control depends on how connected a young person feels to their family. Holding a strong sense of belonging to a family unit, control theorists argue, encourages a young person to uphold good morals outside of the family house, influencing their decision-making processes, including whether to involve themselves in criminal behaviours or not (Boutwell & Beaver, 2010).

Attachment Theory
Attachment theory specifically focuses on the impact that the family, in particular parents, have over the socialisation of their children. A central element of social control theory relates specifically to the attachment an individual has with others around them. Early child development theories provide the basis for this concept, with the focus on a more general explanation of children's behaviours. It is the development of strong affectional bonds during early childhood to significant others such as parents, that has been identified as key (Bowlby, 2005). In particular, holding a strong attachment with

a parent or caregiver can act as a protective factor against social and environmental pressures (Janssen et al, 2017), such as spending time away from the family home with delinquent peers. Conformity to society's rules requires individuals to internalise rules and norms of society. Personal control has proven to be much more efficient and effective, as opposed to external controls. One way that personal control is developed, is through holding affectional bonds with other family members, predominantly a parent (Hopkins-Burke, 2016). It is understood that children who hold strong attachments with family members are less likely to engage in youth offending behaviour. However, the flipside of this is that if these family members are already involved in criminal behaviour, then the strong attachment the child holds with them could result in youth offending behaviour (Hopkins-Burke, 2016).

Therefore, much of the empirical research conducted in support of attachment theory has explored the impact of different parenting styles on children's behavioural outcomes. Parenting styles have become a popular way of operationalising the concept of parental responsibility, particularly within the field of youth justice. It is routinely hypothesised that the authoritative parenting style provides the most beneficial outcome for children (Johnson, 2016). The high levels of emotional support provided by the parent, to the child, ensures the young person will develop a good sense of self-control and confidence, leading to greater resilience. Resilience is considered a highly important trait, which can protect a young person against multiple adverse experiences, but also the exposure to antisocial peers and criminogenic environments. In contrast, the uninvolved parenting style is associated with emotionally detached parents, who provide little supervision of their children. As such, young people who have experienced this style of parenting are more likely to develop coping strategies for navigating life and are therefore more prone to high levels of risk-taking behaviours (Rothrauff et al, 2009). In turn, this places them much more at risk of becoming involved in crime, and serious and persistent youth offending behaviours have previously been correlated with neglectful parenting styles (Hoeve et al, 2008). It is clear to see how influential attachment theory has been in the development of the political rhetoric which placed increasing blame on 'broken' and dysfunctional families for the rising rates of youth crime throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, which continued into the early twenty first century.

Theorists have suggested that children who experience inadequate parenting during early childhood, leading to weak attachments between the parent and child, have not been adequately socialised (McCord, 1991). Empirical research findings support this theory, when measuring the impact of parenting quality on children who display aggressive tendencies (Griffin et al, 2000). Displays of aggression during early years of childhood have previously been used as a predictor for youth offending behaviour. However, the findings from research suggest that this trajectory can be altered, depending on the quality of parenting the child receives in the interim years. Children who had been identified as aggressive in early years (between the ages of 4-7) and who had experienced lower quality parenting in the later years (between the ages of 9-12), were more likely to report engaging in criminal behaviour at follow up (age 15) (Hay et al, 2017). 'Lower quality parenting' was characterised by less attachment with their child, lower levels of supervision, and more frequent displays of hostility towards their child.

There has been a large amount of empirical research that has sought to draw correlations between certain family types and the development of youth offending behaviours, but many of the findings have been mixed due to the inconsistencies with measurements used for 'family type'. In one particular empirical study, it was found that family structure was not a significant predictor of youth offending behaviour, however, the degree of maternal attachment was predictive (Mack et al, 2007). These findings highlighted the importance of the quality of the mother-child relationship, rather than the presence of certain family members in a young person's life. Furthermore, a study conducted in Sweden with children who had been placed in a children's home during early years (before the age of 4), when followed up in young adulthood (between the ages of 20-25) found that those who had experienced a secure attachment with their birth mother and continued to hold a positive relationship with her, were more likely to be categorised as having a 'good social adjustment and well-being' (Andersson, 2005). Those in the 'poor social adjustment and well-being' category were identified as such, due to their continued and prolonged involvement in antisocial behaviour, drug abuse and criminality. Young people in this category had experienced mixed relationships during childhood, featuring a range of biological family members, foster family members and state care agencies. Failure to form secure attachments with significant others during childhood can significantly impact

on a young person's developmental trajectory, and their responses to adversity (Andersson, 2005).

Social Bond Theory

Similar to attachment theory, social bond theory focuses on the relationships and connections held with others, as determining behaviours. Emerging from social control theory, Hirschi (2002) developed the concept of 'bond' and connectedness to others as an explanation for why individuals choose to not commit crime. It assumes that holding strong, pro-social bonds to others and society is the key to deterring offending behaviour. When bonds to a legitimate society are weakened or broken, the individual is more inclined to engage in antisocial and/or offending behaviour (Hopkins-Burke, 2016). Importantly, the 'weak' or 'broken' family has been repeatedly viewed as the most influential factor in the development of youth offending behaviour. Since the early twentieth century, notions of 'good' and 'bad' parenting have occupied a large part of youth justice practice, and policy development that is concerned with tackling the 'problem' of youth crime (Muncie, 2015). Both parental behaviour and the family environment are commonly identified as the central factors in explaining youth offending behaviour from this perspective (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008).

Empirical research to explore the social bond theory has found that repeated negative treatment by teachers at school and parents at home is highly correlated with weakened social bonds to society. In turn, young people who report low, or lack of connection to conventional institutions (school, family), also report high levels of involvement in antisocial and offending behaviours (Bao et al, 2014). It is suggested that those with low levels of social bonding are more likely to engage in 'risky' behaviours more generally, often leading to increased exposure to both victimisation and instances of offending themselves (Chen, 2009). As such,

> "It is this theory that has been so influential within the contemporary youth justice system and provides the theoretical foundations on which the work of youth offending teams is based, although this is rarely acknowledged" (Hopkins-Burke, 2016: 183).

With the move of youth justice practice throughout the late 1990s-early 2000s to being more risk-averse, it is evident how influential social bond theory has been and

continues to be. With the concept of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) increasingly taking centre stage in the understanding of youth offending behaviour, empirical research has been conducted to explore the protective nature of social bonds on exposure to multiple ACEs. Findings suggested that the presence of pro-social bonds were correlated with a reduction in rearrest rates of the young people concerned (Craig et al, 2017). However, the presence of social bonds did not appear to reduce the impacts of exposure to more types of ACEs, suggesting that more support is needed for vulnerable young people who experience multiple ACEs during childhood. Typically, ACEs include childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. A young person's ACE score can be calculated dependent on the number of experiences they report. Accumulation of multiple experiences results in high ACE scores, which place young people more at-risk of becoming involved in criminal activity, not just in their younger years, but across their life course (Baglivio & Epps, 2016).

Life Course Theory

Life course theory focuses on explaining the cumulative effects of experiences from across the life course, rather than just on one particular event. During the 1990s, an increasing amount of longitudinal research on offending behaviours, led to life course theory growing in significance (Farrington, 2003). Typically, the life course theory aims to explain an individual's development of offending behaviour throughout their life course, as opposed to focusing on just one age period, or a snapshot in time. The longitudinal method of data collection, whether it be qualitative or quantitative, can be extremely beneficial in tracking these developments in real-time, as they are happening. Life history interviews are another method of data collection, which provide a detailed account of behaviours across the life course, and more importantly, identify key 'turning points' for desistance from crime, or when initial involvement in crime began (Case, 2018). Echoing notions of the aforementioned ACEs work, from a life course perspective, an individual's offending trajectory is documented and exposures to critical life events, or adverse experiences, can be identified (Case, 2018).

Some advocates for this approach have suggested that developmental and life course theories of offending should attempt to explain not only important risk factors that

individual's may experience throughout their life, but also the protective factors (Farrington et al, 2016). Identifying protective factors is important within the field of youth justice, as these can be implemented as early intervention programmes, and to divert young people away from entering the formal justice system. For those who have already come into contact with the formal system, understanding protective factors can also assist with promoting and encouraging desistance. It is argued that for this reason, more research is needed so that factors can be integrated into the developmental and life course explanations of offending and inform policy and practice in this area (Joliffe et al, 2016).

The 'intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour' (Besemer, 2014) draws on the life course theory, and explains the passing of criminal behaviour between familial generations. Rather than explaining this transmission from a biological, genetics-based approach, it draws on social and developmental explanations of criminal behaviour. The troubled families initiative that was launched in 2012 appears to be influenced by this theory on the intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour. By identifying families 'most troubled' and in need, the initiative takes a whole family approach and places emphasis on improving their social and economic circumstances. Empirical research from this perspective have found that both the frequency and timing of parental criminal convictions are important in determining children's probability of engaging in criminal behaviours (Besemer, 2014). Crucially, the higher the frequency of parental convictions, the higher the likelihood that offspring received convictions at some point in their life. Furthermore, siblings can be highly influential, encouraging both pro-social and antisocial behaviour, and particularly in cases where parents are emotionally or physically unavailable to their children (Criss & Shaw, 2005). As such, it can be the quality of a sibling relationship that would be most predictive of offending behaviour outcomes (Bank et al, 2004). Again, to fully understand how and why the sibling relationship endures over time and the ongoing influence this relationship may have over others' developmental trajectories, it is argued that a life course perspective is beneficial (Weaver et al, 2003).

With previous parental convictions often correlating highly with the onset of youth offending behaviour in their offspring, and an increasing focus on the importance of the sibling relationships one holds, the 'family' domain is regarded as extremely influential in the popular risk-focused explanations of youth offending (Case, 2018).

From a constructivist perspective, risk factor theories are combined with life course theory, to provide a more holistic understanding of how young people negotiate their way through experiences in childhood and adolescence. Exploring key transition points in young people's lives helps to further the understanding for both policy makers and practitioners within the field of youth justice (Case, 2018). Importance also lies in understanding the processes that are involved in young people's ability to resist or desist from offending trajectories or criminogenic environments. Therefore, the social learning theory is often combined with the life course theory, to explain the 'intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour' (Besemer et al, 2017).

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory attempts to explain why young people may choose to participate in criminal behaviours, as a result of learnt behaviours. It is argued that it is not necessarily the association with criminals that results in the 'learning' of the criminal behaviours, but it is the general conditioning of behaviours over time (Akers, 2009). As such, the theory is comprised of four main elements: the individual's definitions and values held about criminal behaviours, interactions with others such as peers, the influence of personal experiences on participation in criminal behaviours, and the imitation of observed behaviour in others. Crucially, the definitions and values one holds about criminal behaviours will shape how they view such behaviours. These may make certain behaviours more or less desirable, justified, appropriate or inexcusable. These values are likely to have been learnt over time and are internalised to form the basis of an individual's core moral and social values (Akers, 2009).

Primary socialisation should be provided by parents, to their children, in order to teach them the acceptable cultural norms and values of society. 'Differential reinforcement' refers to either the reward or avoidance of discomfort that results from an act, and so the punishment of an act is likely to result in desistance (Akers & Sellers, 2012). Although many have taken the term 'punishment' as referring to physical reinforcement, some have argued that social reinforcement is most effective (Akers & Sellers, 2012). For example, praise or chastisement from a close family member or role model is likely to have a more meaningful impact, than a physical punishment. Bandura (2005) is most well-known for conducting empirical research studies to test

elements of the social learning theory. Primarily, he sought to demonstrate the role of imitation in children's learning of aggressive behaviour during early childhood, with the bobo doll experiment. Importantly, this theory and supporting empirical evidence are overwhelmingly used in the explanation of transmission of criminal behaviour from parents to their offspring (Doherty & Hughes, 2014). As such, social learning theory is considered to be very influential in policy and practice within the youth justice system, where emphasis has been increasingly placed on the role of the parents in their child's offending behaviour.

Interactions with significant others plays a crucial role in the social learning theory, as it recognises the importance of analysing relationships and the influence these can have on either promoting or deterring youth offending behaviour. 'Significant others' can include a range of people, including family members, peers, authority figures such as teachers, celebrities, and 'virtual groups' established through social media and the internet (Warr, 2005). Some of these role models may be promoting lucrative lifestyles, however, majority will not be engaging directly in criminal behaviours. Whilst observing another person's behaviour, the characteristics and values of the actor, the behaviour and the consequences of the behaviour are all likely to influence how the situation is experienced. If a desirable outcome is achieved by the actor, then the young person observing is more likely to internalise and imitate it at a later date. It is argued that "the process of imitation is likely to have the strongest effect on an individual's decision to perform the particular act in the first place" (Jennings & Akers, 2011: 110). Once the act has been committed, it is the personal experience that is likely to influence the extent to which the behaviour is replicated or reinforced. The 'learning' of the consequences of actions will ultimately guide the pathway for the young person, and likely reinforce negatively or positively the behaviour, influencing future decisions to engage in this behaviour again or not (Jennings & Akers, 2011).

Experiences of violent and criminal behaviour within the family home during childhood are often highly correlated with young people's own violent criminal offences (Gerard et al, 2014). Also, youths who regularly witnessed their parents using drugs or becoming intoxicated, were at a much greater risk of self-reporting as being heavy drinkers and using harder drugs (Baron, 1999). In a recent analysis of data collected from the *Cambridge study in Delinquent Development*, it was found that the intergenerational transmission of criminal convictions was strongest when passed

between same-sex pairs, i.e., from father to son, or mother to daughter (Auty et al, 2017). Social learning theory is often used to explain children's learning of gender roles in home life, work life, and society more broadly. It is increasingly being used to explain the learning of gender roles in criminality. One such study highlights the impact on young males' exposures to male role models who abuse female partners within the family context (domestic abuse), and how these behaviours are replicated in later life (Reed et al, 2008). Studies such as these are crucial in the development of interventions as they can help to focus on and emphasise the importance of prosocial role models in children and young people's lives. However, the observation that the majority of children in families where there is parental offending do not go on to become prolific offenders themselves has become lost in the discussion (Flynn et al, 2018). Regardless, children exposed to violence between parents are still viewed as good candidates for prevention programmes, as they may be especially vulnerable to social learning of the effectiveness of violence (Ehrensaft et al, 2003); another example where theory has been adopted into practice. Most notably, the targeting of certain types of families through the troubled families initiative.

Historically, social learning theory has focused on the 'learning' of parental criminal behaviour by their offspring. However, there has been an increasing demand for empirical research to also explore the high correlations between youth offending behaviour and criminal peer and/or sibling relationships. High frequency and intense conflict between siblings have previously been linked with poor behavioural adjustment and poor mental health in young people (Campione-Barr et al, 2013). As an extension to attachment theory, it has been argued that sibling conflict may amplify the negative effects of ineffective parenting on adolescents' adjustments (Bank et al, 2004). On the other hand, emotional closeness with a sibling who has offended has also been highly correlated with antisocial behaviour and other risk-taking behaviours, which lends support to the social learning theory (Criss & Shaw, 2005). Therefore, social learning theory has been repeatedly applied to explain why the 'family' has such a significant influence over young people's behaviours and has routinely been used to predict young people's offending trajectories. As such, the application of the social learning theory places a larger amount of responsibility on both the young person and their family (Hartinger-Saunders & Rine, 2011).

Risk Factor Research

The next theory that deserves attention is one based on the concept of identifying 'risk' in a child's life in order to predict their likelihood of (re)offending. Since early examples of risk factor research into explaining criminal behaviours, the 'family' has been considered a main risk factor (Glueck & Glueck, 1930). Risk factors that are studied in relation to explaining youth offending behaviour are typically grouped into four main categories: family, school, peers and neighbourhood (Farrington, 1995; Armstrong, 2004). The most cited piece of longitudinal, prospective research into the risk factors associated with youth offending behaviour is the *Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development,* which was started in the 1960s by Donald West, and is now overseen by David Farrington. The participants of the original study were young boys aged 8-10 years old, who were living in London at the time and were mostly from a white, working-class background (Farrington, 1995). Their lives have been followed from childhood into adulthood, using a series of questionnaires and follow-up interviews, collecting both self-reported and official data, from the young boys, their parents and their schoolteachers over the years. Collecting data prospectively in this way allows for pathways into criminal behaviour to be traced in real-time (Farrington, 2015), which limits the possibility for recall bias, which is commonly identified as a limitation in retrospective studies concerning life-histories. There have been many studies over the years that have conducted analyses using the raw data collected, which reconfirm a strong correlational relationship between family risk factors and offending behaviour (Juby & Farrington, 2001; Farrington et al, 2009; Auty et al, 2017).

Empirical research within this particular area seeks to test hypotheses related to the correlations between identified risk factors and youth offending behaviour. Family structure is one such factor that has been overwhelmingly researched. It is argued that family structure is indicative of distinct family processes, and for some, these are linked to risky behaviours among adolescents (Brown & Rinelli, 2010). 'Family risk factors' are typically characterised by less parental supervision and monitoring, increased levels of family conflict, parental attitudes that may be favourable to offending, and weak parent-child relationships (Fagan et al, 2011). Research that supports these risk factors have been used to explain the intergenerational transmission of offending between family members, with a focus on interventions to reduce the 'family' risk factors. For each additional risk factor a child experiences or is exposed to, this

increases their risk of becoming a serious, violent and chronic offender by the age of 35 (Fox et al, 2015). Risk factors are cumulative and develop across an individual's life span, however, it is also important to note that these risk factors should be considered with caution, as young people presenting with these risk factors may never commit crime (Gerard et al, 2014).

Issues have been identified surrounding defining and measuring risk factors, and also with difficulties in interpreting the findings from risk factor research (Haines & Case, 2008). One of the main criticisms with the lack of definition surrounding risk factors is this can lead to over-simplified assumptions and exaggerated claims from findings (O'Mahony, 2009). Regardless of these criticisms, this method of understanding youth offending behaviour continues to be employed. Empirical research considering the impact of risk and protective factors for young people who are involved in both the criminal justice and welfare system has found that these 'crossover youth' experience a higher number of risk factors than 'non-crossover youth' (Lee & Villagrana, 2015). Research such as this demonstrate the importance of identifying key factors that may be problematic and place particularly vulnerable youth at increased risk of engaging in offending behaviours. It is the culmination of this risk factor research that has led to the development and implementation of ASSET and more recently ASSETplus within the youth justice system. These complex forms are used to collect information about a young person by their YOT caseworker, in order to assess their level of 'risk'. Taking a risk-focused approached has been used to achieve the main aim of the youth justice system as preventing youth offending behaviour.

General Strain Theory

General strain theory takes into consideration the social environment and stressors that may impact on a young person's behaviour, which may include their family life. General strain theory was developed out of Durkheim's original work on the concept of anomie. Anomie has been explained as, "resulting from the absence of alignment between socially desired aspirations, such as wealth, and the means available to people to achieve such objectives" (Newburn, 2017: 187), and it is the strain that is created that is used to explain certain types of crime. In order to overcome the strain, they may experience, individuals adapt and are likely to seek alternative, and often

illegitimate means of achieving these socially desired aspirations. From this perspective, theorists argue that crime is the result of adaptations to unrealistic and unachievable aspirations that are encouraged by society (Case, 2018). When applied to explain youth offending behaviour, this theory predominantly focuses on explaining street-level crime committed by working class males. Similarly, this theory has been used to describe the unique social conditions experienced by many African Americans who are exposed to multiple strains and stressors, resulting in higher levels of crime in particular neighbourhoods (Kaufman et al, 2008).

From the family strain perspective, males are much more likely to receive physical punishment from parents, and their emotional response to this strain is more likely to be externalised in the form of aggression and violence (Hay, 2003). In comparison, females are more likely to internalise their emotional response to family strain such as neglect and abuse. As such, it has been found that females are likely to respond with feelings of shame or guilt (Broidy, 2001). Potential engagement in violent criminal behaviour is reduced, but involvement with substance use and other 'risky' behaviours as coping mechanisms may be enhanced. Therefore, gendered differences in offending behaviours may be explained through the general strain theory, particularly when considering the types of antisocial and criminal behaviours that young males and females are likely to become involved in (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). Elements of the general strain theory have been included in the more recent adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) work, which considers both the short- and long-term impacts on young people's outcomes. Experiences of childhood abuse, neglect and household dysfunction have all been shown to impact significantly on the emotional and physical development of children and young people (Romano et al, 2015). Multiple exposures to any of these has been highly correlated with poor behavioural adjustment and serious learning impairments. On a more long-term basis, multiple experiences can lead to poor socialisation and the inability to engage in healthy relationships with others (Donnelly et al, 2018). As previously discussed, poor socialisation can be detrimental in many ways, but more specifically, can lead to a poor decision-making process, and an overreliance on unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance use and criminality.

Empirical research has employed general strain theory to understand the reported high correlations between youth offending behaviour and experiences of the state care

system. Children and young people leaving foster care are likely to have already been exposed to multiple adverse experiences, which places them in a very disadvantaged position. For those experiencing multiple foster care placements, strain is created through the placement instability and disruption (Barn & Tan, 2012). In terms of protective factors, encouragement and support from significant others was reported as essential in alleviating the negative strains associated with time spent in the care system and feeling a sense of worth and belonging was important to the young people in the study (Barn & Tan, 2012).

Underclass Theory

The underclass theory identifies 'unstable families' and the 'feckless' youth as the main contributors to crime in society, with the term 'underclass' being used to describe the unemployed, often characterised by a dependency on state benefits, with failed morality and a rejection of family norms. Charles Murray, and other right realists, argued that the state welfare system encourages a sense of fecklessness, which is a main contributing factor in many types of criminality (Muncie, 2015). An overreliance on state benefits by young mothers is identified by right realists as the underlying cause of criminality in young males, who are increasingly growing up without appropriate male role models (Muncie, 2015). Popularity grew for this theory in explaining youth offending behaviour during the 1980s, as rates of unemployment rose in England and Wales. It was the uneducated and unskilled 'underclass' that were hit worse, and experienced increasing amounts of social exclusion during these years (Hopkins-Burke, 2016). As such, poverty has been identified as central to the underclass theory, with high unemployment rates and lack of economic resources leading to an adaptive way of compensating for this (Hopkins-Burke, 2016).

It is argued by right realists such as Charles Murray, that the overreliance on state welfare erodes individual responsibility. Stable family households and positive male role models are integral for reducing crime levels, but the 'underclass' is lacking these characteristics (Hopkins-Burke, 2016). Single parents and 'broken homes' have been common features in political party's manifestos, in particular, the New Labour government who identified both these as the main causes of youth crime in England and Wales (Blair, 1995). However, some have argued that it is the effects of negative

labelling, stereotyping and media-based moral panics that has led to this socially disadvantaged group in society facing unprecedented and unwarranted police attention and public scrutiny (McAra & McVie, 2005). As such, a major criticism of this theory proposes that many people remain unemployed, sometimes for very extended periods of time, without ever becoming involved in criminal behaviours (Hopkins-Burke, 2016).

Labelling Theory

Labelling theory explains the negative impacts of labels such as 'young offender', and the potential for intergenerational transmission of crime. The function of stereotypes is to simplify well-known traits and characteristics of particular groups in society in order to act as a cultural shorthand (Cranny-Francis et al, 2003). In terms of media and literature, it is argued that the use of stereotypes in this way make it easier to build an image in people's minds as they read a story. However, there have been many who have commented on the negative impact some of these stereotypes can have. At the street level, the increasing reports of gang involvement and activity in Britain has led to a typecasting of those most likely to become involved. As such, racial profiling is widely used to unfairly target certain individuals and groups for specific crimes, that have typically been linked to certain races in society (Welch, 2007). The use of racial profiling exploits racial stereotypes, as they are largely discriminatory in nature and serve no 'real' purpose other than the perpetuate the stereotypes.

Labelling theory and the use of stereotypes has also been explored in terms of explaining female criminality. It has been argued that pre-existing gender stereotypes concerning how women should be expected to behave actually contradict a woman's ability to commit crime, and that any woman who does commit a crime must be biologically 'driven' to do so (Belknap, 2015). Therefore, a woman not only breaks the law in committing a crime, but also breaks her gender role as a passive and gentle being. Due to this double-breaking of stereotypes, females are likely to be treated harsher within the criminal justice system, than a male who has committed the same crime (Gilbert, 2002). However, contrary to this theory, others have found that this is not the case, and that due to the stereotype that a woman is fragile and in need of protection, they are more likely to receive a lenient sentence (Goulette et al, 2015). An

increasing area for concern and research is the involvement of females in gangs. Previously believed to be male-dominated, research concerning gang life and the activities it involves, is now starting to acknowledge the role that females play. Despite there being a preconceived idea that females are likely to play different roles to that of their male counterparts in gang membership and activities, some research has suggested that their level of involvement and gang disengagement showed little difference between men and women (O'Neal et al, 2016).

The labelling theory has also been used to partly explain the intergenerational transmission of crime, from parents to their children. From this perspective, it has been suggested that formal justice institutions become biased against 'known' families and target them and their children more (Besemer et al, 2017). The long-term implications of this bias are that members of these 'known criminal families' are more likely to be stopped and searched, more likely to be apprehended and therefore are more likely to appear in official crime statistics. Bannister and Kearns (2012) have been very critical of the increasing use of anti-social behaviour policy, that targeted certain young people and their families, based on negative stereotypes. Furthermore, they argued that there was an agenda within government, and by extension, the media, to direct the public perception of 'crime as a problem' to a specific group. The purpose of this was to give the impression that 'something could be done' to tackle this problem. What perpetuates the stereotypes of young people as being a nuisance to the local community, is the lack of familiarity with young people (Bannister & Kearns, 2012), which is due to the fact that times have changed, neighbourhoods have expanded, and the feel of a local community has been lost in many places. The resulting effect is that many people are not familiar with their neighbours and the young people in the local area. The Crime Survey in England and Wales (CSEW – formerly the BCS) has found that this lack of familiarity with young people tends to reinforce the negative stereotypes of young people (Bannister & Kearns, 2012). Other academics in this field have also criticised the targeted use of anti-social behaviour orders and other interventions, which run the risk of negative impacts of labelling and stigmatising certain young people and their families (McAra & McVie, 2010).

As such, it is the formal justice system processes that apply these negative and stigmatising labels to young people. To move away from this, children and young people who commit crime should be dealt with through "informal, adequately

resourced community-based services" (Creaney, 2012: 16) which seek to reduce the negative 'outsider' label often attached to them. The more recent developments within the youth justice system have been influenced by the labelling theory and the detrimental impacts of negative labels, such as 'young offender'. Understandings of youth offending behaviour have developed and so too has the approach to one of a positive youth justice movement. From this perspective, behaviour is criminalised by agents of the law, so, crime only exists when these agents, such as the police and the courts, apply the label of criminal (Muncie, 2015). When an individual internalises this label and it forms part of their self-identity is when it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Case, 2018). Therefore, it is hoped the move to a more child first focus in response to young people who have offended, will reduce the likelihood of this self-fulfilling prophecy. McAra and McVie (2012) further argue that young people who offend are faced with negotiating their way through complex rules and norms and potentially multiple forms of labelling. In particular, children and young people who are also part of the care system, risk being labelled more often and more negatively than others, due to problematic behaviours and a plethora of additional needs (Day, 2017).

Moral Panic Theory

Moral panic theory explains how the 'youth crime problem' has been exaggerated by the media and in particular, how 'bad parenting' and 'broken families' have played a central role in this moral panic. Societal reaction is seen as a significant component in explaining youth offending behaviours, with moral panic theory and labelling theory being interconnected, as both are concerned with the way in which the powerful define, respond to and shape 'problematic youth behaviours'. Reoccurring instances of 'moral panic' surrounding youth and youth offending behaviour is evident throughout history, each time bringing with it a renewed lobbying for more punitive measures and increased responsibilisation of young people and their families. This was most evident during the New Labour ministry and their focus on tackling youth crime and introducing parenting orders to hold parents more accountable for their child's offending behaviour. For some, they argue from the moral panic perspective, that selective reporting and focusing on specific groups of offenders, or 'problematic behaviours', actually creates crime waves (Muncie, 2015). Case studies conducted by Hall et al (1978) and Cohen (2011) explain in detail the processes involved with labelling certain

'problematic' groups in society that are worthy of police attention, and the subsequent moral panic that was created in local and national news stories. These predominantly focused on youth from working class and/or black background. Controversially, young people are often portrayed in the media as being 'at-risk' of harms posed by child abusers and paedophiles, and more recently, violent knife crime, but they are also identified as a source of risk, through their antisocial and criminal behaviour (Hier et al, 2011).

Feminist Perspectives

The final area that deserves attention is feminist perspectives because these focus on explaining the power imbalances in society and how these contribute to the development of youth crime. Also, they consider how gender differences in experiences of being victims contributes to the 'cycle of crime'. It has been argued from this perspective that a consideration for the power imbalances exhibited and acted out within the private family life is as important as the power imbalances between men and women that are publicly displayed by the state (Higgins, 2010). It has further been suggested that these power imbalances are learned from an early age, and from within the family environment, with both hierarchical and authoritarian control being transferred from parent to child. This is carried out in the way that children are treated as inferior to parents and in constant need of order and control (Hooks, 2015). As such, Allen and Jaramillo-Sierra (2015) have argued that the concept of 'family' should be questioned from a feminist perspective, as both the public and scholarly view of family can be uncritical and follow functionalists' ideals. In general, criminological theories to explain offending behaviour have typically focused on male offenders, and this has also been the case for explaining youth offending behaviour (Muncie, 2015). With an increasing focus from a feminist perspective, role theory has identified that girls and women are socialised differently to their male counterparts, with more informal social controls being placed on young girls and women (Muncie, 2015). Gilbert (2002) argues that it is the cultural stereotypes that society holds about women and gender roles that impact on the way that both formal and informal systems deal with antisocial and offending behaviour by girls and women. Research into understanding gendered differences in offending behaviour have found that females

who commit crime are much more likely to have experienced abuse (physically, psychologically or sexually) in childhood and/or as adults (Pearson et al, 2017).

Both research and victimisation surveys report that girls are more at risk of being subjected to abuse, particularly rape and sexual abuse (Rich et al, 2016). Young girls who experience abuse and maltreatment within the family home are more likely to run away and resort to being homeless in order to remove themselves from the harmful environment (Osuji & Hirst, 2015). This places them at an increased risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviours, but also leaves them open and vulnerable to becoming further victims of crime and exploitation. Therefore, based on research findings, young females should be considered more 'at risk' of offending behaviour that is significantly related to experience of abuse and neglect. However, it has been argued that it is the way that males and females deal differently with these experiences that predicts how 'at risk' they are of engaging in criminal behaviour (Bender, 2010). Research supports this view, with findings demonstrating that it was the emotional response to 'family strain' that determined the gendered outcomes (Hay, 2003). As such, females were more likely to self-report feelings of guilt at the trauma experienced, in comparison to males. It is therefore proposed that both control and learning theories may help to explain part of this gender gap in offending behaviour (Rebellon et al, 2016). Furthermore, Fitzpatrick (2017) highlighted the need to listen more to girls and young women who are involved in the care and criminal justice system and argued that girls and young women who are classified as 'looked after children' are more likely to have their problematic behaviour criminalised, rather than receiving the support needed to deal with underlying causes.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a review of existing literature that contributes to the understanding of the relationship between 'family' and youthful offending. The purpose of this chapter was to review existing theory and research in order to summarise the 'state of knowledge' regarding the relationship between 'family' and youthful offending. These theories and key pieces of research have been considered within the wider context and a brief commentary has been provided on how they have influenced youth justice policy and practice over the years. In particular, social learning theory has

played a key role in the responsibilising of parents and holding them more accountable for their child's offending behaviour, most notably through the introduction of parenting orders with the Crime and Disorder Act (1998). Also the development of Asset and Asset Plus as tools for measuring levels of risk in young people coming into contact with youth offending teams, has clearly been influenced by the risk factor research and theories that have been developing from the 1960s onwards. Despite this, labelling theory and the negative impact of stigmatising labels such as 'young offender' have more recently been acknowledged, as the positive youth justice movement has been increasing in popularity, signifying the important role that theories on youth offending have played in the development of policy and practice over the years.

Of all the theoretical perspectives that have been reviewed, attachment theory and social bond theory seem most relevant because they are concerned with the presence and quality of relationships between individuals, and particularly individuals who are considered part of a 'family'. Although all the theoretical perspectives reviewed do refer to the 'family' at some point, either in the theory itself or in the research that has applied the theory, the social bond theory and the attachment theory do seem most relevant to the current research project. As such, this chapter demonstrates the importance of the research project, as much of the research reviewed relies on an assumed definition for the term 'family', and has not directly asked the children and young people participants 'what does family mean to you?' Some of these theories will be revisited in chapters six, seven and eight when the findings from the empirical research will be presented and discussed, to compare and contrast their applicability. The next chapter will provide a review of existing literature that has explored the 'family' as a sociological concept, and how understandings of what 'family' is, has changed over time.

CHAPTER FOUR - THE FAMILY AS A SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of existing literature that explores 'family' as a sociological concept. The purpose this chapter serves is to present an understanding of how the concept of 'family' has changed over time. The literature will be reviewed to explore how the concept of 'family' has been operationalised in previous research, in order to demonstrate where the findings from the current research project can be positioned. The term 'family' is part of everyday language however, there is an ongoing debate about what a family is, and how to succinctly define the term (Weigel, 2008). Numerous studies explore the concept of 'the family', using different types of participants and applying an array of different data collection and analysis methods. Typically, research has used adults (Becker & Charles, 2006) or university students (Baxter et al, 2009) as participants, to explore how the term family is conceptualised, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitatively, personal narratives are explored, with both discourse and thematic analyses being conducted to identify not only what is being said about 'family life' but also the ways in which language is used. Quantitatively, secondary data sets have been the typical approach, conducting complex statistical analyses using data collected from large-scale, often nationally representative, household surveys. However, these types of studies have come under heavy criticism for a range of measurement issues identified (Casper & Hofferth, 2006). These include the way in which 'family' has been defined, or not defined, and then subsequently measured. Most commonly, 'family' has been measured according to the presence of children and how many adults are in the household, with the most basic of descriptors being 'single parent' and 'two parent' households.

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of research being conducted using young children as participants. Family researchers and child development practitioners have begun to rely on more creative data collection methods so that children and young peoples' voices may be heard through research (White et al, 2010), complimenting adults' perspectives (Darbyshire et al, 2005). Despite the wide variety of data collection methods and the participants that are used in family research, one group that are missing from the literature are young people who have offended. With 'family' being considered a major source of risk for young people's (re)offending

behaviour, their experiences, and views on the construction of the concept must be considered. This is one of the main methodological gaps in the literature that was identified, and where the primary research conducted (chapter seven) aimed to provide an original contribution.

Relationships

The first area that is important in the discussion about the 'family' as a sociological concept focuses on relationships, because definitions concerning 'the family' are typically developed from the perspective of relationships. Traditionally, 'the family unit' has been defined through the adult marital relationship and the presence of children (Brown, 2019). Within each of these types of relationship, there are preassigned roles and a set of expectations that are associated. For example, the mother has been traditionally depicted as the primary caregiver for children and responsible for the running of the household. In contrast, the father has been understood as the breadwinner, expected to hold a job outside of the home and to provide income and support for his family. As society has changed, so have these roles and expectations, with women gaining more independence both legally and economically over the years by entering the work force (Purvis, 1995), being granted more rights in terms of divorce (Divorce Reform Act, 1969), guardianship of children and ownership of property (Thane, 2010).

Marriage

The first type of relationship that is important and needs to be explored, is marriage. This is because marriage, or rather the relationship between two parents, tends to be the main way of measuring 'family' in research, with categories often being identified as 'single parent' or 'two parent' families. Despite the decline in marriage rates since the late 1970s (Thane, 2010), marriage as an institution and a social 'rite of passage' is still perceived by many as a significant relationship goal (Garrison, 2014). This is demonstrated by the advocates who support marriage equality, most notably through changes in same-sex marriage laws (Bernstein, 2015). Formal marriage proceedings not only set the standards for a conjugal adult relationship but provide a specific date when the formal commitment and standard of stability is set (Garrison, 2014). In

comparison, it is much more difficult to measure the impact of breakdown in cohabiting adult relationships, as there is not only a lack of clear data for when the commitment began but there is also no official recording of data for when relationships break down, unlike the process involved in filing for divorce (Maughan & Gardner, 2010).

Traditionally, research has measured 'family stability' by the status of the adult marital relationship, with many studies focusing on the impacts of parental divorce on children's educational outcomes (Devor et al, 2018), short- and long-term psychological well-being (Rappaport, 2013), and criminal behaviours (Rebellon, 2002). Research conducted by Xerxa et al (2020) followed children from birth until age 9years, to measure the effects of parental separation on their development of problem behaviours. Findings from their study demonstrated that parental separation on its own was not significantly correlated with child problem behaviour, however, if high levels of family conflict were present prior to the parental separation, this would increase the child's vulnerability. Similar to this study, research conducted by Moschion and van Ours (2019) found that it was not parental separation itself that led to increased rates of homelessness, but it was the financial implications associated with 'loosing' a family member from the household. Furthermore, a study conducted by Linstrom and Rosvall (2016) found that poor psychological health in adults was significantly associated with experiences of parental separation/divorce during childhood. However, this study was based on self-report data which asked adult participants to recall experiences from their childhood. A commonly cited limitation for such studies is the likelihood of response bias, where participants may recall past events incorrectly and/or provide socially desirable responses (Rosenman et al, 2011). Finally, when considering the impact of divorce or separation from a child's perspective, they are more likely to discuss it as a positive experience, rather than focus on the negatives as would be suggested by other research that rely solely on adult participants or secondary data (Moore & Beazley, 1996).

Parent-child relationships

The next relationship that is important to consider is the relationship between parents and their children. This is because a major defining feature and function of the 'family' has traditionally included the presence of children and the parental responsibility to

socialise and care for them from a young age (Shaffer & Kipp, 2014). 'Obligation' is a word that has been used in research conducted by Chapman et al (2018) and the belief that parents, and other family members are bound by obligation and responsibilities to help each other, and to care for their children. Using vignettes to explore the language chosen to describe parent-child relationships, participants expressed that parents and stepparents from the vignettes did not have any obligations to assist the children but may be motivated to do so if they were 'good parents' (Chapman et al, 2018). In some cases, the length and quality of the relationship between the parent and child in the vignette was identified as most important for the participant to consider, particularly in situations involving stepparents. The use of language by children and adolescents in 'claiming' stepparents and other adults to be their parents provide an insight as to how the limited vocabulary for describing families and family relationships can be extended (Ganong et al, 2018). The use of family labels, such as 'mother' and 'father' were used by the young participants in the research conducted by Ganong et al (2018) to not only convey feelings of love and closeness to others, but in developing their own self-identity in a variety of social situations.

With many engaging in research to explore how people define and make sense of the term 'family', a communication or linguistic approach is a popular method for considering how the term 'family' is applied in a variety of circumstances, and about different types of relationships one holds with others around them (Holtzman, 2008). In interviews conducted by Becker and Charles (2006), it was found that different meanings emerged when participants referred to varying groups of relatives, which the researchers referred to as a form of "layering of meanings" (2006: 101) about their family. This finding demonstrated the importance of considering the social and cultural contexts individuals experience, and the impact these can have on their understandings about 'family'. Family research is increasingly being conducted using a holistic approach, inviting several members from one 'family' to participate, providing narratives on experiences, and personal opinions from multiple perspectives. Building a case study about a family is a typical way in which these types of research projects are presented (Backett-Milburn & Harden, 2004). Exploring such an issue using the whole family draws on shared past experiences, but also on 'anticipated future', and importantly, as risk and risk management are considered socially constructed

concepts should be researched within a social context (such as a family). Despite the variation within families about the boundaries concerning rules and expectations, the 'bottom line' was understood by all members interviewed as part of Backett-Milburn and Harden's (2004) research.

A further reason why it is important to consider the relationships between parents and their children, is that a great deal of research has sought to identify the correlations between parenting and young people's 'problem behaviours', such as substance use, homelessness and offending. Research conducted by Janssen et al (2017) demonstrated the importance of the quality of the parent-child relationship, in acting as a protective factor against criminogenic environments. As young people mature, they are likely to spend an increasing amount of time away from the family home and with peers (Wight et al, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of the relationship they hold with their parent(s) whilst away from the family home. Importantly, the measurements of 'parenting' in the study by Janssen et al (2017) were based on the adolescents' perceptions, rather than on any 'actual' measurements of parenting, which reflects the significance the researchers placed on understanding the quality of the parent-child relationship from the young people's experience. Johnson (2016) reflects on the four types of parenting styles that were first identified by Baumrind (1991), who also stated that the relationship held between the parent and child was important for understanding how effective discipline would be. Furthermore, Johnson (2016) highlights that in order for prosocial behaviours to develop in the child, displays of warmth and active involvement from the parent(s) are crucial. As such, an authoritative parenting style has been identified as most proficient in encouraging the development of prosocial behaviours, providing children with clear standards and expectations, which are balanced with high degrees of responsiveness and emotional support (Baumrind, 1991).

Parental supervision and how this is internalised by young people, has featured in research concerning the impact the parent-child relationship can have on youth offending behaviour. Research conducted by Church et al (2009), was based primarily on differential association theory and social control theory (chapter three), to demonstrate the importance of family cohesion in the development of youth offending behaviour. As such, their measures of 'family cohesion' were "based on the relationship that the respondent had with his/her family as well as how important the

family relationship was to the respondent" (2009: 7). In particular, this was based on social control theory, and the prediction that the stronger the relationships a young person holds with others around them, the less likely they would be to engage in criminal behaviours. These strong relationships, often held with parents, encourage the young people to internalise prosocial behaviours and moral codes of society. This was further explored in research conducted by Craig et al (2017) who found that in instances when a young person reported holding a strong bond to others, they were more likely to be protected from adverse childhood experiences (ACES), and in turn, less likely to reoffend. Therefore, strong social bonds, primarily with parents, are considered important for youth desistance from crime. However, in cases when young people do offend and keep reoffending, the parents are often held accountable, from both a social and legal perspective, in the form of parenting orders (see chapter two). The responsibility attributed to parents of young offenders are disproportionally issued to mothers, rather than fathers, which in turn, can add extra pressures in the form of financial burdens (fines), and increased physical and emotional labour (Holt, 2009). The way in which parents experience these additional burdens and responsibilities when 'parenting a young offender' (Holt, 2009) is often overlooked, both in research and policy.

Furthermore, the attachments that young people hold with family members are likely to develop and change over time. The importance of the relationship held with their mother has been both theorised (attachment theory – chapter three) and researched plenty. In a study conducted by Vandevivere et al (2015) support-seeking behaviours toward mothers were explored with adolescents, aged 10-13 years. Findings suggested that physical discomfort, in the form of serious injuries and illness, were most likely to result in the young people seeking support from their mothers. Further to this, young people that had experienced parental separation during childhood reported significantly more need for support from mothers during times of 'discomfort'. From these strong attachments and experiences of relationships held with parents throughout childhood, trust in others is developed. However, in instances where the child experiences traumatic relationships, or a sense of being rejected by parents, the development of trust in others is likely to be delayed or disrupted (Bernath & Feshbach, 1995). As such, these disturbances can negatively impact on the young person, leading to antisocial behaviours, and a general lack of trust in others. Finally, not only

can parents influence their children's offending behaviour, but they can also have an influence over their developments of fear of crime. In research conducted by De Groof (2008), the aim was to explore the impact of parenting styles over the child's level of fear. The findings demonstrated that striking a good balance between parental supervision and attachment was integral in ensuring their child's safety whilst also fostering their independence. As such, parents that are overprotective of their children may actually contribute to their child developing increased feelings of insecurity and fear of crime. In contrast, parents that exhibit reduced supervision and restrictions over their children, may result in young people who have reduced fears about crime and so are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours (De Groof, 2008).

Siblings, extended kin and pets

The final relationship that is important to be explored is that of sibling relationships, and relationships with extended kin and pets. Research on the family has predominantly been concerned with the parent-child relationship and the adult conjugal relationship. However, as the research methods employed move their focus from quantitative to more qualitative and creative approaches, the complexity of how 'family' is defined and practiced emerges. The importance some children and young people place on the relationships they hold with their siblings become apparent, with the language being used particularly insightful. Increasingly, research into sibling relationships is being conducted and demonstrates the importance of considering the impact these may have on behavioural outcomes. Sibling relationships are an extension of the parent-child relationships in family research and as such, the quality of sibling relationships have been linked to behavioural outcomes (Bank et al, 2004). As siblings tend to be close in age, and may even share common peer networks, it is likely that future peer relationships outside of the family may reflect those relationships held between siblings, rather than the previous focus on parent-child relationships. With the unique social learning opportunities experienced through sibling relationships (Campione-Barr et al, 2013), for both older and younger siblings, it is important to explore these as well as the parental relationships.

In terms of encouraging youth offending behaviour, Walters (2017) investigated whether sibling offending behaviour could predict future offending behaviour in the

participants (young people). The findings from his study demonstrated that "like delinquent peers, delinquent siblings may serve as an important risk function" (2017: 9), and so should be treated in much the same way that the influence of delinquent peers over young people has previously had. The implications for these findings acknowledge that all 'family' relationships are important in understanding young people's offending behaviour, and in particular, understanding from the young people themselves, how their experiences of 'family life' can impact on decision-making processes and engagement in offending and antisocial behaviours. However, the reverse of this is that siblings can also have positive influences and act as prosocial role models for each other. From the social learning theory (chapter three) and the understanding that the 'family' operates as a social system, siblings can have both positive and negative influences over one another. In a review conducted by McHale et al (2012), they concluded that sibling influences can be both unique and powerful, and that the sibling relationship should be as important in research, as has previously been the parent-child relationship in understanding youth offending behaviour. They suggest that family scholars who fail to include sibling relationships in their research "may be missing important pieces of the family puzzle" (2012: 923). This demonstrates the importance of drawing on young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' in research that concerns them, and in particular, young people who have offended, to see the influence that siblings may have had.

The concept of 'care' in relation to siblings is often proven to be important either in receipt of care and support from older siblings or feeling a degree of care and responsibility for younger siblings (Brannen et al, 2000). For young people who are leaving or moving on from the state-run social care system, the support from extended kin is considered a key source of helping them feel safe and settled (Stein, 2012). Having a 'sense of family' in the presence of a wider kin network is important for many young people, whether these be siblings, grandparents, teachers, or friends. Typically, these wider kin networks are not included in research concerning the family, despite being identified by children and young people as being important others (Brannen et al, 2000). However, in a study conducted by Dunifon and Bajracharya (2012) they sought to understand the grandparent-grandchild relationship, and the ways in which it develops during adolescence. In particular, Dunifon and Bajracharya (2012) were interested in understanding the way in which the quality of the grandparent-grandchild

relationship may have an influence on the youth outcomes, including school grades and risky behaviours such as offending. For some young people, grandparents may play a crucial part in their lives as mentors and role models, so it is important to further understanding of these relationships, as much as the sibling relationships, and parent-child relationships already discussed. Finally, when allowed the freedom in research to explore all aspects of family life, increasingly participants of all ages are describing pets as 'part of the family' (Irvine & Cilia, 2017). Not only is the developing conceptualisation of 'family' likely to identify a much broader variety of 'family types' but people are becoming more accustomed to including significant others, peers and pets into their own understandings and ways of 'doing' family life. In research conducted by Meltzer et al (2018) a range of 'other adults' were highlighted by young people as providing essential support and encouragement. As young people mature and spend more time outside of the 'family' home and away from parents, it is important to understand what characteristics these 'other trusted adults' hold, from the view of young people. As such, Meltzer et al (2018) concluded that "trusted adults can be particularly well placed to provide support to young people, while may be critically important when young people's parents are unavailable" (2018: 588), and particularly in the case of young people who spend time in the care system. In support of the social learning theory (chapter three), having a 'trusted adult' as a positive role model, whether that be a parent, grandparent, or 'other adult', is important to young people as a source of support and encouragement during adolescence, as they move towards adulthood.

Household

Also important in the discussion about the 'family' as a sociological concept is the household because traditionally, 'family' was synonymous with 'household', with early research relying on the members residing in the same household as a reliable measurement of 'the family'. In large-scale quantitative surveys, the defining of family is often blurred with defining the household (Hill & Callister, 2006), with sampling of participants based on those residing in the same household. Despite the *Labour Force Survey (Household dataset)* (ONS, 2017) providing clear definitions of both 'family' and 'household' from the outset, methodologically the sample is flawed. The report claims to present findings on "trends in living arrangements including families (with

and without dependent children), people living alone and people in shared accommodation, broken down by size and type of household" (ONS, 2017: 1). However, the types of data collected and the way in which it is presented, would suggest that the term 'family' is still being treated as synonymous with the term 'household'. As such, 'multi-family households' are referred to as "the fastest growing household type" (ONS, 2017: 9), with explanations provided as to why this might be. However, 'two-household' families are not included in the survey or report, which is a concept that may be more fitting in describing instances where adults actively involved in parenting the same child reside in more than one household (Hill & Callister, 2006). As society and social life evolves, so too does the concept of 'family', which no longer clearly equates to household (Finch, 2007), signifying the importance of research which can examine 'my family' at multiple points throughout the life course, without the restrictions of preconceived categories to 'fit' families into.

Research with children and young people demonstrate a 'developmental sequence' for how they think about families with perspectives on who to include in definitions of family becoming more complex and inclusive with age. As individuals grow older and move out of the childhood home, their understanding that family can be spread across more than one household develops (Anyan & Pryor, 2002). Increasingly, there are reports of adult children and elderly parents residing in the same household. In research conducted by Isengard and Szydlik (2012) findings from a range of European countries suggested that high levels of co-residence among adult children and elderly parents was more common in communities where the State provide less economic and welfare support for its citizens. As a result, young people will remain living with parents well into adulthood, as a form of support for both the parents and children, and in some cases, grandchildren too. However, this form of 'household' is not just limited to European countries. Research conducted by Li and Huang (2017) in Taiwan sought to understand intergenerational co-residence, in particular, between married couples and their parents. In much previous research into parent-child co-residence in Asian countries, this has been understood to be due to providing support for elderly parents. But the findings from Li and Huang's (2017) suggested that in some cases it could also be due to economic constraints on young married couples. As such, intergenerational co-residence between adult children and their parents transgresses the normalised societal image of the 'nuclear family', which typically consists of two

married parents and their children. This supports the argument, that it is important to explore the concept of 'family' with a variety of people from the same society.

Looked after children (LAC)

Another crucial element in the discussion about the 'family' as a sociological concept focuses on looked after children. This is because a disproportionate number of young people entering the youth justice system have also experienced state care (Barn & Tan, 2012), to the extent that it is argued that there is an over-representation of care experienced children and young people in the youth justice system (Bateman et al, 2018).

Historically, children's departments were introduced to support the local authorities in providing a service to look after children who had been placed in state care. Over time, these responsibilities have developed and, like the progression in youth justice, are now much more pro-active and targeted in their approach. It was believed that by intervening at earlier stages, before any serious harm had come to children, and whilst they were still living in the family home, the likely requirement for them to be removed and placed in state care could be exponentially reduced (Frost & Parton, 2009). Increasing the powers of the state to make decisions regarding children's future safety and wellbeing, formal legislation was passed. Section 1 (Children Act, 1989) introduced the powers for a court to make judgements based not only on harm already suffered by the child, but also whether they were 'at risk of suffering', and formally allowing for future predictions of risk to be made.

Young people who are involved in both the care system and the youth justice system are more likely to report experiencing multiple risk factors and are also more likely to reoffend (Lee & Villagrana, 2015). However, many studies exploring the link between being a 'looked-after child' and engaging in youth offending behaviour, have been conducted retrospectively, selecting participants that have received an official criminal conviction, thus focusing on the failures of the system (Bullock & Gaehl, 2012). When conducting prospective research into the trajectories of children involved in the care system, more positive outcomes are recorded. Furthermore, research concerned with the lived experiences of children in care found that the negative labels and stigma

associated with being 'looked after' and the subsequent lack of support they received, were explicitly described as reasons for engaging in 'bad behaviours' (Day, 2017).

Children entering the care system have experienced some degree of trauma, abuse, or neglect in their lives, and so are already considered to be at an increased risk of becoming involved in youth offending behaviours. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to determine the impact of the care episode on the young person's behaviour (Darker et al, 2008). Moreover, a focus on risk factors in predicting offending behaviour has perpetuated the misconception that by being in care, a young person is placed more at risk of offending behaviour (Fitzpatrick, 2017). Research has found that it was not the residential care episode itself that was the cause of offending, but the influence from other young people, coupled with the lack of support from the care system to tackle underlying issues (Barn & Tan, 2012). Being placed in a group-home setting with other troubled young people, and the concept of 'peer contagion' is often cited as a main explanation for increased youth offending behaviours during a care episode (Ryan et al, 2008). Further to this, the impact of being moved to a more disadvantaged neighbourhood when being placed into care has been associated with an increased risk of offending behaviour and demonstrates the bearing of the wider social environment on young people's lives (Huang et al, 2016).

For many young people with experience of the care system, holding a sense of belonging to a 'family' may be considered important, but unobtainable. In research conducted by Biehal (2014), four types of 'belonging' were identified through interviews with children and their foster carers. For many of the young people interviewed, their early experiences of 'family life' were full of much uncertainty and change, resulting from multiple placements. The 'type' of belonging that majority of the cohort identified most with, was 'qualified belonging', which Biehal (2014) described as the young people fostering a sense of ambivalence and being unsure of who they 'belonged' to. The conflicting feelings that these young people described, was echoed in research conducted by Mariscal et al (2015), which used focus groups with young people who had experience of the care system. Many spoke about conflicting feelings when joining a new foster family, between establishing good relationships with them and still holding a sense of loyalty to their birth families. In particular, the young people related these feelings of ambivalence to experiencing major trust issues throughout their life (Mariscal et al, 2015). Developing trust and a sense of belonging, are

described in the social bond theory and attachment theory, as integral for developing prosocial behaviours and strong connections to society (see chapter three). As such, foster care placements are intended to provide a form of surrogate family for children and young people, and by extension, all the experiences that come with being part of a 'family'. However, for some young people, this is not their experience of the foster care system. In research conducted by Meakings and Selwyn (2016), the young people who they collected accounts from, stated that a lack of emotional warmth from foster parents would often lead the young people to refrain from integrating fully into their 'new family', and thus lacking a strong sense of belonging.

Negative experiences of being in care have further been explored and reported in research by Winter (2010), who identified that in young children who had spent time in foster care, it was "the lack of opportunity to explore their memories, feelings and perspectives…[which] made their yearning for lost relationships with birth family more intense and was accompanied by a range of unresolved feelings" (2010: 193). As such, she suggested that this creates an 'emotional void' that social workers should aim to address, so as to reduce the likelihood of these feelings, or lack of feelings, contributing to further trauma and the development of antisocial behaviours. It has been argued that social workers and foster families should aim to maintain the expectations that children and young people hold about their imminent episodes of care, to alleviate negative experiences (Mitchell et al, 2009). In line with articles from the UNCRC (1989), and under recommendations made by young people who had experience of the care system, being provided with information regarding their care episode and being involved in communication and decisions regarding them, should all be considered integral (Mitchell et al, 2009). If expectations are not managed appropriately, then children and young people may experience a care episode as negative and harmful. However, in research conducted by Naert et al (2019) with young people who had been through the care system in Belgium, they reported that adults who provided much-needed support to the young people, such as caseworkers, were considered important relationships. This echoed what Thomas et al (2017) found when interviewing adult former foster children, on their experiences and constructions of 'family'. The findings suggested that a 'complex web of relationships' was present in the participants lives throughout childhood and into adulthood, and accordingly, "these webs of meaning produced a hybrid understanding of family" (2017: 249).

Importantly, this type of research explored not only the range of relationships that were considered significant to the care-experienced individuals, but also demonstrated the variety of discursive constructions of the term 'family'.

Further to this, in research that has considered gendered differences, it has been found that young girls who experience abuse and maltreatment within the family home are more likely to run away and resort to being homeless to remove themselves from the harmful environment (Osuji & Hirst, 2015). This places them at an increased risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviours, but also leaves them open and vulnerable to becoming victims of crime and exploitation. Qualitative research conducted with young homeless people in Australia found that 'family conflict' was present in all four pathways into homelessness (Mallett et al, 2005). Additionally, substance use was implicated in a substantial number of the narratives given, most notably for young females as a form of coping mechanism for dealing with 'family conflict'.

Features of 'family life'

Features of 'family life' are also important in the discussion about the 'family' as a sociological concept because some of the more creative and qualitative ways of exploring definitions of 'family' have focused on attributes of 'family' life, including physical and emotional features. With the shift in focus of family researchers to using more qualitative methods, emphasis has been placed on the emotional and physical attributes of 'family life', rather than on the household structure or specific types of relationships between members. Using some simple word-association activities, lists of features considered most central to the understanding of the term 'family' have been generated predominantly using university student participants as a representative sample of 'laypeople' (Weigel, 2008). Concepts of 'love', 'care' and 'closeness' have all been identified as important attributes in determining whether a relationship or group of people can be defined as being 'part of a family'. In research conducted by Backett-Milburn et al (2008), with young people who gave accounts of living with substance using parents, "respondents' accounts showed how they wanted to love their parents, often despite everything" (2008: 473). It is argued by the authors that this demonstrated the importance attributed by the young people, to the concept of 'love' between family members. Furthermore, that the concept of 'love' can be

understood as both symbolic of meaningful relationships, and integral to a relationship being considered enduring, particularly as a child matures into adulthood and moves out of the 'family' home (Wilson et al, 2012). In research conducted by Aparicio et al (2015), participants drew on their experiences of the foster care system, and the 'glimpses of light' that were found in episodes of love, gained through romantic relationships and widening their circle of support with friends and their families. This range of findings concerning the importance of the term 'love' in explorations of 'family', reaffirm earlier findings from research conducted with adolescents in New Zealand. When asked to examine vignettes which described groupings of people, the adolescents endorsed a range of different 'family' types, and in particular, identified love and affection as primary criteria for defining and recognising 'a family' (Anyan & Pryor, 2002).

Further to identifying 'love' as an important feature of family life, feelings of belonging and emotional closeness to parents (biological or not) have also been identified by adolescents as important, not only in their understanding of the word 'family', but in terms of their general emotional well-being and adjustment (King et al, 2018). 'Family cohesion' has previously been used as a way to measure children and young people's well-being, as the quality of relationships between family members is considered important. Findings from research conducted by Lietz et al (2018) demonstrated the importance that children place on "having fun with family members" (2018: 12), and how this understanding of 'family cohesion' can be used as an appropriate predictor and measurement of children's well-being. As such, the authors not only present these as findings, but state that they demonstrate the benefits of being part of a supportive family and suggest that policymakers concerned with increasing children's well-being should identify ways to promote family cohesion. The quality of certain features of family life, such as holding a strong sense of belonging, has been previously identified as significant when considering the fluidity of family life (Finch, 2007). It is acknowledged that as individuals move through the life course (from childhood, through adolescence, and towards adulthood), the family composition is likely to change, but that the relationships may remain stable. Finch (2007) attributes this to the quality of those relationships, and that individuals who report holding a strong sense of belonging and 'family cohesion', are likely to report maintaining these family relationships and kinship ties. Furthermore, the benefits of these positive and

supportive relationships, are the development of strong personal identity, particularly as individuals mature and seek a sense of belonging in a much wider society, than simply within their own family (Finch, 2007). The developing and maintaining of strong social bonds to others and to wider society is an essential part of the social bond theory (chapter three) and is identified as crucial in desistance from criminal and antisocial behaviour, particularly for young people. Not only can holding a strong sense of belonging increase social bonds to society, but it can also promote the perception that life is meaningful. In turn, this can contribute to positive self-esteem and psychological well-being (Lambert et al, 2013).

As well as feeling a strong sense of belonging, to either a family unit, or wider society, feelings of safety have also featured in 'family' research concerning young people. More specifically, in research that seeks to explore young people's conceptualisations about the term 'safety', in order to develop effective strategies for improving services for children and young people. In focus groups conducted by Moore and McArthur (2017) "'feeling safe' was seen as being related to, but distinct from, 'being safe'" (2017: 210), with the children and young people who participated in the discussions, explaining that one could be present without the other. For the younger children in the cohort, 'feeling safe' was more attributed to spending time around familiar people, such as parents, siblings, other family members and friends. For the slightly older children in the cohort, 'feeling safe' was also related to their physical environment, and concerns with how to maintain personal safety, particularly when away from the family home (Moore & McArthur, 2017). In determining where they could feel safe, being in the presence of people they could trust was an important factor. Goldsmith (2005) described the concept of trust as being firmly rooted in experience and identified two main types of trust that are commonly found among children and young people. 'Innocent trust' is more common in younger children, with 'implicit trust' being more common in older children, as it is based on stable and personal relationships. Trusting others, adults in particular, was highlighted by the young people as specifically significant, and has been echoed in more recent research conducted by Michelmore et al (2019) when exploring young people's views on the increasing prevalence of knife crime. The young people who participated in the focus groups described hearing about knife crime 'all the time' from their family, and when asked about who they might speak to if they were concerned about knife crime, many of the young people identified

individuals, or places, that could be 'trusted'. This included certain family members, but it is noted that this largely depended on the type of relationship they held, and whether they were considered 'trustworthy'. In contrast, both the police and school were not considered 'safe places' to talk about knife crime, because of a lack of trust and/or worries about being labelled negatively (see chapter three on discussion of labelling theory). The perceived 'safety' that family members could exert, even in circumstances that occur outside of the family home, has previously been found in research conducted by Ahlin and Antunes (2017). Where high levels of violence in the community are present (for example, high rates of knife crime among young people), Ahlin and Antunes (2017) were interested in understanding the differing levels of guardianship that could be displayed by parents, in order to protect youth against exposure to violence in the community. Their findings suggested that parents may exhibit various types of 'family management' to restrict the movement, or amount of time their children spend outside of the family home, and in potentially criminogenic environments. In circumstances where high levels of parental supervision were not possible, youth exposure to violence in the community could still be 'managed' through the young person's internalisation of parental control, and as such, act as their own 'guardian' against criminogenic and 'unsafe' environments (Ahlin & Antunes, 2017).

Research conducted with children and young people mostly reports positive attributes associated with the concept of family, such as love and care. However, research with 'troubled' young people often presents an alternative view. Although not aiming to explore the definition of 'family' per se, through interpretative phenomenological analysis researchers were able to identify some central features of family in the narrated lives of young people who have offended, who described family life as violent, unpredictable, unstable, and with physically or emotionally unavailable parents (Paton et al, 2009). In work undertaken with young people, identified by welfare services as homeless in Melbourne, Australia, central features spoken about in relation to family life prior to becoming homeless, or the reason for the young people becoming homeless were also very negative (Mallett et al, 2005). Words such as 'conflict', 'anger' and 'stress' all appeared regularly in the personal accounts given by the young people that participated in the research. Understanding how a person conceptualises the term 'family' will have an impact on how they respond to questions about their own family life (Weigel, 2008). This demonstrates the importance of understanding the

conceptualisation of 'family' from a young person's perspective, who may have experienced conflict or violence at some point during their childhood (Muncie, 2015). The central role that 'family' plays in both policy and research concerning young people who have offended has been explored so far in this thesis. However, it is increasingly evident that the definition and use of the term rarely takes into consideration the young people's experiences or understandings of the term.

Moving away from the term 'family'

The final area that is important in the discussion about the 'family' as a sociological concept focuses on the move away from using the term 'family'. This is due to the increasing range and diversity of 'family types' in the modern western world, and in some cases the traditional definitions and understandings of 'family' simply do not fit for everyone. Personal narratives form an important part of family research, to understand the perceptions and changing definitions of the term 'family', as they facilitate an understanding of how different people construct their realities and to explore the language that they use to create their own identities (Weeks et al, 2001). By extension, the role of language is important in the construction of family identities and realities (Chapman et al, 2018), especially at a time when society allows people to experience a wide range of personal relationships and living arrangements, which are more fluid and dynamic than ever before (Chambers, 2012). In response to this, there has been a move towards 'doing family' as a concept, rather than a reliance on a singular definition of 'family' and with a focus more on the activities and social interactions associated with family life (Pylyser et al, 2018).

One of the earliest proposals within family research, was to focus on the practices of 'family life' as opposed to the structure of a family unit when seeking a definition or way of recording 'what is a family' (Morgan, 1996). This was argued by Morgan (1996) on the grounds of definitional issues, and he suggested that instead, the term 'family' should be used to refer to the range of practices commonly involved with 'family life', rather than specific structures. However, he further explained that the word 'family' is used by many people in daily life, and so "it would seem somewhat cavalier to dismiss the term altogether or to strive for some alternative, scientifically neutral, term" (1996: 11). As such, he suggested that people may choose to use the term 'family' flexibly, in

referring to a range of others in a variety of different contexts, and that taking a focus on autobiographical accounts and experiences is integral to understanding these family 'practices'. As such, it has been argued that in research concerning 'family', importance should be placed on the quality of relationships between members and on how they decide to display or carry out 'family life' (Finch, 2007), rather than on attempting to quantitively 'measure' the family structure. Building on this, has been the suggestion by some to move forward from an overreliance and preoccupation with static definitions for complex terms, such as 'family'. Instead, there has been a proposal for an application of the prototype theory[3] to explain traits and characteristics that are representative of family (Weigel, 2008).

However, the lack of vocabulary available to new and emerging ways of 'doing family' still prove problematic. For lesbian parent families, making a distinction between the birth mother and the 'other mothers' proved difficult and with a lack of consensus among participants over what terms to use (Gabb, 2005). In legal terms, the defining of 'mothers', 'fathers' and 'parents' is a complex process, largely dependent on the circumstances in which the child is carried to full gestation (Brown, 2019) and not reliant on the genetic relationship between the child and parent as may be expected. As such, there has been a proposal, to move away completely from the use of the word 'family' and the preconceived ideas about who or what this may involve and move towards the use of 'personal life' as a more open concept, concerned with the socially connected individual and to encapsulate wider forms of kinship (Smart, 2007). As such, Smart (2007) argued that "the term 'family' conjures up an image of degrees of biological relatedness combined with degrees of co-residence" (2007: 7), which can prove problematic for a range of individuals, as society progresses. Instead, her proposition for the term 'personal life' is considered 'appropriately neutral' as it does not prioritise such biological or other 'legally binding' relationships as the term 'family' does. As an alternative, 'personal life' allows a much broader range of 'family forms' and relationships to be included, treating all types of 'important relationships' as significant and equal. In support of this, research conducted by Edwards and Graham (2009) found that "individuals possess varying conceptions of what a family is and

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[3] An approach used to explain recognition memory in cognitive psychology (Cantor & Mischel, 1977), applied to the understanding of complex concepts such as family (Weigel, 2008), love (Fehr & Russell, 1991), commitment (Fehr, 1999) and respect (Frei & Shaver, 2002).

should serve to accomplish" (2009: 205), which highlighted the important role that communication plays in defining the term 'family'.

Furthermore, it is the communication between family members, and communication about family life, that should both be considered important and integral in research and policy concerning this concept. McCarthy (2012) described the term 'family' as being powerful, through the use of language used to demonstrate close emotional ties held with others. As such, she argued that everyday understandings of 'family' should be considered as 'real' and taken seriously in research when exploring individual's use of the term. From a sociological perspective, the term 'family' then should be seen as a divisive tool for communicating with others about the degrees of human belonging and connectedness one feels with the social world around them (McCarthy, 2012). Previously, Mason (2008) has proposed a conceptual framework for exploring the term 'kinship', which is sometimes used as an alternative to 'family'. As such, she has argued that an individual's associations, or 'affinities' with others should be considered as tangible, as they are inherently borne from lived experiences but are negotiable and may take many forms throughout the life course. Research conducted by Mason and Tipper (2008) explored the more creative ways in which kinship is created by children, concluding that children 'reckon' kinship in a variety of ways, which are based on both past and present relationships that are held with important others, and 'played out' in the everyday.

Finally, in circumstances where individuals or groups in society are less exposed to non-traditional families, this may reinforce the idea that traditional families are more representative of the majority, leading to prejudice against non-traditional families (Kille & Tse, 2017). To combat this, there is an inherent need to remember that diversity in family forms has always existed, but mostly been hidden from view (Steel et al, 2012), especially for those considered socially or legally unacceptable at various times throughout history. The creative research being conducted with children and young people demonstrates that it is the quality of a relationship that is more meaningful in their definitions of 'what a family is' instead of who they live with or who they are genetically related to (Mason & Tipper, 2008). Increasingly, researchers interested in exploring how people understand the concept of 'family' are now including children and young people's voices, in accordance with article 12 (UNCRC, 1989) and in recognition of the fact that children and young people are social actors in their own

rights and, as such, "deserve to be asked who they consider their family to be" (Anyan & Pryor, 2002: 316). As such, this thesis has continued this line of argument, and placed young people who have offended at the centre of primary research to explore how the term 'family' is conceptualised (see chapter seven for findings).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a review of existing literature that explores 'family' as a sociological concept. As such, this chapter has presented an understanding of how the concept of 'family' has changed over time, how the concept of 'family' has been operationalised in previous research and where the findings from the current research project can be positioned. Previous research that has used 'family' as a static entity, have predominantly used relationships as a form of measurement, via either the adult's relationship status (married, cohabiting, separated, divorced, etc) or the parent-child relationships. In some cases, researchers have broadened the range of relationships they consider, including 'other' family members such as siblings and grandparents. The term 'family' has sometimes been used interchangeably with the term 'household' and so some research has recorded household composition as a form of 'measurement' for the family. Increasingly, there are researchers who want to move away from these static and restrictive measurements of family, by using alternative language, referring instead to relationships or kin networks. Overall, from this review of existing literature on 'family' as a sociological concept, the understandings, and experiences of 'family' from the perspectives of young people who have offended are missing, which demonstrates the significant gap in research that this thesis aims to fill. The next chapter will provide a detailed account of the methodological approach that was employed in the research project.

CHAPTER FIVE – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed account of the methodological approach that was employed throughout the research project. It will be transparent and clear about the research methods that were chosen and the data analysis methods that were used. Justifications for all decisions will be explained, with reference to academic literature that informed the decision-making process. The ethical approval process is also detailed, as are some of the methodological challenges that were faced during the research journey.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory methodology (GTM) is a process, not just for analysing data, but for understanding it and drawing relationships between different themes or constructs that emerge from the data (Urquhart, 2013). Researchers that follow the methodological framework of GTM aim "to generate theory based on data, rather than verify 'grand theory'" (Urquhart, 2013: 5). The rationale of the project reported in this thesis, was to explore young people's understandings and experiences of 'family', as these have largely been ignored in policy and research. A pre-study literature review was conducted to identify this as a research problem and gap in the literature. Once identified, GTM was used to design the primary research that would follow. GTM was identified as most appropriate, as the process allows for a 'bottom-up' approach to analysing data. As relatively little attention has been paid to young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' in previous research and policy, it was necessary to include these in the research project and place them at the centre. As such, it was important that literature and existing theories could be put to one side, so that full engagement with the data and the emerging theory could be developed. The 'bottom-up' approach to coding enables the key themes to develop out of the data collected, rather than being led by previous theories and research (Urquhart, 2013). Therefore, GTM has been used to build a theory on how young people who offend understand the term 'family'. The thesis was underpinned by the researcher's philosophical understanding and the social constructionist approach, which assumes

that "…society, reality, and self are constructed through interaction and thus rely on language and communication" (Charmaz, 2006: 7).

Social Constructionist Approach

How the world is understood and approached depends largely on personal experiences and that social relationships help to shape these experiences (Gergen, 2009). The way in which 'family' has been and continues to be constructed through theory and research with young people who have offended, tells us about how reality is constructed and why this is reflected into youth justice policy. Therefore, taking a social constructionist approach to understanding how young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family' is important. Underpinning the research, the aim was to explore how the concept of 'family' has come to be taken for granted in society, but that the 'reality' (lived experience) has not been fully explored with those who it may directly impact within the youth justice system. Therefore, this research has drawn together an approach from sociology (exploring the term 'family') and applied it in the field of criminology, in a child-first approach to understand how young people who have offended understand and use the term 'family'. Communication is key in understanding how a concept such as 'family' comes to have different meanings to different people in society. As Keaton and Bodie (2011) explain:

> "many versions of social constructivism (sc) maintain that objects exist only after they enter communicative space… the social process of defining the object (i.e. its construction) enables it to exist in a social context, to have meaning… communication changes how objects are perceived and the range of potential meanings they can embody" (Keaton and Bodie, 2011: 192).

Applying this philosophy to the research design meant that the participants had to be young people who have offended, as they had been identified during the pre-study literature review as largely missing from previous research. Also, that the central question being asked of the young people had to focus on answering the question 'what does the word 'family' mean to you?' The young people were active agents, central to the creation and production of data (Mannay, 2016). This approach to generating data *with* young people, rather than simply *on them* has been demonstrated by other academics to be crucial in adhering to a children's rights-based

model in upholding their rights to participate and express their views on matters that concern them (Martellozzo et al, 2020). In particular, Lansdown (2010) provides some critical reflections on the increasing focus being placed on children from a rights-based perspective and the promotion of their engagement in research and policy development. In line with this approach, power was handed to the young people who participated in the focus groups during the empirical research element and decided how they wanted to present their understandings of the term 'family'.

With communication being key, it was important to record not only the data that was generated by the participants through their discussions, but also the non-verbal responses, which were included in the observational field notes (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Furthermore, during the focus group conducted in Scotland, the young people produced drawings to help explain their experiences and understandings of 'family', contributing to the wealth of data that was generated. Combining the methods of data collection throughout the research project allowed the researcher to draw on the strengths associated with each of them. Drawing together these different 'slices of data' all contributed to the building of the theory (Urquhart, 2013), which is the main aim of applying a grounded theory methodology. A strength of using grounded theory methodology as a framework for research is that rather than imposing preconceived ideas on those involved, the approach allows the research to remain open, offering opportunities for new and innovative ideas to emerge (Urquhart, 2013).

Coding of the data is integral to following a grounded theory methodology, as it enables the researcher to identify key themes that emerge from the data. As important, is the process of connecting these categories, of identifying and understanding the relationships that they have to one another. It is from these 'connections' and 'relationships' that the theory can emerge, so that conclusions can be drawn as to whether "…your emergent theory confirms or challenges existing theories" (Urquhart, 2013: 17). It is important that the researcher maintains a degree of theoretical sensitivity throughout the data collection and analysis process, to hold an understanding of the context in which the new theory is being developed. As such, theories identified in the pre-study literature review were reanalysed in relation to the emerging theory, to provide a clear discussion in chapter eight of how the emerging theory may either confirm or challenge these.

Finally, thematic coding was used for the youth justice policy analysis (see chapter six), with the central theme being 'family'. The aim of this analysis was to identify how 'family' featured in policy and legislation that is relevant to young people who have offended. The purpose of this was to contribute as an additional 'slice of data' towards the starting point for the emerging theory, and the argument that children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' have largely been ignored in policy. The following section outlines the research questions and aims that were developed throughout the project, with some reflections on how these questions and aims changed over time as new data and themes emerged.

Research question and aims

The main question that was a constant throughout this research project, was quite simply: 'what does the word 'family' mean to you?' With this question guiding the research project, the first step was to identify why 'family' was important as a central concept in research concerning young people who have offended. As such, the following questions were developed:

Research question 1

What role does 'family' play in youth justice policy in England and Scotland?

Research question 2

What theories are relevant to explaining the relationship between 'family' and youth offending behaviour?

Research question 3

How has the concept of 'family' previously been researched? And what was found?

These three questions formed the basis for the pre-study literature review and helped to identify a clear gap and research problem that needed to be addressed. This was that young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' are largely missing from policy and research that concerns them, and young people who have offended were often found to have research conducted *on them*, rather than *in collaboration with them*, which reinforces the argument that their voices were missing.

Once this gap had been established from the pre-study literature review, a further research question was identified:

Research question 4

How is the term 'family' used in youth justice policy?

This question developed from the literature review that was conducted to answer research question 1 (what role does 'family' play in youth justice policy in England and Scotland?) and was considered important as previous literature had identified 'family' as playing a central role in policy, theory and research that concerns young people who have offended. Therefore, it was important to develop a better understanding of how the term 'family' was used in policy. The thematic analysis that was conducted drew conclusions about the use of the term 'family' in youth justice policy, which contributed to the central argument of the thesis, that young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' have largely been ignored in policy that concerns them. As such, a further research question was established:

Research question 5

How do young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'?

This fifth, and final question, formed the basis and rationale for the primary research that was conducted, which generated more 'slices of data' that have contributed to the emerging theory on how young people who offend understand the term 'family'.

This section has outlined the research questions and aims that were developed throughout the project, with some reflections on how these questions and aims developed over time as new data and themes emerged. The following section of the methodology chapter provides a detailed account of the process that was used during the youth justice policy analysis. Justifications for the decisions made and discussions about the methodological issues that arose are also included in this section, to provide transparency on the process that was employed.

PART 1 – Youth Justice Policy Analysis

Introduction

This part of the methodology chapter will provide a detailed account of the process that was followed for collecting and analysing the pieces of youth justice policy. This policy analysis forms an important part of the overall research project, as the findings contribute to the central argument of the thesis that children and young people's understandings of 'family' are largely missing in policy that concerns them, in particular, young people who have offended. The following sections will describe how the policy documents were chosen for analysis, how the thematic analysis was conducted, and finally, how the primary research developed from this analysis.

Deciding which policy documents to include in the analysis

The process for sampling the policy documents and legislation was based on those which have had most impact on youth justice policy over the last thirty years. The main criteria for identifying these pieces of legislation and governmental papers, was predominantly those that are commonly mentioned in textbooks related to youth crime and justice (Muncie, 2015; Hopkins-Burke, 2016; Case, 2018). The list of documents to be analysed was written and each one found with ease, as they were all published on the internet, so electronic copies were downloaded and saved. It was important to include a range of legislation, policy documents and governmental papers because,

> "documents are 'social facts', in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organised ways… they construct particular kinds of representations using their own conventions" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004: 58)

Including a range of different document types the intention was to get a good understanding of how the term family is operationalised, as documents are socially constructed and static, and reflect the time period in which they were created (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

As the primary research was conducted in both England and Scotland, it was important to include policy documents from both countries. Scottish Parliament was devolved in 1998 (see chapter two for full discussion) and so some of the policy documents that

were to be analysed from England, may not be relevant to young people in Scotland. However, the selection of Scottish policy was made more difficult as these are less likely to be mentioned in youth justice textbooks. Therefore, selection was based on legislation that was assumed to have an impact on young people who have offended. A simple search on legislation.gov.uk website, using key term 'Scotland' was conducted, which listed all the Scottish Parliament policy since it was devolved in 1998. Legislation was chosen based on the mention of 'family', 'children' or 'criminal justice' in the title.

Thematic analysis of youth justice policy

A thematic analysis of documents aims to understand the content of the documents, and in some cases, to draw out the main themes (Waller et al, 2016). For the documents being analysed in this research project, the main aims were to identify and analyse:

(a) what the document or legislation says regarding children and their families

(b) what definition, if any, is provided for the key terms used

The analysis that followed drew on the key principles of a grounded theory methodology, in that a central theme of 'family' was used to code the documents. Although specialist software such as NVivo could have been used to conduct the thematic analysis, it was found that some of the documents did not upload correctly into the software. As such, this made it very difficult to conduct key word searches and to code sections of text. In response to this technical challenge, the documents were printed and highlighted using coloured pens. On the first read through, 'open coding' was used to identify all sections of the documents that mentioned 'family' in any form. On the second read through, a different coloured pen was used to conduct a more thorough coding, for identifying different concepts within the central theme of 'family'. For instance, 'parental responsibility', 'parents' and 'legal guardians' were some of the main themes that were identified during the thematic analysis (see chapter six for full findings). The coding followed a 'bottom-up' approach, whereby the main themes were not known prior to the coding process but emerged during the coding. This form of coding followed the GTM that was being adhered to throughout the research project, both in the policy analysis and in the primary research that was conducted.

Aside from the main relationships between all these concepts being identified, the context and definitions for each of the key terms used were also recorded. It was important to understand how each of the key terms were being used in policy that could impact on young people who have offended. Furthermore, the main purpose of the policy analysis was to understand how the term 'family' was being used in youth justice policy. This was important to demonstrate the central argument of the thesis, that children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has been ignored in policy that concerns them.

The purpose of this policy analysis was to address research question four:

How is the term 'family' used in youth justice policy?

The conclusions drawn from this thematic analysis demonstrated that children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored in the policy that concerns them. Therefore, primary research that used participants who were young people who had offended, was necessary to fill this methodological gap and provide an original contribution to knowledge. The following section of the methodology chapter provides a detailed account of the process that was used during the primary research, which was conducted with groups of young people who had offended, in both London and Glasgow. Justifications for the decisions made and discussions about the methodological issues that arose are also included in this section, to provide transparency on the process that was employed.

PART 2 – Primary Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

This part of the methodology chapter will provide a detailed account of the process that was followed for collecting and analysing data in the primary research. The data that was generated is central to the overall research project, as the key themes that developed out of the data have been used to build an emerging theory on how young people who offend understand the term 'family'. The application of a grounded theory methodology has facilitated this. The following sections will describe how the primary research was designed, the ethical process that was followed, the methodological

challenges that were encountered throughout the primary research journey, and finally, how the data collected was analysed in accordance with the coding process of grounded theory methodology (GTM).

Access and recruitment of participants

As the theoretical underpinnings of the research lay in social constructionism, a clear definition was needed regarding the research participants. Typically, young people involved in the criminal justice system are referred to as 'young offenders' (Case, 2018). However, with recent developments and a changing approach to youth justice, this terminology did not sit well. Drawing on the positive youth justice movement, the title given to the participants by way of a clear and appropriate definition, was decided on: young people who have offended. At the London-based youth offending team (YOT) the young people that participated in both the questionnaire and the focus group were between the ages of 14-17 years. The potential age range was 10-17 years, as this is the age group that the YOT typically deal with, but as participation was voluntary, the age range of the individuals who chose to participate only spanned 14-17 years. However, the focus group in Glasgow involved young people that were slightly older, and between the ages of 16-21 years. This is because the group in Glasgow was already formed and engaging in youth work prior to the primary research taking place, so the age range was pre-established.

The primary research (questionnaire and focus groups) was intended to be exploratory and with participants that are sometimes considered 'hard to reach'. Therefore, it was appropriate to draw on pre-existing, personal connections in order to gain access to participants. These personal connections came from volunteering work that had been undertaken with the youth offending service, and from other academics and practitioners from the youth justice field that the researcher had the privilege of connecting with over the years. As such, the two groups of young people who participated in the research were sourced through both the youth offending service in England and through a charity organisation that works closely with care and criminal justice experienced young people in Scotland. One challenge faced throughout the initial stages of the primary research was gaining and maintaining access through gatekeepers. Despite initially approaching organisations through personal

connections, the maintaining of successful relationships with subsequent gatekeepers proved problematic and prolonged the fieldwork. This issue was not one that was anticipated at the start of the research project, but once fieldwork had commenced, soon became apparent would become a major hurdle.

As with any research, the literature review should be an ongoing process throughout the entirety of the research project, not just conducted at the start and pushed to one side. As such, the literature was consulted regarding the gaining and maintaining of access through gatekeepers, and the challenges researchers may face. Most textbooks on research methods and the methodology sections of journal articles very rarely reported any challenges or difficulties with gaining access to research participants through gatekeepers. Typically, if gatekeepers were even mentioned, it was to report that access had been gained through a gatekeeper, but no further discussion on this process was provided. As such, there is limited literature that reports on the challenges of working with gatekeepers. Despite this, maintaining adequate communication and an ongoing relationship with gatekeepers is key to helping the research process (Campbell et al, 2006). This was managed to a certain degree, as emails were sent on a weekly basis to the YOT to check in and see how many more questionnaires had been completed. When the time came to organise the focus group, again, emails were sent to organise the date and time of the focus group, and to check how many young people had been signed up to participate. Organising the focus group with the young people in Glasgow was more straight forward as there was only one gatekeeper, and so the number of emails exchanged was less.

The relationships with gatekeepers may come in a variety of forms and vary, depending on the situation (formal versus informal settings). The relationships are also likely to change over time, for better or worse. When relying on gatekeepers for access to participants, the researcher should be mindful of the level of disruption caused to daily workload (Clark, 2010). Even if the information and findings that are to be generated from the research will be useful to the gatekeeper, the consideration of costs relating to increased effort and work involved may be considered too high, and in some cases, access may be limited or even revoked. Upon reflection, and as noted in the fieldwork journal, maintaining the access and engagement from gatekeepers was, at times, exhausting and frustrating. At the YOT setting in London, the initial gatekeeper was the manager of youth services for the Borough, who was keen for the

research to go ahead. However, once passed onto the 'frontline' practitioners of the YOT, the level of enthusiasm for the research dipped. At the time, it was frustrating that things were not progressing as quickly as first anticipated. In hindsight, this was due to a misunderstanding of quite how stretched the staff were at this YOT. As such, the decision was made to begin looking for additional access points, in other geographical locations, to involve young people in the research project. There were a few opportunities presented over the following few months in response to requests for access, however, many of these came with their own challenges: more gatekeepers that wanted multiple meetings to discuss the research and what the project could do for them before agreeing access, plenty more form filling, and the potential for having to amend the approach to 'better fit' with particular institutions' policies and procedures. Eventually, a second setting was identified based on a group of young people in Scotland, who were not affiliated with any institution, but who were already engaged in youth work intended to raise awareness of young people's voices and experiences of the Scottish Children's Hearing System. As this group was already established prior to the primary research taking place, the young people were familiar with one another, and it took much less effort to get them to talk in a group setting. In comparison, when working with the young people through the YOT in London, some ice breaker games were played first before the main discussion, to get the young people familiar and comfortable with each other and the researcher.

In support of providing financial compensation, it is argued that participants should be meaningfully thanked for their time and the contribution to the research (Ripley et al, 2010), particularly in circumstances where participation has no other beneficial gain for them. Payments as an incentive to participate may be appropriate in certain situations, for example, recruiting young people from a highly deprived, low-income area. However, offering payment for participation can affect levels of recruitment in a research study, with increased willingness to participate regardless of risks and effort involved. Furthermore, with a payment incentive, participants may feel the need to give the 'correct' responses, rather than honest responses, which is likely to impact on self-report and data validity (Klitzman et al, 2007). After a discussion with the manager at the YOT, and with approval from the University Ethics Committee, it was decided that financial compensation would not be provided to the participants. Partly due to the participants already attending regular meetings at the YOT offices, and partly due to

the self-funded nature of the research project. Free refreshments were provided to participants for the duration of the focus groups, and everyone was thanked for their time and contributions to the research project. This was replicated with the young people who took part in the focus group in Glasgow. The following sections detail the ethical issues that were taken into consideration during the design stage of the primary research.

Positionality Statement

Reflexivity of the research process is important, to understand and be transparent about how power and bias may impact on all phases of the research process. As such, "reflexivity is about the politics of positionality and acknowledging our power, privileges and biases throughout the research process" (Leavy, 2020: 6)

I was an outsider in terms of not having personal experience of going through the criminal justice system as a young person who has offended; coming from a typical nuclear family (mum, dad and siblings); growing up outside of large cities such as London and Glasgow. Coming from a different background to the young people involved in the research, I consciously wanted to put any pre-conceived ideas about what they might say during the focus groups, aside. Taking a grounded theory approach, meant I was not intending to test any theories or hypotheses, but simply listen to what the young people had to say about the term 'family'. My own understanding of the term 'family' is that it is different to everyone, and that it also changes over time; very much being a term that is socially constructed.

In providing an 'emic account', using "…terminology that is meaningful to and from the perspective of a person from within the culture whose beliefs … are being studied" (Holmes, 2020: 5). Typically, an 'emic account' is developed by an insider to the culture. However, it is possible to be an outsider to the researched culture whilst still aiming for an 'emic account'. In this case, despite being an outsider, I was very much taking into consideration the young people's voices and placing emphasis on these during the write up and reporting of findings.

Ethics: respect

When conducting empirical research, there is a need to uphold professional standards. Academic associations and professional organisations have their own published codes relating to the ethical standards that should be adhered to. This research project has followed the British Society of Criminology (BSC) *Statement of Ethics* (2015) and the Middlesex University *Code of Practice for Research* (2011). Specifically, the BSC (2015) draws attention to the main responsibilities that the researcher has towards their participants: to minimise personal harm, to protect the participant's dignity and identity at all times, to provide substantial detail regarding the research being conducted so that the participants can give fully informed consent that is voluntary and free from coercion or duress, and that the data collected is treated with the up-most respect and in compliance with the *Data Protection Act* (2018).

Fully informed consent

For any research involving human participants, academic institutions and professional organisations state the need for fully informed consent to be given by the participants prior to data collection beginning (Goredema-Braid, 2010), which should be voluntary and without coercion. Emphasis should be placed on protecting the best interests of the participants in any case (Berry, 2009), with due diligence being paid to how participants are likely to be affected by engagement with the research process. As the term 'fully informed' may be interpreted differently, guidance was sought from the BSC *Statement of Ethics* (2015), which defines 'fully informed consent' as being:

> "to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how any research findings are to be disseminated" (2015: 6)

Importance is placed equally upon the information provided, and the way in which it is presented to the potential participants. When approaching young people as participants, there is an understanding that they may not have the literacy competencies required to read and fully understand a typical participant information sheet, which is a common concern when conducting research with young people who have offended (Hughes et al, 2017). Consent was sought in a variety of different ways throughout the research project, to ensure that those who were participating, were

aware of why the research was being undertaken, and how their contribution would be used.

In London, passive consent was gained through a statement on the front page of the questionnaire (appendix A), which briefly explained the aims of the research, plans for dissemination, and that by completing and returning the questionnaire, participants consented to the information they provided being used as part of the research project (de Meyrick, 2005). In this way, anonymity was maintained for the participants, and the young people and staff could actively make their own decision whether to participate or not. To overcome the potential for literacy problems, case workers were asked to distribute the questionnaires to young people, verbally explaining that completing the questionnaire was voluntary, and if they required any assistance with completion, that the caseworkers would be on hand. Obviously, if a caseworker was asked to assist a young person with completing the questionnaire, then it would no longer be anonymous. However, the data that was collected and delivered to the researcher would still be anonymous in the sense that the questionnaires did not ask for names or any other identifying information from the participants.

As the focus groups in both London and Glasgow required more input from the young people, active and formal consent was sought. A participant information sheet (appendix B) was developed and handed to all potential participants. Once the formal consent form had been signed and returned by the young person, they were invited to attend a focus group session. For young people who were under the age of 18, they were asked to also have a parent/guardian signature on the form. However, for young people who were over 18, they did not require this additional signature, only their own signature was required on the consent form. As the young people in the London YOT were all under the age of 18, they were required to have a parent/guardian signature on the consent form, in addition to their own signature. This was in accordance with ethical guidelines, which recommend that parents/guardians are aware of research their children are participating in. As the young people in the Glasgow group were between the ages of 16-21 years, some of them were required to also have a signature by a parent/guardian.

Before each of the focus groups officially began, a discussion with the young people about the research and how their data would be used, took place. This was to ensure

that they were fully informed about the project, and to reaffirm their consent for the data collection to proceed. There is a need for children's informed consent to be ongoing throughout, "as in-the-moment ethical challenges emerge" (Moore et al, 2018: 89). To address this, the focus group sessions were planned with some specific points (appendix C) at which participants were reminded of their rights and to ensure that everyone present was happy and comfortable with the discussions so far (Moore et al, 2018). Morally, it was important for the researcher to reaffirm with the young people themselves that they fully understood what would happen in the session, and that they were comfortable with the tape recorder in the room. As it transpired, some of the young people in the first focus group (London) objected to having the discussions recorded using the tape recorder, and as a result, the discussion proceeded with the researcher making written observational notes instead. After the session had finished, the literature was consulted, to see if this reaction from young people to being audio recorded was a common feature in social science research. It was found that it is quite commonplace for young people who have offended to not give consent to being audio recorded in research (Wilson, 2006; Holt & Pamment, 2011). Despite the young people having already signed and returned the consent forms, and attended the group session, the researcher still felt a level of responsibility in ensuring they fully understood the purpose of the session, and how it would be running. Partly due to adhering to the ethical guidelines, but mostly for peace of mind, allowing up to fifteen minutes at the start of the session to discuss the participant information sheet was important.

With this new insight into young people's potential wariness of being audio recorded, this was approached with more caution for the focus group in Glasgow. Again, a discussion was held at the beginning of the session to ensure that everyone in the room was fully aware of the purpose of the discussion, and how their data would be used. This time, rather than telling them the session would be audio recorded, the young people were asked if they would be happy for the discussion to be audio recorded. A few in the room were hesitant, and so again, the tape recorder remained unused. At the time, it was recorded in the fieldwork journal that the work may be considered less credible due to not having full transcripts of the discussions. Many of the research methods textbooks that were consulted during the planning stages of this primary research had always assumed that qualitative data would be transcribed and

rigorously analysed (Waller et al, 2016). Upon reflection, these kinds of assumptions about qualitative research initially induced anxiety in the researcher, who felt that the primary research was not 'complete' due to lacking in detailed transcripts. One strategy for overcoming this was to read 'outside the box' and to find research articles that had used more creative research methods (Lomax, 2012; Lees et al, 2017). Furthermore, the researcher needed to adopt the understanding that in some settings, "…research practices need to be adapted in situ at each stage to better fit real people with varying needs and competencies" (Webb et al, 2020: 2). Therefore, upon reflection on the research process, the researcher eventually came to realise that the data generated by the young people during the focus group discussions were very rich and provided invaluable insights into young people's understandings and experiences of 'family'.

Regardless, the implications of not generating full transcripts of the focus group discussions does need to be considered. Krueger and Casey (2014) state that there are different forms of data that can be captured during focus group discussions, which all provide varying levels of detail and specificity, and their collection may be based on the type of data that is necessary to meet the requirements of the research question(s). A transcript of the focus group discussion is described as, "a word-for-word written record of the focus group discussion, based on the audio recording" (Krueger & Casey, 2014: 149). This type of data is useful to provide the researcher with a permanent written record of what was discussed during the focus group. However, if the participants of the discussion use poor grammar or colloquial language, or simply stop talking mid-sentence, then the transcript may be difficult to understand on its own (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). As such, it is commonplace for transcripts to be supplemented by the observational field notes that are recorded during the focus group, to help with clarifying points that might be unclear just reading the transcript on its own. As such, the recording of field notes is important in providing a context for what is said during the discussions. In the case of the focus groups for the primary research in both the London and Glasgow settings, the analysis was only conducted using the observational field notes. In support of this, Krueger and Casey (2014) state that a "note-based analysis may be sufficient when the purpose of the study is narrowly defined" (2014: 149). As the purpose of the primary research was to explore young

people's understandings and experiences of 'family', rather than specifically testing any theories or hypotheses, using field notes as the main source of data was sufficient.

Minimising harm

The researcher had a duty of care to the young people as research participants, and as such, had to design-in the legal safeguard requirements when dealing with young people. Typically, any research to be undertaken with children requires the researcher to be cleared by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS, 2020; BSC, 2015). The researcher had previously completed training with the youth offending service to take up a voluntary role, and so already held a valid DBS certificate and had completed a CPD accredited level 1 course in safeguarding. In order to adhere to safeguarding procedures whilst at the YOT and working with the young people, it was necessary to make it clear to the young people that safeguarding procedures would still be in place throughout the focus group discussions. This was stated on the 'informed consent' form that the young people (and their parents/guardians) were asked to read and sign prior to attending the session, "In accordance with safeguarding policies, if significant risks of harm to, or from others, are disclosed these will be immediately reported to the relevant safeguarding officer" (see appendix B). Although it had been stated that their data would be anonymised, and anything discussed during the focus group was not to be taken outside, it was important to remind them that anything that was disclosed that could be considered a safeguarding issue, would need to be reported according to the YOT safeguarding policy procedures. As the discussions were to be focused on a topic that could be considered sensitive to some people, it was anticipated that the disclosure of safeguarding issues may be a possibility.

Researchers should seek to avoid causing unnecessary harm to participants. As such, undesirable consequences of participation should be anticipated as much as possible with the participants being notified of these potential consequences at the outset, preferably during the informed consent process (Oliver, 2010). Qualitative research affords flexibility, allowing the researcher to continuously be assessing the situation, and deciding whether there is justification in continuing with the discussion, based on the reactions of the participants (Iphofen, 2009). Being receptive and sensitive to participants' spoken words, but also their body language, is an important skill to have

when conducting research with human participants. Following a semi-structured schedule allows a variety of questions to be listed but removes the necessity to ask them in any order, or even at all (Waller et al, 2016). The list of questions (appendix D) had been approved by the University Ethics Committee and were on hand to both the researcher and the assisting practitioner during both the London and Glasgow-based focus groups. As such, some of the questions were used to start a conversation, but overall, the flow of discussion was natural and did not require structured questions to guide it. In addition to the list of questions being available, there was also a brief plan to follow for each of the focus group sessions, to ensure that they both followed the same structure and that important parts such as the 'project outline' discussion at the start and the 'debrief' at the end were included. As the focus group sessions were scheduled for just one hour long, it was necessary to make sure enough time was left at the beginning and end of the group discussion to address any issues or questions that arose from the young people who were participating.

Furthermore, ensuring that the participants are regularly reminded of their right to withdraw or not participate in the discussions may alleviate the feeling that they are participating under pressure (Morris et al, 2012). Therefore, there were reminders included in the 'focus group session plan' (appendix C) for the researcher and the assisting practitioner, to ensure that the young people's wellbeing was considered throughout. Providing a debrief at the end of the focus group can help to minimise psychological distress (Iphofen, 2009), and can be achieved by reassuring the participants about the value of their contribution and ensure that they are made aware of appropriate options for further support (Morris et al, 2012). When the 'focus group session plan' was put together, each section was allocated a certain amount of time, to ensure that everything could comfortably be covered during the one-hour time slot. The final debrief was allocated five minutes at the end of the session. However, for each of the focus groups, a professional was asked to be present for the duration of the session, which included a groupwork practitioner at the YOT and a youth worker at the Glasgow group (a further discussion on who these people were and the role that they took during data collection is given later in this chapter).

Confidentiality

Typically, when conducting social science research with human participants, confidentiality is offered to the participants in exchange for their contribution. Confidentiality is maintained through anonymising the data generated, either at the point of collection or during the first stages of analysis. The data collected through the questionnaires allowed participants to complete it anonymously, with limited personal information required. Providing this level of confidentiality was intended to engage as many participants as possible. For the focus groups, the data generated was also anonymised at the point of collection. Originally, these had been designed with the intention of using audio recordings and transcriptions, however, as it transpired, audio recording was not used. Therefore, names and any other identifying information was omitted as the notes were being made. Adhering to GDPR guidelines (DPA, 2018) was a requirement of both the University ethics committee and the organisations used for accessing the participants. To ensure data was stored securely, it was entered into word documents and excel spreadsheets and password protection features were used. Once the hard copies of completed questionnaires and the field notes recorded during the focus groups had been transferred to electronic formats, the hard copies were placed in an envelope and sealed, not to be opened. Once the thesis has been approved, the original hard copies of data will be destroyed. The reason for keeping the hard copies is in case any participants requested access to their own data or asked for it to be removed from the data set. As the questionnaire responses contained no personal information such as names or dates of birth, participants would be asked to give some answers in order to identify which completed questionnaire was theirs. If requesting their information from the focus group discussion, the original hard copies of the field notes would need to be consulted, as the researcher recorded both the original participant's name and their allocated pseudonyms for any direct quotes that were recorded. When the field notes were typed up to be stored electronically and to be analysed, the pseudonyms were only used.

When engaging in discussions with young people, researchers must be vigilant and report any suspicions that a young person may be at risk of harm, or that they reveal another person may be at risk of harm (Furey et al, 2010). As such, all participants were made aware of the implications should such omissions be made, and that confidentiality could not be maintained should omissions be made. This was in

accordance with strict safeguarding policies at both organisations where the research was conducted. Finally, the young people were made aware that being in a group situation also meant that agreements about confidentiality was not just between them and the researcher but was also between themselves as participants (Moore et al, 2018). As a group, a verbal agreement was made, that what was said in the room during the focus group session would not be discussed with others after the session adjourned. Although the aim of the group was not to explicitly discuss personal experiences or circumstances, there was an acknowledgement that the participants may wish to draw on these personal situations when explaining their thoughts on the term 'family'. As such, it was imperative to have a group discussion and agreement put in place prior to the discussions beginning, as when conducting a group discussion with young people, it is important to set a standard for mutual trust and safety.

Anonymity

In order to maintain anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were allocated to the participants as the field notes were recorded. When these were typed up to be stored electronically and to be analysed, the original participant names were removed, and the pseudonyms took their place. To further ensure anonymity, the specific locations of where each of the focus groups took place were also hidden. Although this approach was preferable in guaranteeing that the participants' and the organisations involved in the research, remained unidentifiable, it proved difficult when needing to reference some sources. Background information on each of the chosen locations was important for providing a context in which the research was being conducted. With each of the locations being based in a different country, with differing youth justice systems, a brief overview of how children move into, and through each of these systems was needed. Also, due to the high numbers of children experiencing both the care and justice systems simultaneously (Muncie, 2015), a brief overview of the care system in each country was also necessary. Further to this, demographics of the local population in each of the areas has been included in the finding's chapter, but in some instances, the full reference has been omitted to preserve anonymity. As such, the location in Scotland, will be referred to as 'Glasgow', and the location in England, will be referred to as 'the London Borough'.

Ethics: integrity

Social science researchers have a responsibility to their discipline and to their participants to ensure they conduct themselves in a morally and ethically sound way, to maintain research integrity (Iphofen, 2009). As well as following the above outlined ethical codes, researchers can also ensure research integrity by being transparent. This should be demonstrated in their approach to participants, and through dissemination of the research process and the findings. From personal experience of dealing with young people within a voluntary capacity, being open and honest is a good way to begin building trust and rapport with them, especially if only having limited time together. Additionally, being flexible and listening to feedback from the young people throughout the session was crucial in maintaining this rapport and relationship. Being able to adapt to their way of thinking and how they saw fit to present their thoughts was integral to the research process, not only to reiterate the importance of their contribution, but also to ensure the data generated was truly representative of the participants, as opposed to being overly interpretive from the researcher's point of view. This element of being flexible and adapting to the young people's requirements was particularly relevant during the focus group in Glasgow. Some of the young people explained that they would find it difficult to put into words their understanding of the term 'family'. It was suggested that they could draw out their understandings, with pens and paper on hand to accommodate this. Although the intended plan for the group sessions was to use flash cards to write out key words and phrases that were associated with the word 'family', the researcher took a box full of coloured pens and paper in case the young people felt like getting more creative. For the London-based group, the young people were happy writing on the flash cards, but for the Glasgow-based group, the young people wanted to use large sheets of paper and a variety of coloured pens. Upon reflection, providing a space for the young people to visually explore their thoughts and feelings, and then being given the opportunity to explain what they had drawn, worked well for this type of exploratory research. Feedback from the young people was positive, and that they had enjoyed this experience, as for some of them, they had never been given the opportunity to reflect on their perception of 'family' in such a way before.

Maintaining research integrity also requires the researcher to be honest about the research process, which includes providing detailed discussions of both the successes

and challenges faced throughout the project. An appropriate way to ensure this is to keep a fieldwork journal, which enables the research to be reflective throughout. In the short-term, keeping such a reflective log offered some consideration on what was working and what was not working. This enabled the researcher to adapt and be flexible, and to know when more reading of the literature was required to understand why something was not working, or how something could be improved. In the long-term, keeping a fieldwork journal was an important resource when writing up the thesis, in being able to reflect and be transparent about the process. As such, being able to recall all the steps in such a long piece of work was necessary for improving the integrity of it.

Finally, a strong working relationship with the University ethics committee was sustained to assist with guidance on best practice throughout the project. This was achieved by keeping in regular contact with the head of the ethics committee, and anything that was unclear or that the researcher was unsure of, was sent in email communications for clarification. Being relatively new to conducting fieldwork, the researcher found it extremely beneficial having the University ethics committee available to discuss progress and updates for the research project. Of importance, was the ability to review the semi-structured list of questions (appendix D) available to the researcher during the focus groups. As the research aimed to be exploratory, it was integral that any questions asked of the participants should remain as neutral as possible, to avoid the participants being led to answer in certain ways. By including the University ethics committee in the development of the list of questions considered acceptable, these potential demand characteristics were greatly reduced (Devlin, 2018).

Ethics: justice & fairness

To ensure justice for all concerned it is important to not exclude certain groups or individuals from being selected to participate, and the fair treatment of participants for the duration of the research project should be highly valued (Waller et al, 2016). This is achieved by having a clear selection criterion for the participants, which in the case of the primary research, was that they were young people who had offended. The way this was determined was by accessing young people through a youth offending team

(YOT) who deal with young people who have offended and received a formal conviction for their behaviours. For the Glasgow-based group, the young people were not accessed through a YOT, but instead, through a youth group who work specifically with young people who have offended. Again, this was to ensure that the young people met the criteria. Other than this selection requirement, there were no other restrictions placed on young people who could, and could not, participate in the primary research. Furthermore, in maintaining a standard of justice and fairness for the participants, there is a requirement for researchers to strike a balance between maintaining anonymity of the participants, whilst at the same time, acknowledging the sources of data and giving credit where it is due (Iphofen, 2009). This is especially important when dealing with under-represented groups in social science research.

The young people that were identified at the outset of the research as being the focus of the project, was to be young people who had offended. This was due to the acknowledgement that they had largely been ignored in previous research that explored people's understandings and experiences of 'family'. As the pre-study literature review identified, 'family' has played a central role in theory, research and policy that concerns young people who have offended. However, selecting this particular group of young people as the focus for research offered some challenges, and as Holt and Pamment (2011) state,

> "it is the very interplay of 'young-person-as-offender' which presents some very particular and specific challenges to researchers who want to work with such populations" (Holt & Pamment, 2011: 126)

Despite the inherent challenges of working with this group, if researchers were to avoid conducting research with them, then knowledge in this area would never advance (Oliver, 2010). Furthermore, to exclude the young people entirely from research would only seek to perpetuate their under-represented status. From the very outset of the research, the intended participants were to be young people who had offended. This was the identified gap in knowledge that the research project aimed to address, and so it was considered a high priority to design a piece of research that would be able to explore the concept of family in a sensitive manner, ensuring that the young peoples' voices were at the forefront. Children and young people are often overlooked as

participants in social science research and are often not considered social actors in their own right (Berry, 2009).

Finally, ensuring that the voices of the young people are presented clearly and coherently is important in maintaining a high standard of justice and fairness for them (Wellington & Szczerbiński, 2007). This is achieved by providing verbatim quotes, or other forms of data, that are a true and honest representation of the discussion that was held with participants. By providing readers with this evidence, justice is seen to be done. As such, it is the researcher's responsibility to decide which 'voices' are best to represent the key themes or discussion points identified during analysis. Typically, the amount of qualitative data generated could be very extensive (Wellington & Szczerbiński, 2007), making the researcher's job at choosing representative quotes very difficult. However, as the qualitative data generated in this research was mostly handwritten, observational field work notes of the discussions during focus groups, rather than several pages of transcriptions, the task of selecting representative quotes was made considerably easier. As such, the findings presented in chapter seven are formed from the analysis of the field notes that were recorded during the focus groups, the responses provided by both staff and young people on the questionnaires, and photos taken of the drawings that were produced during the Glasgow-based focus group. All direct quotes from participants that were recorded during the field notes have been used to demonstrate the findings and to draw attention to the importance of recording children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family'. The variety of 'slices of data' that were drawn on during the analysis further demonstrate the need to include a range of data collection methods, to provide a more holistic understanding of young people's voices. The researcher recorded in the field work journal, feeling grateful for the opportunity to collect a variety of different types of data throughout the project, which all assist in demonstrating the thesis' original contribution to knowledge and the theory that emerged from the data.

Politics: power relationships

Politics in research concerns the power relationships that exist between the researcher, the researched, and other contextual elements such as the location and the gatekeepers who may be involved. The power in such relationships may relate to

status and hierarchy but may also be acknowledged and readjusted to accommodate innovative and creative methods, addressing the pre-existing power imbalance. The epistemological position underpinning the research was crucial in deciding how to approach the issue of power relations (Waller et al, 2016). In this case, a constructivist approach was drawn upon, with the primary intention of acknowledging the young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' as central.

The researcher and the researched

To readdress the power imbalance commonly found in research with young people, there was a need to draw on some of the key elements of a constructivist approach, which dictated the choice of methods to be used in generating data (Conolly, 2008). First and foremost, this involved giving power to the young people to present their ideas how they saw fit. Although an activity (appendix E) was developed by the researcher to generate discussions about the term 'family', the power was very much in the young people's hands as to what extent they engaged with this activity. It was intended that by being considered an 'outsider', the researcher could be positioned as an interested but impartial party, rather than just another professional asking intruding questions. By being flexible and allowing for multiple forms of data collection to take place during one focus group session, this approach enabled the researcher to capture the young people's voices in such a way that would empower and ensure they were not misrepresented (James, 2013). This was demonstrated when the young people in the Glasgow-based group asked to draw their understandings of 'family', as they felt this would be easier than trying to put it into spoken words. In both the focus groups, the young people were encouraged to lead the discussion, by giving their own interpretations and understandings of 'family', with the conversations that followed being based on the language that they used. As some of the young people in both focus group settings stated that they were uncomfortable at the thought of having their discussion audio recorded, the researcher put the tape recorder away and asked for the young people's permission to record field notes by hand. This demonstrated to the young people that what they had to say was important, but that feeling comfortable whilst sharing their thoughts was also essential. As the young people were central in the data generated for the primary research, the researcher wanted to build a good rapport and level of trust with them as quickly as possible. By taking their concerns

about the tape recorder seriously, and removing it from the room, this helped in building a good level of trust early in the sessions.

In order to assist, a practitioner known to the young people was also present in both focus groups. This individual would act as an important moderator, and the purpose of them being in attendance was to draw on their already-established relationships with the young people to help facilitate discussions within a group setting. It was intended that by inviting a 'known' practitioner to join the discussions, that they would be better placed to empathise with the young people, being familiar with the "world" of teenagers (Adler et al, 2019: 8). At the London-based YOT, the moderator role was taken on by the groupwork facilitator, who was employed by the YOT to organise all group work sessions with young people. At the Glasgow-based group, the moderator role was taken on by the youth justice participation worker, who was already organising and running groupwork sessions with the young people. Both of these individuals had pre-established relationships with all the young people in attendance of the focus groups. Upon reflection, they were both extremely helpful in engaging the young people in discussions, drawing on their previous experience and being flexible in their approaches. Acting as moderators, they were able to encourage the young people to participate, and to keep from one person dominating the conversation (Daley, 2013). When considering the relationship between the researcher and the researched, it is also important to include a reflection on the demand characteristics that were likely to have been present during the focus group settings. Defined as "something in the research situation [that] demands or shapes our behaviour" (Devlin, 2018: 90); and can include a variety of cues. These cues might be the physical setting, others that are present in the room during the discussion, the perceived status of the researcher, gender or ethnicity of the researcher, or even the attire of the researcher. The first step to addressing potential demand characteristics should be to identify and acknowledge that such cues exist. Secondly, the behaviour of the researcher should be evaluated, and consideration should be given to the physical setting. Finally, reflection upon these demand characteristics should identify problematic cues or behaviours that need to be addressed prior to the focus group taking place. In both focus groups that were conducted, consideration was given on all the above characteristics prior to the session, in as much as they could be anticipated. However, in terms of the ethnicity and gender of the researcher compared to the participants,

this was difficult to anticipate as it was not known who would turn up to the session, until they arrived and so was included in the reflections recorded in the fieldwork journal after the session. Even though the discussion with participants never turned to discuss matters related to gender or ethnicity, it was still important for the researcher to provide reflections on the impact of social identity within the focus group setting. A full discussion on the impact of having both a researcher and 'known' practitioner present during the focus groups, is provided in chapter eight.

Finally, despite seeking to readdress the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched, one must remember that in most cases, the participants have the power to grant access to information that they have been asked to divulge. As such, it was important to remind the young people throughout the focus group, that it was their decision to participate and to share their thoughts and opinions on 'family'. Particularly in the London-based group, some of the young people did not contribute anything to the discussion until quite late in the session. Again, it was important to make these young people feel comfortable and at ease, and to demonstrate through conversations with those who were participating, that what they were saying was to be taken seriously. The young people needed to know that their own understandings and experiences of 'family' were crucial to the research, and it was important to record everything they wanted to share. During semi-structured discussions, and particularly within group settings, the participants also have the power to redirect the discussions, and the research, to what they feel the researcher should be interested in (Kawulich, 2011). This was considered to be potentially a major challenge when focus groups were chosen as a research method, rather than one-on-one interviews with young people. Of course, it was integral to the research question that the young people should direct the discussions in whichever way they saw fit, but that the central focus of the research was to remain on the topic of 'family'. The list of questions (appendix D) developed for the researcher and moderator were on hand during the focus groups, which is a method commonly used in group settings to ensure the conversation stays on track (Krueger & Casey, 2014). However, this problem never arose whilst conducting the fieldwork.

The researcher and gatekeepers

A second important relationship to consider during research is that between the researcher and gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are often described as being those who provide access to key resources in research projects (Campbell et al, 2006). Most commonly gatekeepers are relied upon to gain access to potential participants, typically, through institutions or organisations. During the research project, the challenge of gaining and maintaining access to young people participants through gatekeepers came to light. Upon consulting the literature, it was identified that there is a gap between what is said on gatekeepers in research textbooks, and what it is like (Crowhurst, 2013).

There were three main challenges recorded in the reflective journal concerning reliance on gatekeepers. Firstly, that there were multiple gatekeepers throughout the research journey. Conducting a research project, which spanned multiple locations, meant that a variety of gatekeepers were consulted throughout the project. Whilst in the London setting, the assistant director of youth services in the London borough of the YOT was initially approached, who then passed the project onto the manager of the YOT. From here, the focus group was designed and conducted with the assistance of the groupwork facilitator at the YOT. The Glasgow-based focus group was designed and conducted with the assistance of the youth justice participation worker who was the primary point of contact with the young people.

The second main challenge that was recorded in the reflective fieldwork journal was that, at time, maintaining good strong relationships with the gatekeepers was difficult. Maintaining good relationships with these gatekeepers was to be key in ensuring the fieldwork was conducted in a timely fashion and in accordance with the research project schedule. Despite careful planning at the initial stages of the primary research, and effort made to maintain communication and good relationships, at several points, the fieldwork was halted. A review of the literature concerned with managing relationships with gatekeepers, found that researchers should have an understanding, or at least an awareness, of reasons why gatekeepers may or may not be willing to engage. A major challenge that faces researchers is the possibility that gatekeepers may resent the responsibility that they are charged with whether in agreement with the researcher, or from a higher authority within their organisation (Coyne, 2010). At times throughout the fieldwork, it was assumed this was the main explanation as to why

some break-down in communication occurred. There was an understanding by the researcher that staff working within the youth offending service were extremely stretched for time and cases they were dealing with. As such, recruiting participants to focus groups and then aiding with facilitating these sessions was not considered a high priority for many staff, which ultimately resulted in the time spent on fieldwork being extended to almost double that which was initially allocated.

The final challenge that was recorded in the fieldwork journal was that something needed to be done in order to move the primary research along. Initially, the research had been planned to only be conducted using young people from the London-based YOT. The intention was to conduct several focus groups, each time with a different group of young people, until the data had become 'saturated' (Urquhart, 2013). However, due to the difficulty and amount of time spent organising and running just one focus group, it was decided by the researcher that the access to participants needed to be extended elsewhere. As such, access was organised and granted to a youth group that was based in Glasgow, and thus, the remit of the thesis extended to include both England and Scotland. Upon reflection on this decision to expand the remit of the research, it has offered invaluable insights into both the English-based youth offending service, and to the Scottish-based children's hearings system. Despite the multiple challenges faced regarding gaining and maintaining access to young people who had offended, through various gatekeepers, the result is much more data was collected, that was rich in children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family', from different systems and countries. Although the findings are not generalisable across the whole population, the insights are invaluable and provide a strong case for an original contribution to knowledge. The following sections of this methodology chapter will provide a detailed account of the specific research methods that were used in generating and analysing data. These have been split into two sections, one for each of the locations. The London-based setting saw the use of both questionnaires and a focus group to generate 'slices of data', whereas the Glasgow-based setting only used a focus group to generate data. The analysis that was conducted on all sets of data are also detailed in the following sections, to provide transparency and credibility to the findings that follow in chapter seven.

Methods: London

This section of the methodology chapter will provide a detailed account of the specific research methods used with the London-based youth offending team (YOT). Questionnaires and a focus group were conducted here to generate data, that was then analysed. The collection methods and the analysis that was conducted will be detailed, to provide a transparent and credible account of the process. The participants for the questionnaires were both staff and young people at the London-based YOT. The participants for the focus group were young people from the YOT.

Why access through the Youth Offending Team (YOT)?

The underlying approach throughout this project was to involve young people who have offended as the main participants, due to this group in society being identified during the pre-study literature review as largely being ignored in previous research and theories that concern them, and their understandings of the term 'family'. As such, the design needed to include a way to access this specific group. One method of access and recruitment that was considered during the initial planning stage, was through a young offender institute. However, the time and financial constraints of conducting research as part of a doctorate programme, combined with the ethical approval process involved in gaining access to said institution (Wilson, 2006), proved to limit the options available. Instead, it was recommended by a member of staff at the PhD registration panel that access to young people who have offended should be sought through a local YOT, where the researcher already held a volunteer position. However, in hindsight, despite the lengthy ethical approval process involved in gaining access to young people through a young offender's institute, this may have been a better option for collecting data. At the end of an 18-month period 'in the field', the researcher had collected a total of 57 questionnaire responses and conducted one focus group with seven young people at the YOT. The slow progress of data collection through the YOT was largely due to the speed, or lack of, at which the groupwork facilitator and manager of the YOT were able to organise the data collection through both the questionnaires and the focus group session. Despite this slow progress, data was eventually collected and analysed, and the process of both (collection and analysis) will now be provided. The remainder of this section will provide a detailed

account of how the questionnaires and the focus group was conducted, and how the data collected was analysed.

Questionnaires

The primary aim of the questionnaires was as an initial investigation to consider whether there was a basis for conducting further qualitative enquiries into the understandings of the term 'family' with the young people at the YOT. The questionnaire was adapted for the two separate participant groups (appendices A and F), as the literacy level varied, with young people who have experience of the youth justice system typically having a much lower level of literacy comprehension (Muncie, 2015). The questionnaire comprised of three main sections: basic demographics, statements about family life, and a selection of different definitions of 'family'. The questionnaires covered just two-sides of A4 but were contained on just one sheet of paper, intended to be short and only take a few minutes to complete. They were distributed to staff by the YOT manager, and to the young people by their case workers. They were to be completed independently and anonymously, being returned via a concealed drop-box system. The drop-box for returns was situated in a corridor of the YOT offices, where it was not monitored by anyone, to maintain a degree of anonymity for those who were completing and returning them. Once the final date for collecting questionnaires was passed, the drop-box was opened by the researcher, the data from the completed questionnaires were transferred to an electronic storage system (in an excel document) and the original paper copies were stored securely (in a sealed envelope in the researcher's desk).

Demographics

The questionnaires collected basic demographic information, including participants' age, gender, ethnicity and living arrangements. This information was useful in analysing the representation of the data, particularly when comparing results from the two participant groups (staff and young people). Within the demographics section of the questionnaire, there was also a question included to record current living arrangements, with multiple options for participants to choose from, plus space to write if need be. As the overall aim of the questionnaire was to reflect on what the term

'family' means, it was important to ask participants to provide information on their current living arrangements. Typically, in national surveys, the household composition is assumed to reflect the family composition, and that those who are residing in the same household tend to be related in some way to one another (Casper & Hofferth, 2006). The *Families and Household Survey* (ONS, 2017) did provide respondents with two separate definitions of 'family' and 'household', however, much of the literature reviewed (chapters two, three and four) suggested that both these terms have been used interchangeably, and so both should be considered important. Furthermore, the household composition element intended to give some context to the responses provided in the remainder of the questionnaire but was not to be used as a way of reducing the definition of 'family' to meaning 'household'.

Statements about family life

For the second section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate a series of statements about family life, using a five-point sliding scale, which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Three previous studies into family life were drawn upon to aid in the construction of these statements (Zimet et al, 1988; Frick, 1991; Waters & Cross, 2010). There was a total of sixteen statements included, that covered a range of topics on family cohesion, levels of supervision, and emotional support within the family environment. The purpose of these statements was to provide some understanding of how the participants' perceived their own 'family'. It is important to note, that at this point in the questionnaire, the participants had not been given a definition of the term 'family' and neither had they had the opportunity yet to provide their own thoughts on a definition. Upon reflection, it would have been more useful to rearrange the sections of the questionnaire and put the statements about family life at the end. This way, the responses would have been more contextualised, in terms of how the respondent defined 'family' in the first instance, with their responses to the statements more likely being based on their chosen definition. Regardless, the responses to the statements provided an insight into the respondents understanding of 'family'. Comparing the responses between the staff and young people also added another 'slice of data' to the overall findings.

Definition of 'family'

The final and the most important question provided three very basic definitions of 'family' that the participants were asked to select any that they agreed with. Each definition was designed to be brief and limited, to capture which basic elements of the 'family' concept were deemed more acceptable as a working definition. All that was required at this point in the research was a broad overview of how 'family' is defined, therefore, closed questions were enough, and no space was provided to participants for further explanation, or 'other' definitions. This final section was intended to provide a very basic understanding of how the participants conceptualised the term 'family'. As previously stated, upon reflection, this question should have been first on the questionnaire, to provide a better context for the rest of the questions asked. Some of the feedback from participants, both staff and young people, mentioned that it was difficult to know who or what some of the statements were referring to when the word 'family' was used. This feedback was mostly in the form of written notes on the questionnaire itself, although the manager of the YOT was asked if there had been any verbal feedback received from those who had been asked to complete the questionnaires. This observational note is integral to the research, as it clearly supports the need for more exploration of how different people understand the term 'family', particularly in such a diverse society. Furthermore, it highlights the problematic nature of making assumptions about participants' understandings of the term. This was demonstrated by the fact that majority of the respondents were happy to answer the statements and questions about 'family' how they saw fit, but a few had chosen to make written comments on the questionnaire to explain the difficulty they had in knowing who or what 'family' was referring to in the questions/statements. After analysing the data collected, it was confirmed that there was a need for an additional qualitative research element, to explore how young people who have offended choose to define the term 'family'. This was due to some difference in responses between the staff and young people, particularly relating to the definitions of 'family' that the respondents from the two groups had chosen.

Data analysis

All of the questionnaire responses were collated and entered into Microsoft Excel, with the staff and the young people responses on separate sheets. In the first instance, the

responses were entered as they appeared on the questionnaires. A second sheet was then created, and the data was converted into numerical data, denoting '1' for a tick, and a '0' if the box was left unticked. This was done so that the researcher would be able to create basic graphs to visually represent the data and in order to draw comparisons between the staff and young people's responses, indicating whether there were any marked differences.

To analyse the questionnaire responses, the researcher first broke the data into three distinct sections: demographics, statements of family life, and definitions of 'family. The demographic information (age, gender and ethnicity) was put into tables (appendix H) to show both the number of responses, and these were then converted into percentages, so that the responses by young people and the staff could be compared. It is important to use percentages to compare data sets when the number of people in the groups are not the same. This same protocol was used when comparing the responses on the statements about family life. As each response (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree) was given a numerical label, this made it easier for the researcher to compare between data sets. Furthermore, for ease of comparisons, the data was also manipulated on a separate sheet, so that the strongly agree and agree responses were condensed into one single measurement of 'agree', and the strongly disagree and disagree responses were condensed into one single measurement of 'disagree'. This condensed format for the data was not intended to replace the full set of data, and in the final reporting of the findings (chapter seven) both the full set and the condensed sets of data are used to demonstrate the key findings.

The questionnaires were only distributed to the YOT in the London borough and were not used with the Glasgow-based group. The response rate amongst staff was high, with the majority of staff members (20 out of a potential 26) completing and returning the questionnaire. However, the response rate amongst the young people was quite low, with only 37 (out of a potential 90-100 young people on the books at the YOT) being completed and returned. The low response rate amongst the young people was explained by the YOT manager as being due to the staff not always remembering to hand out the questionnaires during scheduled meetings with the young people, combined with the young people's lack of willingness to complete 'yet another survey'. Although the first issue was anticipated, the second was not. Unbeknownst to the

researcher at the point of designing the project, it was very common practice for the YOT caseworkers to distribute surveys to the young people, to collect their feedback on various activities they had engaged in. As such, during a six-month court order with the YOT, the young people were likely to be asked to complete numerous surveys. This low response rate from the young people and the acknowledgement that questionnaires were not the most effective way of involving the young people in research, contributed to identifying the need to continue the research project with a more qualitative, and engaging approach.

Focus group

The main aim of the focus group was to explore how young people understand and define the term 'family'. To encourage discussion during the focus group, a simple word-association activity was developed (appendix E), which was based on the findings from a previous study. Weigel (2008) asked university students to compile a list of words associated with the central term 'family' as the first stage in his study. The purpose of this was to identify the key features of 'family'. The next stage in his study was to ask a second group of university students to rate these features according to their "centrality or goodness to the category" of 'family' (Weigel, 2008: 1432). For the focus groups that were conducted as part of the primary research in this thesis, the list of words that were generated as part of Weigel's (2008) study were written onto flashcards. The young people (participants) were then asked to arrange these on the table as a visual representation of how they relate to, and help to define, the central term 'family'. However, this activity was designed and introduced to the participants as a suggested and interactive way of engaging them in a discussion about 'family' and its meanings. It must be noted here that participants were not required to complete this activity as part of the research, and as such, both groups approached the discussion and the flashcards in slightly different ways. For the London-based group, participants took it in turns to pick up a flashcard that they related to the word 'family' and then as a group, discussed the word on the flashcard. For the Glasgow-based group, participants used the words on the flashcards to prompt and assist with the drawings that they did, which actually all turned out looking like spider diagrams whereby they had organised the words into categories (see chapter seven for full discussion of findings, including the drawings).

Often associated with market research, focus groups provide a unique setting to discuss a topic of interest. The setting is considered unique, as the interactional nature of the participants generates additional data (Devlin, 2018). This was one of the main reasons that focus groups were chosen as the main research method, over the one-on-one interview method. With the researcher approaching this topic from a social constructionist perspective, and the understanding that terms such as 'family' are socially constructed, both through everyday life and through policy (see chapters four and two, respectively), it was necessary to research this concept within a group environment. As the research project was to be made up of different 'slices of data' to build a new and emerging theory (Urquhart, 2013), it was important to also consider the group dynamics and the interactions between group members, as well as the spoken words of the discussion. Furthermore, had the research been conducted using one-on-one interviews with the young people, there was a concern that the young people would not feel comfortable in such a setting, and so discussions between the young person and the researcher may not have generated sufficient data for analysis.

For solo researchers, focus groups also make more efficient use of time, as opposed to individual interviews. As the aim of this research was to record the voices of the young people, a group setting was preferred, to create a more informal and relaxed environment for the young people, so that they would not feel intimidated or anxious about talking to a researcher. The inclusion of a 'known' practitioner in the focus group setting was also used as a mechanism for encouraging discussion amongst the young people. As the researcher considered herself an 'outsider' to the young people in the focus groups, it was decided that having another adult present, that already held a relationship and some rapport with the young people, could be used to 'bridge the gap' and help to facilitate the session. This 'known' practitioner was also useful in the group settings to act as a moderator, should the need arise. The following section will provide a detailed account of how the data was recorded and then subsequently analysed, all following the principles of grounded theory methodology (GTM).

Data recording and analysis

As previously discussed, the young people in the London-based group had chosen not to be audio recorded, and so the researcher made handwritten observational field

notes throughout the focus group session. As the session had been planned with the intention of using the tape recorder, the researcher did not have a template prepared for recording notes during the session. As such, notes were made as thoroughly and as quickly as possible, collecting only a few direct quotes from the young people. Although an arduous task at the time, it did mean that the data could be anonymised as it was being collected. A key was also produced, with the real participant names recorded and next to them the allocated pseudonym, which would be used when the notes were typed up. In the long-term, this eliminated the need for transcribing an extensive audio recording of the discussion, which did speed up the analysis process. Handwriting notes during the discussion did also mean that additional, non-verbal information could be collected, which included observations on the group behaviour and individuals' behaviour.

These notes were then typed up after the session, with the real names of participants being replaced with the pseudonyms, to maintain the anonymity of the young people. Once the fieldwork notes were in an electronic format, the original notes were placed in a sealed envelope and stored. This was in case any of the participants sought to remove their contribution after the focus group had taken place, but before the thesis was published. The very first stage of data analysis that was conducted, sought to highlight any key themes that emerged from the discussions. As the researcher was following grounded theory methodology (GTM) and a 'bottom-up' approach to analysing the data (Urquhart, 2013), the key themes at this point were vague and so grouping of these was not attempted just yet.

For the second stage of data analysis, the key themes were organised into loose categories, as connections or 'relationships' between the constructs were beginning to emerge (Urquhart, 2013). From this, a template form was developed (appendix G) so that the researcher could organise the handwritten notes into the main themes that were beginning to emerge and that were associated with the central concept of 'family'. It also provided a useful framework for when the Glasgow-based focus group was conducted, so that the key themes that emerged, could be compared. Transferring the handwritten notes eventually into this template was beneficial for gaining an initial impression on how the findings might eventually be organised and presented, for coherence. The final stage of data analysis drew together all 'slices of data' that had been collected, to identify key themes and concepts, and to understand the

relationships between them all (Urquhart, 2013). This process is described after the following section, which gives a detailed description of the data collection and analysis from the Glasgow-based group.

Methods: Glasgow

This section of the methodology chapter will provide a detailed account of the specific research methods used with the Glasgow-based group. A focus group was conducted here to generate data, which was then analysed. The collection methods and the analysis that was conducted will be detailed, to provide a transparent and credible account of the process. The participants for the focus group were young people who were accessed through a project already being run in Glasgow, which involved young people who had offended and who also had experience of the care system in Scotland (also known as the Children's Hearings system, see chapter two).

Why access through a current project?

As the main aim of this project was to involve young people who had offended as the main participants, the design needed to include a way to access this group. Drawing on contacts that the researcher already had, contact was made with several organisations across the UK requesting access to the young people that they engaged with. One group, based in Glasgow, responded enthusiastically. The group had been formed as part of an ongoing project with young people who have experience of the care and criminal justice system in Scotland (the Children's hearings system). The group was made up of young people who were very passionate about wanting their experiences, and their voices, to be heard. As such, when they were approached about participating in the focus group, they were very excited to share their thoughts on the matter of family. Accessing young people who were part of an already-established group proved extremely useful, as the level of engagement was higher than that of the London-based group. A total of eleven young people attended the focus group which was held at the venue and time that they would normally meet, and all of them engaged very well. The remainder of this section will provide a detailed account of how the focus group was conducted, and how the data that was collected was analysed.

Focus group

The main purpose of the focus group discussion was to generate data on the young people's understandings and experiences of 'family', which has largely been ignored in previous research and policy that concerns them. Based on the researcher's experiences from conducting the first focus group in London, a main adjustment was made in the approach used during the focus group with the Glasgow-based group. This was that the researcher came more prepared to the session and anticipating the young people not wanting to have their discussion audio recorded. Despite this, no template was used to record the field notes, as it was felt this may hinder the data collection process and not stay true to the 'bottom-up' approach that was being drawn on from GTM. However, the researcher did feel generally more prepared the second time round. As such, rather than telling the young people during the 'project outline' (appendix C) that the discussion would be audio recorded, the researcher instead asked the young people whether they would be comfortable with using a tape recorder. This approach felt much more ethical to the researcher, and better reflected the project that was developing and the theory that was to emerge. Placing children and young people at the centre of the research and making it clear about the power that they hold in the research setting was an increasingly important part of the project and the methods that were being employed. Eventually, these small details would accumulate and demonstrate that the emerging theory and the methodological approach could be used to complement the 'positive youth justice' movement, and the need for placing young people's voices at the forefront of theory, research, and policy (Case et al, 2020).

As with the focus group conducted with the London-based group, the semi-structured list of questions was on hand to the researcher and moderator that were facilitating the group (appendix D), and the session plan (appendix C) was also followed so that everything was covered in the time allocated for the session, which was one hour. When the topic of 'family' was first introduced to the group, there were several of the participants who felt that it was difficult to put into words what they thought. Therefore, the group were given some time to reflect and to use the paper and pens that were on hand, to see about visually representing their understandings and experiences. It was at this point in the research project, that the researcher realised the importance of allowing the young people flexibility in the generation of the data. As such, the data

collected in Glasgow consisted of verbal discussion notes, non-verbal observational notes, and visual material in the form of the young people's drawings. The same word-association activity (appendix E) offered to the participants in London, was also made available to the young people in Glasgow. As the discussion progressed, a few of the flashcards were used to demonstrate points that the young people wanted to make and were incorporated into their drawings. For some, they chose to organise the flashcards into categories. As such, the young people led the discussion, and used their drawings as talking points. This provided an insight into how this group of young people thought about the term 'family' and based on both their experiences of the care and criminal justice system, their ideas about 'family' had changed over time. For the remainder of the session, the group talked more generally about the term 'family' and how useful they thought it was as a word, being that it is largely undefined and has different meanings to everyone.

Again, conducting the research in a group setting rather than as one-on-one interviews worked well and was best placed for the type of discussion that was required. In contrast to the London-based group who were initially quite shy, as the young people in the group had not previously met, the young people in the Glasgow-based group were familiar with one another. In fact, they had previously met several times as part of the project that they were involved in. With the participants already holding good relationships and feeling comfortable discussing potentially sensitive topics as a group, this made the focus group discussion run much more smoothly than that with the London-based group. This was reflected in the fieldwork journal that the researcher kept, and it was stated that conducting the focus group in Glasgow felt much more relaxed and the discussions and data came more easily. Whether this was due to the group dynamics, or the researcher now holding some experience of conducting a focus group, or a bit of both. The following section will provide a detailed account of how the data was recorded and then subsequently analysed, all following the principles of grounded theory methodology (GTM).

Data recording and analysis

Like the London-based group, the young people in Glasgow chose not to have their discussion audio recorded. As already mentioned, the researcher was more prepared

for this response, and so was fully equipped ready for this. Again, there was a focus on recording as many direct quotes from the young people as possible, with non-verbal observations also finding their way into the notes. These included comments about how the young people were seated/spread out around the room, and whether they chose to group together or work individually on their drawings and organising of the flashcards. Reflecting upon how the data was collected and the fact that the data from both the focus groups mainly comprised of handwritten observational notes, in hindsight, it would have been beneficial for the researcher to have had a laptop to type up notes, as this could have generated more notes than what was actually recorded, as typing speed is much faster than writing speed. Despite this, a sufficient number of observational notes were recorded, that captured the main themes of the discussion, and also included some of the non-verbal and behavioural observations.

In addition to the observational notes made by the researcher, the data collected from the Glasgow-based group comprised of another 'slice of data', which were drawings the young people made. It is difficult to describe these drawings (photos are included in the findings chapter seven), however, they mostly consisted of words taken from the flashcards that were offered to the participants, but also words from their own experiences of 'family'. As such, the term 'drawings' is used loosely to refer to this data that the young people chose to create. Some of the 'drawings' could be described as spider diagrams, whereas others were simply sorting some of the words from the flashcards into groups. Therefore, it was also difficult to know how to analyse these drawings, and so the literature was consulted once more to see if similar research methods had been used before and how the researchers had sought to analyse these.

Much of the literature that was found spoke about the use of children's drawings in developing understandings about a variety of different topics, such as home life and school life. Bland (2012) describes some of the main issues that may occur when conducting analyses of visual data generated in research with children and young people. In particular, he states that the lack of good models of practice have stemmed directly from the lack of use of 'freehand drawings' as a research method. However, he argued that "drawing can present visual researchers with rich data" (Bland, 2012: 236), as it can enable children and young people to convey their understandings and experiences of certain concepts, where verbal language may not come so easily. When discussing how to approach analysing such 'rich qualitative data', Bland (2012)

draws on the work of others who have previously used visual data as the primary source in research. Although he does demonstrate that it may be possible to code and categorise visual data in much the same way that text can be analysed, many of the examples that are given used visual data as the main research method and therefore collected a large quantity of visual data for comparing (Galman, 2009). Alternatively, Walker (2007) states that in order to properly understand the visual data, it must be accompanied by verbal data, whether in the form of a discussion or a written explanation. She argues that this not only helps with explanations of what the drawings mean to the participant, but that additional information may be generated if specific and probing questions are asked about the drawing. As such, she states that "drawings served as a way to jump-start discussions with children" (2007: 100) and can provide an insight into their understandings and experiences. The 'drawings' that were collected during the focus group in Glasgow were analysed in much the same way as Walker (2007) recommends, as they were used primarily as a talking point during the group discussions. As such, no 'categories' or key themes have been ascertained from the 'drawings', but instead, they are used in the findings chapter (chapter seven) to demonstrate and reinforce certain points that are raised and findings that emerged.

The analysis of the focus group discussions that followed, were recorded and analysed in much the same way as the focus group discussions had been processed from the London-based group. Again, the notes were typed up using pseudonyms to replace the real names of participants, with the original hard copy of the handwritten observational notes being placed into an envelope and sealed, to be stored until the thesis had been published. Again, an 'open coding' approach was used as the initial stage of data analysis, to simply identify when the participants had spoken about specific themes and concepts relating to the term 'family'. Following the analysis principles of GTM, these pieces of the data were then coded and grouped into vague categories, to see what themes were emerging from the data (Urquhart, 2013). It was important to consider this data set as being separate from that of the London-based one, and so the two data sets were not mixed. However, the final stage of analysis was to draw the two sets together to compare whether similar or different themes had emerged, and to understand what the relationships (if any) between them were.

As such, the template that had already been developed during the analysis stage for the London-based group (appendix G), was used. By attempting to 'fit' the Glasgow-based findings into the template, it was possible to see what themes were similar. Although not a conventional way of analysing data, an important part of GTM is understanding the relationships between the emerging themes and concepts. Charmaz (2006) calls this 'theoretical sorting', whereby key concepts are sorted into categories and relational links between the categories are identified. Furthermore, if a researcher is striving for data saturation, then identifying similarities in the emerging themes is key for reaching this (Urquhart, 2013). Charmaz (2006) defines this 'grounded theory saturation' as the point at which "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories" (2006: 113). During the final stage of analysis, when comparisons were being drawn between the two sets of data generated from the focus groups, it was clear to see some similarities in themes that emerged from the data. Therefore, it is argued that data saturation was beginning to be met, as some of the same themes were found in the data from the Glasgow-based group as were found in the London-based group. However, due to the lack of time left on the research project, no more data was collected, and so complete data saturation is not claimed in this thesis. The implications of this, and the recommendation for further research is discussed in chapter nine.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the methodological approach that was employed throughout the research project. It was transparent and clear about the research methods that were chosen and the data analysis methods that were used. Justifications for all decisions were explained, with reference to academic literature that informed the decision-making process. The ethical approval process was also detailed, and the methodological challenges that were faced during the research journey. The methodological approach was chosen based on its ability to provide a clear framework for conducting an exploratory piece of research with young people. As such, the data was generated in collaboration with the young participants, to draw on their own understandings and experiences of 'family', something which has been significantly lacking in previous research and policy. The next chapter will present the

findings from the youth justice policy analysis that was conducted as the first part of this research project.

CHAPTER SIX - FINDINGS PART 1: YOUTH JUSTICE POLICY ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter will provide the findings from a content analysis that was conducted using key pieces of legislation and policy documents that impact on children and young people who have offended. The purpose of this analysis was to identify how the concept of 'family' was used in the documents and if any clear definition of the term was provided. As 'family' has played a central role in much political rhetoric and research, particularly over the last thirty years, it was important to understand how the concept has been employed in youth justice policy.

 The aim is to identify and analyse:

> (1) what the document or legislation says regarding children and their families

> (2) what definition, if any, is provided for the key terms used (such as 'family', 'parent', 'parental responsibility')

The analysis that follows has been organised into three sections. The first section analyses legislation that regards children more generally in terms of their use of the concept of 'family' and its definition. The second section draws more specifically on legislation that concerns young offenders, or 'children in conflict with the law' (Case, 2018). The final section provides an analysis of key policy reports from the field of youth justice, that have been published to review the youth justice system, propose changes to the youth justice system, or to implement new programmes and interventions for youth justice practitioners. As the primary research (see chapter seven) was conducted in both England and Scotland, there is a variety of UK Parliament and Scottish Parliament legislations and policies that have been included in the analysis.

SECTION 1: GENERAL LEGISLATION THAT IMPACTS CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Children Act (1989)

The main purpose of the *Children Act (1989)* was to reform the law that related to children, particularly those considered in need of care and being looked after by the State. As such, the Act (1989) sets out provisions for children's homes, fostering and adoption processes, and voluntary organisations that deal with children and young people in need. In keeping with approaches to children at the time, welfare was the overarching principle of the *Children Act (1989),* with children's wishes and needs placed at the centre of all decisions regarding them. The Act formed the basis of many subsequent pieces of legislation. *The Children Act (1989)* does not provide any clear definition of 'family' or 'parent', instead, the focus is on defining 'parental responsibility'. Section 3(1) identifies 'parental responsibility' as referring to, "all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property". Section 2(1) identifies that 'parental responsibility' is automatically attributed to both biological parents, "where a child's father and mother were married to, or civil partners of, each other at the time of his birth". In situations where the parents were not married, or civil partners, at the time of birth, Section 4 outlines the ways in which the father might acquire 'parental responsibility'. This section has further been updated in 2005 to include section 4A "acquisition of parental responsibility by step-parent", and again in 2009 to include section 4ZA "acquisition of parental responsibility by second female parent". The addition of both these sections demonstrates that policy is willing to move forward and acknowledge a broader range of family structures in society. Section 5(3) outlines the basic premise of acquiring 'guardian' status for a child, that "a parent who has parental responsibility for his child may appoint another individual to be the child's guardian in the event of his death". This further demonstrates the power associated with an individual who has been designated by law as holding 'parental responsibility' for a child.

It is important to note that subsequent versions of the *Children's Act*, or in fact any other piece of legislation reviewed do not go into as much detail as this regarding the definition of 'parental responsibility', or 'family' and 'parent(s)' for that matter. Some of the subsequent pieces of legislation make specific reference to the *Children Act (1989).* For others that do not make any reference or provide a definition, it has been

assumed that they are using the defining features of 'parental responsibility', as taken from the *Children Act (1989).*

Adoption and Children Act (2002)

The Adoption and Children Act (2002) legislation was implemented in response to a government white paper, with proposals to improve the performance of the adoption service. Part of these proposals was to place more emphasis on child welfare, and to put the child at the centre of decisions made regarding them. The overall aim of this legislation was to align more closely with the welfare provisions set out in the *Children Act (1989).* As such, Section 25 of the *Adoption and Children Act (2002)* outlines the importance of 'parental responsibility', as it is defined in the *Children Act (1989).* In circumstances where the parents have placed the child with an adoption agency, or where an adoption order is in force, 'parental responsibility' is passed to the adoption agency. Furthermore, when the child is placed with prospective adopters, the 'parental responsibility' is then passed to them. Sections 67 and 68 of the *Adoption and Children Act (2002)* outlines the terminology that may be used, by law, in reference to children who have been adopted, and their 'new' family. Once the adoption process is complete, Section 67 states that, "an adopted person is to be treated in law as if born as the child of the adopters or adopter", thus conferring their status. Section 68 builds on this and outlines the use of terminology with regards to the 'new' family members. To have written into legislation regarding the child adoption process, the 'correct' terminology that may be used in law to refer to 'adoptive relatives', adds support to the argument that 'family' plays a central role in legislation, policy implementation and law.

The Child Trust Funds Act (2004) briefly refers to the definition of 'parental responsibility', in identifying who is eligible to open a trust fund on behalf of a child. This reinforces the importance of the definition provided by the *Children Act (1989),* as it is still being used nearly twenty years after it was initially implemented into law. The proposed changes reported in the government's paper *Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004)* led to the implementation of the updated *Children Act (2004).* This Act intended to ensure a voice for children and young people, and crucially established a new 'Children's Commissioner' to oversee this. The Act also placed more emphasis on local authorities to take responsibility for ensuring children's well-being in their local

area. Although the *Children Act (2004*) did not add to, or change, the definition and importance of 'parental responsibility' from the *Children Act (1989),* it did identify in Section 10 that local authorities in England, "must have regard to the importance of parents and other persons caring for children in improving the well-being of children". Again, an acknowledgement in legislation as to the important role parents and carers play in children and young people's lives, despite the lack of clear definition as to who these labels may refer to. On the other hand, the vagueness does leave the law open to interpretation. Whether this is beneficial or not is still debatable, but the lack of definition has been highlighted by some as potentially problematic (Brown, 2019). It has been found that the legal understanding of 'family' is still underpinned by the concept of the 'nuclear family', which becomes even more evident in circumstances and legislation that lacks any clear definitions of who or what the term 'family' refers to (Brown, 2019).

Section 7(6) of the *Children and Young Persons Act (2008)* defines 'children' as being persons under the age of eighteen. When outlining provision of accommodation and maintenance for children who are looked after by a local authority, the Act (2008) refers to the *Children Act (1989)* in relation to the ways in which looked after children are to be accommodated, although the terminology used in the criteria for being considered as 'suitable' is somewhat confusing and contradictory of the 'parental responsibility' definition being used. The local authority can make arrangements for a child under their care, to live with (a) a parent, or (b) a person who is not a parent but has parental responsibility. Up until this point, all of the legislation that has been reviewed has relied on the 'parental responsibility' clause from the *Children Act (1989)* as a way of defining a parent holding responsibility over a child. However, according to the *Children and Young Persons Act (2008*), there is a marked difference between a parent and a person who holds 'parental responsibility' for a child. Despite this, there is no evidence of a clear distinction being made between the two terms.

Family Law (Scotland) Act (2006)
The purpose of the *Family Law (Scotland) Act (2006)* was to implement changes to family law in Scotland, with particular attention paid to the rights and responsibilities of parents for their children. This Act acknowledged the changes in family formations

in recent decades and intended to address legal vulnerabilities families may face. In addition to this, family law was needed to be updated to reflect the increasing attention being paid to child welfare and rights, and so the Act (2006) also focused on protecting the best interests of the child. Section 23 amends parts of the *Children (Scotland) Act (1995)* regarding parental rights and responsibilities of unmarried fathers, so that they can be registered at the birth. Prior to this amendment, fathers were only afforded these rights and responsibilities if they were married to the mother at the time of birth. In further recognition of a wider range of family formations, section 25 makes amendments to the *Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act (1981)*, in altering the definition of 'cohabiting couples' to also include same sex couples. However, there are still requirements that must be met in order for a couple to qualify as being 'cohabitants', such as, the length of time the couple have been living together, the nature of their relationship, and the extent of financial arrangements between the two people. Section 34 of the *Family Law (Scotland) Act (2006)* made amendments to language in legislation concerning cohabiting couples, replacing 'man and the woman' instead for 'two persons' acknowledging a wider range of family formations. Finally, schedule 1 of this Act (2006) further amends the *Civil Partnership Act (2004)* to extend the definition of 'child of the family' to encompass "any child or grandchild of either civil partner, and any person who has been brought up or treated by either civil partner as if the person were a child of that partner". Moreover, amendments are made to the definition of 'family' to encompass the "civil partners in the civil partnership, together with any child, grandchild or person so treated by them". After analysing the whole of the Act (2006) these are the only attempts made at providing a definition of 'family', which are not particularly clear. This demonstrates how difficult it is to generate a singular definition of 'family' that is relevant to everyone. However, there is a clear attempt to update family law in accordance with changes in acceptance of a wider range of 'families' in society, and most importantly, providing legal protections for them.

Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act (2007)

As with the *Family Law (Scotland) Act (2006),* the *Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act (2007)* sought to amend and update legislation to incorporate a wider range of family formations, and as such, allowing a wider range of people to adopt. Section 29

provides a definition for who constitutes a 'couple', and includes people who are married, civil partners, or living in an "enduring family relationship". Furthermore, in the Act (2007), there are no restrictions on the couple only being heterosexual. As this particular piece of legislation concerns children and young people who are being adopted, it primarily speaks about 'parents' rather than 'family'. Section 29 also provides a definition for 'parent', stating that it means, "a parent who has any parental responsibilities or parental rights in relation to the child". This echoes what is stated in the *Children Act (1989),* which is concerned with 'parental responsibility' rather than providing a clear definition of 'parent'. However, Section 30 of the Act (2007) which covers 'adoption by one person' does mention that person A can make an application for an adoption order if they are a "natural parent" of the child, and if the other "natural parent" is (a) dead (b) cannot be found (c) there is no other parent (d) or, exclusion of the other natural parent is justified. Despite this, there is no definition provided as to who is meant by "natural parent", and so this concept is assumed to be known and understood by the reader of the legislation.

Section 31 goes on to state that in cases where the court considers the parent or guardian unable to satisfactorily carry out their rights and responsibilities towards their child, an adoption order may be made, and the child removed from their care. This provision is made in accordance with the child welfare approach in Scotland, and as such, places the best interests of the child at the centre of the adoption process. In spite of this, there is no mention of how the child's views and opinions are to be considered during the process, which is another central part of the child welfare and rights-based approach that is used in Scotland. As such, this piece of legislation is contradictory in places, but overall, it does acknowledge a wider range of family forms, and does take into consideration the child's welfare and safety. Regardless, the words 'parent' and 'parental responsibility' are used a lot in this legislation, with only brief definitions provided in section 119. "Parental responsibilities" and "parental rights" are given the meanings provided in the *Children (Scotland) Act (1995),* which state that "a parent has… the responsibility to safeguard and promote the child's health, development and welfare" (section 1, Children (Scotland) Act, 1995). Also, in terms of the 'parental rights', a parent has the right "to control, direct or guide … the child's upbringing … [and] to act as the child's legal representative" (section 2, Children (Scotland) Act, 1995). In terms of who constitutes 'parents' in both of these sections,

section 3 states that "a child's mother has parental responsibilities and parental rights in relation to him" but that "his father has such responsibilities and rights in relation to him only if (i) married to the mother at the time of the child's conception or subsequently, or (ii) where not married to the mother at that time or subsequently, the father is registered as the child's father". As such, this demonstrates that an attempt has been made in Scottish legislation to provide a clear directive as to who, or what, constitutes 'parents', and sets out their rights and responsibilities towards their child(ren).

Children and Families Act (2014)

The purpose of the *Children and Families Act (2014)* was to amend and improve operation of the family justice system, and the way in which private family law is conducted. Private family law seeks to resolve issues between family members, whereas public family law is concerned with the intervention of public authorities. Section 11 outlines the law regarding the welfare of the child, when making decisions about 'parental responsibility'. It states that it is adopting the definition from the *Children Act (1989)* and is concerned that the "involvement of that parent in the life of the child" should be on the basis that the child's welfare is upheld, and that involvement would not put the child at risk of suffering harm. Section 11(2) defines 'involvement' as "involvement of some kind, either direct or indirect, but not any particular division of a child's time", again leaving this open to interpretation as to the extent of activities considered 'involvement' in a child's life. Section 11(3) goes on to state that "'parent' means parent of the child concerned". With no definition of 'parent' provided at any point in this Act, it is difficult to know precisely who this piece of legislation concerns. As previously mentioned, Brown (2019) sees this as extremely problematic, after reviewing several pieces from Family Law himself, in that magistrates and judges are left to draw upon their own assumptions about family, and family structure, when making decisions related to family matters. Often these assumptions take the form of the nuclear family, and as such, are not representative of the many different family types found in contemporary society.

Section 127 of the *Children and Families Act (2014)* outlines the law in relation to employment regulations and the circumstances under which an employee can

reasonably apply to take time off during working hours, to accompany a pregnant woman to ante-natal appointments. This section is particularly important in the discussion of 'family' in policy, as it applies to an individual based on the relationship, they hold with either the pregnant woman or the expected child. Predominantly, legislation concerning children puts them at the centre of decisions, however, Section 127 of the *Children and Families Act (2014)* moves away from this slightly, and also includes the welfare needs of the pregnant woman. Furthermore, it is important to note the terminology that is used in Section 127(7), which lists individuals who are considered to hold a 'qualifying relationship' with the pregnant woman or her expected child. These are (a) husband or civil partner of the woman, (b) "the person, being of a different sex or the same sex, lives with the woman in an enduring family relationship but is not a relative of the woman", (c) father of the expected child. Here, there are no definitions provided, so it is assumed that 'father' refers to be the biological father. It is particularly interesting that the policymakers involved with writing this legislation, felt the need to specify that the person could be of different- or same-sex to the pregnant woman. However, it is stated that these clauses make amendments to the *Employment Rights Act (1996)* and that these amendments were introduced after the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act (2013*) came into effect. As such, this further demonstrates that the government and legislators are increasingly acknowledging a broader variety of family structures and amending legislation accordingly. Furthermore, that the 'family' still plays a central role in legislation that is related to children and young people.

As with majority of the legislation reviewed since the implementation of the *Children Act (1989),* a focus on children's welfare has been central to law. As such, much of what is written, concerns the relationships held between the child and their 'parent(s)'. However, there has been little to no mention of any other 'family members' in legislation that has been reviewed as part of this analysis. This first section of analysis has reviewed generic social policy that relates to children and their families, to understand the role that 'family' and 'parents' have played in legislation. It is clear from this analysis that the terminology used is not always clearly defined, and there has been and continues to be, a heavy over-reliance on the concept of 'parental responsibility', as defined in the *Children Act (1989).*

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014)

The purpose of the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014)* was to improve services and provisions for children and their families. It aimed to create a single point of contact around every young person, so that coordinated planning and delivery of services could be ensured. This Act built on the child welfare approach in Scotland, and further implemented children's rights from the UNCRC (1989) into all aspects of a child's life. Part 9 of the Act (2014) sets out the responsibilities and provisions of those who are considered to be 'corporate parents'. Schedule 4 provides a list of 24 'corporate' bodies who could be identified as a 'corporate parent' in a children's hearing case. These included, but are not limited to a local authority, the Scottish Social Services Council, the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland, and the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland.

Section 67 details the provisions for continuing care with looked after children, who have reached the age of 16. As part of this section, the definition of 'carer' is given as "the family or persons with whom the placement is made". However, there is no further definition of 'family' provided, and so it is argued that this is assumed to be known by people enacting this legislation. Section 68 deals with provisions of services to parents of children who may be at risk of becoming a looked after child. Instead of referring to them as parents, the terminology used is 'qualifying person'. The definition given is "a person (a) who is related to the child, (b) who has any parental rights or responsibilities in relation to the child, or (c) with whom the child is, or has been, living". As such, this definition could refer to a wide range of people, as it does not put any restrictions on only referring to biological parents, or people the child lives with (household). This range of options for defining 'family' is reflected in the questions asked during the primary research with young people who have offended (see chapter seven). This finding that a variety of family structures have been included in policy that concerns young people and their families further demonstrates the importance of conducting primary research, because even though 'family' and 'parents' play a central role in policy concerning young people who have offended, the children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored.

Section 72 sets out the parameters of kinship care orders, which would appoint a 'qualifying person' as a legal guardian of a child. These orders can be made for a person who (a) is related to the child (b) is a friend or acquaintance of a person related

to the child, or (c) has such other relationship to, or connection with, the child". Importantly, though, it specifies that a parent of the child is not classed as a 'qualifying person' in the care of kinship care orders. The inclusion of such a care order echoes research that has explored the importance of wider kinship networks, particularly for young people that are, or have been, involved in the care system (Stein, 2012). As such, it is argued that this particular Act (2014) is more considerate of young people's potential range of 'family' experiences than other pieces of policy that have been included in this analysis.

Children (Scotland) Act (2020)

The purpose of the *Children (Scotland) Act (2020)* was to ensure further compliance with the UNCRC (1989) in terms of children's rights being upheld, particularly in family court cases. As such, it places an emphasis on the best interests of the child, and importantly, seeks to ensure that the views of the child are heard. This is in keeping with Article 12 (UNCRC, 1989), which states that children's views and opinions should be considered in all decisions that concern them. In general, this Act (2020) seeks to amend and update previous pieces of legislation, including the *Children (Scotland) Act (1995).* Despite this, there are no amendments made to the definitions provided in the Act (1995) in terms of 'parents' or 'parental responsibilities'. Instead, it focuses on improving children's rights in expressing their views on matters that concern them. In particular, this Act (2020) states children's views should be considered in instances of children's hearings, adoptions and other related orders, and in any cases that are heard within a family court.

Section 13 of the *Children (Scotland) Act (2020)* also amends the *Children (Scotland) Act (1995)* by promoting contact between looked after children and siblings. This section does provide some clear definition, that "two people are siblings if they have at least one parent in common", demonstrating that biological relatedness is regarded as most important, over who the child feels most connected to or safest with. However, this is all based on the assumption that the 'parent' of each child is known, and that the definition of who is considered a 'parent' is clear, which it has been argued is not the case (see the *Family Law (Scotland) Act, 2006).* Research conducted by Brown (2019) demonstrated that a lack of clear definition as to who is considered to be 'family'

in law, can have negative impacts on how judges and magistrates make 'family-related' decisions in courts (see chapter four for full review). Overall, this piece of policy relies on definitions of 'parents' and 'parental responsibilities' that are provided in the *Children (Scotland) Act (1995)*, which was written and published 25 years previous. As such, it is argued that although some aspects of the *Children (Scotland) Act (2020)* does extend children's rights, it has not considered amending the definitions provided for 'parent' or 'parental responsibilities' or attempted to provide a definition of 'family' that is reflective of children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family life', but instead, uses adult policymakers' assumptions about who should be considered 'family' to children and young people. This section has presented the analysis of more general legislation that may impact on young people who have offended. The following section will provide findings from a content analysis that was conducted on specific youth justice policy in England and Scotland.

SECTION 2: YOUTH JUSTICE POLICY

Crime and Disorder Act (1998)

The purpose of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)* was to detail provisions for preventing crime and disorder in England and Wales. Crucially, for children and young people, it also abolished the presumption that a child between the ages of 10-14 are *doli incapax,* therefore, holding all children who are ten years and older, fully accountable and responsible for any crimes that they commit. This change in policy demonstrated the political rhetoric at the time, that was very concerned with responsibilisation of both children and their parents, and in promoting their 'tough on crime' approach.

With the implementation of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998),* prevention was introduced as the main focus of the Youth Justice System, with the overall aim to make it a more effective, efficient and economical system. New methods of assessment and intervention were implemented, which were largely based on a risk-factor approach. Formal arrangements for the new Youth Justice Board and Youth Offending Teams were also actioned as part of this legislation. Part of the 'making communities safer' approach, combined with the 'tough on the causes of crime' rhetoric (Blair, 1995), the

New Labour government sought to tackle the issue of youth crime in a more coherent and effective manner. As well as a heavy focus on a risk-based approach, responsibilisation of both the young offenders and their parents took centre stage in new court orders and interventions.

Section 8 of the Act (1998) details the new 'parenting orders' that were introduced as part of this legislation. A way of making parents more responsible for their young people who engaged in antisocial or criminal behaviour. However, the lack of a clear definition for 'parent' leaves this legislation open for interpretation by courts. In Section 8(2), a parenting order can be brought against an individual identified as, "a person who is a parent or guardian of the child or young person". Unlike other pieces of legislation already reviewed, there is no reference back the *Children Act (1989)* and 'parental responsibility', nor is there an attempt at expanding the given definition. For a court order that is intended to responsibilise parents over their children's behaviour, it is difficult to comprehend how this is actually achieved in law, without a clear definition of who the 'parent' may be. Whether the 'parent' is the biological parent, or whether it is an individual who holds 'parental responsibility' status, according to the *Children Act (1989)*, it is unclear. Part 3, Sections 37-42 of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998*) clearly set out the aims and provisions available to local authorities as part of the responsibilities of the refurbished Youth Justice System and the newly introduced Youth Justice Board. Despite the heavy focus on 'responsibilisation' in the New Labour agenda on youth crime, and in particular, on holding parents more accountable for their children's behaviour, it is strange that there is no mention of 'parents' or 'family' in this part of the legislation.

Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003)

The main purpose of the *Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003)* was to ensure that the police had appropriate powers to deal with anti-social behaviour, including nuisance behaviour caused by young people and problems related to drug dealing. Part 3 of the *Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003)* updated and amended the wording with regards to parenting orders introduced under the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998),* to reflect the move from 'sessions' to 'programmes'. By doing so, it broadened the remit of resources and support available to parents, who had been placed on a parenting

order. Furthermore, in the explanatory notes that accompany this piece of legislation, it states that,

> "All reference to 'parent' includes 'guardian' which takes its meaning from the *Children and Young Person Act (1933*) and includes anyone who, in the opinion of the court, has for the time being the care of the child or young person".

However, with the extensive number of textual amendments and modifications to this early piece of legislation *(Children and Young Persons Act, 1933*), it was difficult to ascertain precisely what 'meaning' the *Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003)* was referring to.

Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act (2011)

The main purpose of the *Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act (2011)* was to restate and amend parts of the law that related to children's hearings. Part 3 of the Act (2011) covers a range of considerations that apply specifically to the children that are to be involved as part of the children's hearings system. Section 25 restates that the purpose of the panel is to ensure the child is safeguarded appropriately and that their welfare and wellbeing is promoted throughout the process, but also throughout their childhood. This section is in keeping with the general child welfare approach in Scotland. Section 27 of the Act (2011) states that the views of the child must be considered in all decisions that concern them, which includes providing children the opportunity to express these views. As such, it is identified that "a child who is aged 12 or over is presumed to be of sufficient age and maturity to form a view". Part 6 of the Act (2011) deals with the investigation and referral to a children's hearing, with section 60 specifically outlining the local authority's duty to refer a child to the hearings system in instances where "the child is in need of protection, guidance, treatment or control". In this one sentence, it encompasses both children who need protection, but also those who have offended. As such, section 61 sets out the duties of the police in referring a case to the children's hearings system, whether the child has been the victim or the perpetrator of an offence. These two sections of the Act (2011) demonstrate Scotland's focus on child welfare, and reinforces the argument originally put forward by the Kilbrandon Committee (1964), which stated that children who offend and looked after children often have common needs. This resulted in the proposal of a 'whole

system approach' which was to deal with all children through the same system, that could provide necessary support, care and control that these children needed, with the overall aim of improving life chances for all children and young people in Scotland (CYCJ, 2019).

Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (2014)

The implementation of the *Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (2014)* saw anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) replaced with 'injunctions' and 'criminal behaviour orders', and, in this piece of legislation, there is no mention of parenting orders to be found. Despite this, during the early days of the Coalition government, the publication of green paper *Breaking the Cycle (MoJ, 2010)* reaffirmed the government's commitment to responsibilising young offenders and their parents, through parenting work with the YOTs and 'informal interventions' (Case, 2018).

Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act (2012)

One of the main purposes of the *Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012),* was to make provisions about sentencing offenders and the rehabilitation of offenders, in particular, introducing diversionary approaches for children and young people who have offended. As such, the Coalition government continued to impact on the youth justice system and uphold their focus on prevention of youth crime. However, the *LASPO Act (2012)* adjusted the focus incrementally, as a range of diversionary approaches were introduced, as a way of keeping children and young people from entering the formal youth justice system. Again, the *LASPO Act (2012)* features no mention of 'parental responsibility' in the form of parenting orders or other means. Therefore, it could be assumed the government rhetoric is changing once again and is moving away from the 'responsibilisation' approach from the last two decades. This section of the chapter aimed to analyse more specific legislation that relates to young offenders, with the intention of analysing the definitions of 'family' and 'parent(s)' that are used. However, from the pieces reviewed, there was very little mention of family or parent/parental responsibility. Even though much of the government rhetoric from the past two decades (1995 – 2015) has focused unequivocally on individualising youth offending behaviour, and holding parents more accountable for their children's

misdemeanours, it would appear that in terms of legislation, this has not been the case.

Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act (2016)

The main purpose of the *Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act (2016)* was to introduce reforms to modernise and enhance certain parts of the Scottish criminal justice system. In particular, it restates provisions on the power of the police to arrest and detain people in custody, including children and young people. Section 22 sets out the conditions under which children (those under the age of 18) are to be kept prior to a court appearance, stating that this should not be a police station. In particular, section 23 outlines the regulations pertaining to providing information to a parent for under 18s. A definition of who is considered a 'parent' is provided, stating that "'parent' includes guardian and any person who has the care of the [child]". However, this section of the Act (2016) also states that if a constable has reasonable grounds to believe that giving information to a 'parent' will be detrimental to the wellbeing of the child, then they are not required to provide this information. This demonstrates that the child's best interests are still being held as most important, which is in keeping with Article 3 of the UNCRC (1989), and the requirement to place the best interests of the child or young person as a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect them.

Section 40 of the *Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act (2016)* outlines the rights of under 18s that are being held in police custody, stating that children under the age of 16 must have access to a parent, or if a parent is unavailable, an appropriate adult should be supplied. However, for those who are 16 or 17 years old, the person they have access to does not have to be a parent but could be any adult (over 18). Again, this is at the discretion of the police to decide whether the person selected is in the best interests of the child or young person, on the grounds of their wellbeing and safety. As stated in section 23, 'parent' is defined in section 40 as including "guardian and any person who has the care of the person in custody". As such, this could also refer to any person or 'corporate' body who has been identified as a 'corporate parent' for the child or young person (see the *Children and Young Person (Scotland) Act, 2014,* for a full review of this). Overall, this Act (2016) does provide some vague definitions of 'parent', which could encompass a wide range of people that are present in the young

person's life. However, it is clear that in all aspect of law, the best interests and the welfare and wellbeing of the child or young person is considered a top priority. This section provided findings from the analysis conducted on youth justice policy that has been published and implemented in England and Scotland. The final section of this chapter will provide findings from the analysis conducted on key youth justice policy reports.

SECTION 3: KEY YOUTH JUSTICE POLICY REPORTS

Respect Action Plan (2006)

The Respect Action Plan (Home Office, 2006) formed part of the Government's approach to 'fixing broken Britain'. On the opening pages, the document sets out the aims, as being "about taking a broader approach" (2006: 1). It identifies "stable families and strong, cohesive communities" (2006: 1) as being integral to the Respect Plan, and in reducing disrespectful behaviour within British society. Chapter four 'supporting families' and chapter five 'a new approach to the most challenging families', set the overarching tone of this approach on targeting problematic families. It is argued at the start of chapter four, that "85% of people in the UK think that parents not bringing up their children properly is the biggest reason for the perceived rise in anti-social behaviour" (2006: 17). Chapter four in particular identifies some key family circumstances that place children and young people more at risk of engaging in antisocial behaviour, including: parents who refuse to take responsibility for their children's poor behaviour, teenage parents, and parents who have poor parenting skills and who hold weak relationships with their children. Despite the strong emphasis placed on 'good parenting skills' in order to develop respect in children and young people, there is nothing in the way of a definition for 'family' or 'parent'. As such, it is unclear who precisely the document is referring to as being responsible for children's disrespectful behaviour. As previously discussed, in legislation there is also a lack of a clear definition for family or parents, but there is a clear definition of 'parental responsibility'. The definition of 'parental responsibility' from the *Children Act (1989)* would be well placed in this Action Plan document, as one of the main themes running throughout the whole document is on the act of holding parents more responsible and

accountable for their children's poor behaviour. Despite the lack of definition, the overall tone of the Plan suggests that 'family' refers to specific members, instead of the presence of certain affectional and emotional traits.

Youth Crime Action Plan: handbook for practitioners (2008)

Further building on the initial *Respect Action Plan (Home Office, 2006),* the *Youth Crime Action Plan (HM Government, 2008)* was published as a tool for practitioners working with young people coming to the attention of the Youth Justice System. Again, there is a strong emphasis throughout on the importance of involving families, to create a more holistic approach. It draws on the Think Family approach, which it claims, "was developed to improve the support offered to vulnerable children and adults within the same family" (2008: 32). This approach places families at the centre of the interventions and services, to ensure the response is 'family led'. The main intervention that is discussed in this document is the use of family intervention projects. It is stated that these projects "help families improve behaviour and underlying problems" (2008: 38). Furthermore, it is suggested that the projects aim to take a 'whole family approach', "ensuring that the needs of the whole family are assessed and responded to in a holistic way" (2008: 41). Despite this focus on the 'whole family', the document fails to identify who these family members are. Interventions and projects that are focused on the young person should take into consideration their understandings of the term 'family' and who they identify as their 'family members'. However, there is no mention of this being part of the process. The document states that key workers would assess the needs of the whole family, but there is no explanation provided of who should be included or how their needs will be assessed. Another document that sets out a framework for assessment and interventions with young people who have offended, is the *Youth Justice: the scaled approach (YJB, 2009).*

Youth Justice: the scaled approach (2009)

Published by the Youth Justice Board, this document is intended to provide guidelines for practitioners working with young people who come into contact with the Youth Justice System. Despite the strong emphasis on the importance of 'parental

responsibility' and in including families in the projects and interventions previously analysed, this particular document barely mentions families or parents at all. "Engaging parents in interventions and/or to support young person" (2009: 11) is listed as part of the case management approach to be used in Youth Offender Teams (YOTs). 'Family and personal relationships' is also included as one of the subheadings for the Asset report that is completed by all case workers, and so is clearly identified as an important area for discussion with the young people. However, there is no explanation of who these terms relate to, or whether these 'personal relationships' are identified by the young person, or by the case worker. In a document that sets the standards and the framework for the approach to be used by all practitioners involved with the Youth Justice System, it is odd that clear definitions of 'family' are not present. Particularly at a time when the Government rhetoric was so focused on emphasising the importance of the family and 'good parenting skills' for reducing youth (re)offending rates.

Breaking the Cycle (2010) & Time for a Fresh Start (2010)

Both of these papers were published in the same year, and at a time when the Coalition Government were coming into power in Britain with the commitment to prevention and the responsibilisation of parents. *Breaking the Cycle (MoJ, 2010)* was the first criminal justice green paper to be published by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), with the intention of outlining the ways in which the new Government intended to make the Criminal Justice System more effective. Strategies such as increased use of financial penalties, and more local, joined up approaches were identified as essential for 'nipping crime in the bud' and for tackling "multiple disadvantages that many young offenders have" (2010: 68). As the title of the paper states, the main aims of these strategies were to "break the cycle of crime" (2010: 68) by identifying those young people and their families who are most at-risk of (re)offending.

The paper mentions the use of parenting orders as a way of compelling parents to face up to their responsibilities as parents of unruly children. It also specifically identifies supporting parents in improving their parenting skills, reminiscent of the New Labour rhetoric from the late 1990s, and the notion that responsibility rests with parents and their lack of good parenting skills. Finally, the paper recognises the

importance of building "ensuring family relationships" (2010: 83) as a way of stabilising those most at-risk and with complex needs. Despite the heavy focus on parenting skills and family relationships as being key to disrupting the 'intergenerational cycle of crime', there are no attempts at defining who these concerns. However, as with the other policy documents included so far in this analysis, there is the general tone and assumption that 'family' refers to close relationships held with the child, and those who impact on their life. This is still just an assumption though, with little attention paid in the policy documents as to how the children at the centre think about and define their 'family members'. In some of the interventions and programmes mentioned within the paper, allowing children to identify their family members may well be part of the process, but this is not made clear.

In a similar approach, the Independent Commission compiled the report *Time for a Fresh Start* (Independent Commission on Youth Crime & Antisocial Behaviour*,* 2010) by conducting a review of data from the Youth Justice System over the previous few years. The aims of the Commission were to highlight how to respond effectively, fairly and proportionately to children and young people who were engaging in criminal offences. Importantly, the report was very critical of the Youth Justice System for targeting and labelling young people from deprived backgrounds. As such, it recommended more prevention and early intervention, and limiting the use of custody for children and young people. At the time, the recommendations set out in this report aligned well with the purposes of the Early Intervention Grant, to be introduced in 2011. However, it has since been argued that the grant and new programmes introduced in response to the *Independent Commission's report (2010),* have been used to target high risk families (Haines & Case, 2015). Reference is made to the importance of families, parents and even carers and extended family members, throughout this report. 'Family risk factors' are identified as being those related to "poor parental supervision, neglect and abuse; harsh, inconsistent discipline; parental conflict; individual and parental attitudes that condone law-breaking; low family income" (2010: 39). Based on these 'risk factors' the report focuses on reviewing some of the family-focused services and interventions that were being used at the time, including parenting programmes, family therapies and family intervention projects. Despite lots of references to families, parents and extended family members throughout this report,

there are no definitions provided about how these individuals are being identified, for example, what criteria would qualify someone as an 'extended family member'.

What works in managing young people who offend? (2016)

The aim of this review was to consider the management of children and young people who offend, and the effectiveness of interventions to reduce reoffending. The interventions reviewed include those used with children ages 10-17 years in the Youth Justice System, and also young adults up to the age of 21, where they have transitioned into the adult system. In the opening pages of the review, the authors position 'the family' as both a place of support, but also potentially a place of trauma and abuse. It is stated that "family based therapeutic interventions… can be effective" (Adler et al, 2016: 2) but that at the same time, "family can itself be a setting of trauma, abuse and exploitation" (2016: 2). Despite this acknowledgement, the remainder of the review places a heavy emphasis on the importance and effectiveness of family-based interventions. In particular, Family Group Conferences, Functional Family Therapy and parent training programmes are all presented as positive and effective ways of dealing with young people who offend. For some of these interventions and programmes, it is mentioned that "trained therapists work with families to assess family behaviours, modify dysfunctional family communication…" (2016: 32), however, there is no mention of how the young person's 'family' is identified, whether these members are identified by the trained therapists, or by the young people themselves. Overall, there are no definitions provided in this review as to who 'family' refers to, despite the heavy emphasis on the effectiveness of family and parent-based interventions. Perhaps further research into these types of interventions would uncover the processes involved, and the specific ways in which key terms and concepts are defined. As an analysis of this review, though, there are no clear definitions of 'family' provided. When considering affectional factors, it could be argued that these concepts may well be embedded within social interactions between 'family members' and so are, indirectly, included in the family-based interventions reviewed by the authors (Adler et al, 2016).

Taylor Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales (2016)

This review considered the progress made in the Youth Justice System, since the initial implementation of the Youth Offender Teams (YOTs) as part of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998).* In terms of what the review says about the importance of family and parents, the author, Charlie Taylor states that "many of the children in the system come from some of the most dysfunctional and chaotic families" (Taylor, 2016: 2). He characterises these families by drug and alcohol misuse, physical and emotional abuse, and offending. However, this is the extent of any definitions provided for family throughout this review. Although Taylor does not explicitly state that 'poor parenting skills' are a risk factor or cause of youth offending behaviour, he does refer to the importance of families getting into 'good habits' of school attendance for their children. Majority of the other points raised regarding parents and families in this review, relate to the importance of involving them in the Youth Justice System processes, as means of support for children and young people. In the absence of parents, other carers, such as social workers, should be encouraged to provide the same level of support. Taylor notes the importance of involving parents more in the court proceedings against their child, including the proposal that "court summons should make clear that both parents are expected to attend court hearings" (2016: 30). Finally, the review discusses the introduction of children's panels to "investigate the causes of the child's behaviour… and put in place a rigorous Plan that will tackle the factors associated with the offending" (2016: 32). He explains the various powers that the Panel would hold, regarding the interventions and programmes that the young person may be subject to, and also the expectations that may be placed on other services the young person may be required to engage with. In particular, he notes, that this "could include the provision of parenting classes or multi-systemic family therapy" (2016: 33), reinforcing the importance of the involvement of parents and the family in a young person's rehabilitation. Despite this heavy emphasis placed on the importance of involvement from the family, the review lacks a clear definition of who 'family' refers to, and whether these are members identified by law, YOT workers, or the young people themselves. This is just another demonstration that children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored in policy that concerns them.

The Lammy Review (2017)

The Lammy Review (Lammy, 2017) provided a critical review of the criminal justice system and the over-representation of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. At the time of the review, it was estimated that "over 40% of young people in custody" were from BAME backgrounds, with more than 20% of these being Black young men (2017: 3). Despite these high rates, the review reports that "young BAME prisoners are less likely to be recorded as having problems" (2017: 5), including 'troubled family relationships'. The author, David Lammy, draws attention to the important role of parents in protecting their children from the pressures of being drawn into street crime. He further identifies parental responsibility as key for supporting young offenders in their rehabilitation and desistance from crime. However, his review of the current practices in YOTs, highlights that "the youth justice systems appear to have given up on parenting" (2017: 6), demonstrated by large numbers of young offenders being found guilty in the courts, but with less than 200 parenting orders being issued. As such, recommendation 18 from the *Lammy Review (2017)* states that youth offender panels should place a stronger emphasis on parenting, with an overall proposal for a "more family orientated" approach to youth justice being needed (2017: 43). Reiterating recommendations and proposals from the *Taylor Review (2016),* the *Lammy Review (2017)* places a strong emphasis on the importance of involvement in youth justice processes from parents and families. Despite this, there is again a serious lack of definitions or explanations of who or what is identified as 'family'. The way in which the term is used throughout the review would suggest that it is specific individuals that are considered by law to be responsible for young people who offend. However, without this clarification from the author, only assumptions can be made.

YJB: Strategic Plan 2019-2022 (2019)

Twenty years since the creation of the first youth offending teams and the youth justice board, this strategic plan sets out the priorities for further developing the youth justice system in 2019-2022. Written by the youth justice board, the opening pages state that they hold "a new vision for a youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their own strengths" (YJB, 2019: 3). This statement sets the tone for the remainder of the report, and clearly builds on

recommendations from both the *Taylor Review (2016)* and *the Lammy Review (2017)* in placing more emphasis on addressing children and young people's needs, rather than focusing on punishment and responsibilising them. Despite this move towards a new approach, there are still echoes from previous strategies, with the YJB identifying 'family breakdown' as a frequent feature in the lives of children who offend. As such, the *YJB strategic plan (2019)* states that their continuing work will be child-focused and will "build on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential" (2019: 7). However, there is no mention of what these 'supportive relationships' look like, or who they will be with. One might assume that with all the previous emphasis on the importance of parents and families, these 'supportive relationships' will be based within the family unit. Or this change in terminology might be signalling a turning point, whereby a much broader range of people are being considered important and integral to children and young peoples' lives. If this is the case, it may then also be assumed that as the 'new approach' is child-focused, who is considered to be a 'significant relationship' would be determined by the young people themselves, rather than law, courts, or youth justice workers. In support of this assumption, of the 21-page document outlining the YJB's strategic plan for the next three years, there is very little mention of family or parents. Searches of these key words only found 4 results for family/families and 0 results for parent/parents/parenting.

Improving Parental Engagement (2020)

Finally, the *Improving Parental Engagement report (MoJ, 2020)* was written to provide details on the understanding and participation of BAME children's parents to inform practice and policymaking. Focus groups were conducted with parents and practitioners from the YJS, and from voluntary organisations in local communities. In practical terms, the purpose of this report was to empower and better meet the needs of BAME parents with children in the YJS. This report opens by drawing on key points from *the Lammy Review (2017)* concerning the involvement of parents in the courts and rehabilitation process of their children who have offended. Lammy concluded that the YJS had given up parents, but that the role they, and the wider family, should play in young people's rehabilitation is not only key, but is also supported by broader evidence. Written and published by the Ministry of Justice, *the Improving Parental Engagement report (2020)* identifies that "lack of trust in the system can be a multi-

generational issue, and that trust deficits could potentially be passed down within families" (2020: 4). This places the learning of social and moral behaviours, and attitudes towards the justice system, as developing from within the family. Furthermore, the practitioners who were consulted on this, suggested that those from a BAME background were more likely to reject support from formal services, and instead turn to family and friends. Both these points place importance on the role of families in the lives of BAME young people, and particularly those who come into contact with the YJS. With the *Lammy Review (2017)* identifying that YOTs are less likely to issue parenting orders, the findings presented in the *Improving Parental Engagement report (2020)* states that YOTs prefer more voluntary participation of parents in programmes, "as they usually lead to greater compliance and more positive engagement from parents" (2020: 15). Unlike the rest of the policy and practice documents analysed in this final section of the chapter, this report actually provides a form of definition for the term 'parents', although the authors admit the term is applied in a broad sense throughout the report. As such, they state that,

> "whilst reference to 'parents' are made throughout the document, the term is used to also include the legal guardian or carer of a child, and the points made apply, in most cases, equally to legal guardians and carers" (2020: 3).

Still a relatively vague description of who the term 'parents' refers to, but nonetheless, it is important to draw attention to the inclusion of guardians and carers in the discussions regarding those responsible for children and young people who offend. However, the use of 'legal' before guardians and carers also suggests a reliance on the law in identifying these individuals.

Summary

Overall, the findings from this analysis chapter contribute to the central argument of this thesis that children and young people's understanding, and experience of the concept 'family' has largely been ignored in policy that concerns them. Not only are these documents lacking in a child-focused approach, but they are also missing a definition of the term 'family' completely. As such, the intended analysis for these policy documents has been somewhat challenging. Instead of analysing the definitions provided (which there were very few), the documents have had to be taken as a whole

and analysed regarding their use of the term 'family' and the assumptions that are being drawn from this use.

Conclusion

In conclusion, many of these policy documents do mention the importance of family and /or parents multiple times, mostly with reference to either taking responsibility for their children who have offended, or as being more involved in the YJS processes, further demonstrating and reinforcing the influencing nature of social learning theory on the development of youth justice policy. As such, it is concluded that 'family' does feature quite heavily in legislation and policy that concerns children and young people who have offended, but that the use of this term appears to be very much from a legal perspective, whether defined or assumed, and that the place of the children's understanding of the term is lacking. This chapter has provided the findings from a content analysis that was conducted using some of the key pieces of legislation and policy documents that impact on children and young people who have offended. This analysis has identified how the concept of 'family' has been used in policy and key legislation that concerns young people who have offended. The findings demonstrate that it is rare to find a clear definition of 'family' in youth justice policy, and that when 'family' is mentioned, children and young people's understanding, and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored. The next chapter presents the findings from empirical research that was conducted with young people who have offended, to explore what 'family' meant to them.

CHAPTER 7 - FINDINGS PART 2: PRIMARY RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter will provide the findings from the empirical research that was conducted with two groups of young people who have offended. The findings are split into two sections: London and Glasgow, based on the geographical locations of both groups that participated in the research project. The aim of the empirical research was to engage directly with young people who have offended, and ask them the question: 'what does the word family mean to you?' This primary research was important because 'family' has played a central role in research and policy, but children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored from these, and in particular, young people who have offended. The first section of this chapter will present the findings from the group of young people who were based in London.

LONDON

Introduction

This section presents the findings from data generated and collected with the staff and young people who were accessed through a London-based youth offending team (YOT). There were two stages of data collection here, firstly, questionnaires were distributed amongst staff and young people. The questionnaires were intended to gather preliminary data on whether there was a clear difference in views and experiences of 'family' between staff and young people at the YOT and to determine whether a further qualitative study was required to explore these differences. The findings showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of views, experiences and definitions of 'family'. As such, a qualitative study was then designed and implemented, using focus groups as the main tool for exploring the concept of 'family' with young people who have offended. This section presents the findings from both the questionnaires and then the subsequent focus group.

London Borough: Setting the Scene

Demographics

The location where the first data set was generated, is one of 32 Boroughs in London, England. Population data shows that this borough has a slightly higher percentage of young people, those 15 and under (22.9%), compared with London (20.6%) and England (19.2%) (ONS, 2019). The larger population of young people contributes to the slightly-higher-than-average rate of youth crime in this borough. The Borough Profile[4] (2019) reports a 'rich ethnic diversity', with increasing numbers of residents reporting English is not their first language. This data is also reflected in schools within the Borough, with 49% of pupils reporting their first language as being 'other than English', which is slightly higher than the London average (45%) and significantly higher than England's average (19%).

Furthermore, the Borough Profile (2019) details the most recent population data,

> "White British backgrounds make up 35.18% of…inhabitants with other White groups at 25.13%, Other Ethnic Groups at 6.09%, Mixed Groups at 5.50%, Asian Groups at 10.16% and Black groups at 17.94%" (2019: 17)

The young people who completed the questionnaires were aged between 14 and 17 (n=37). There was a broad spread of ethnic diversity, with the highest proportion being Black British (29.7%, n=11), followed by White British (27%, n=10) and then Turkish (16.2%, n=6). In contrast, for the staff participants (n=20), White British was the highest proportion (30%, n=6), followed by White Other (25%, n=5) and then Black British (10%, n=2) and White & Black Caribbean (10%, n=2) (for full break down, see appendix H). Due to data protection restrictions, access to information regarding the spread of ethnicities in the YOT at the time of data collection was not available. However, when comparing the spread of ethnicities against those reported in the Borough Profile (2019), the staff represented the wider community. All young people present in the focus group were from a minority ethnic background (n=7). As such, it could be argued that Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) young people were overrepresented in the primary research, which echoes the findings from *the Lammy*

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[4] The reference has been altered slightly to anonymise the London Borough where this research took place, in order to protect the identities of the young people who participated.

Review (2017), that young people from a BAME background are overrepresented in the Youth Justice System (YJS). In contrast, both the researcher and the groupwork facilitator were White British. It is important to reflect how culture and ethnicity may have an impact on participant engagement and for the researcher to be mindful of how their social identity shapes the decisions they make regarding research approaches (Jesuvadian & Wright, 2014). A full reflection on the impact of the focus group setting, including the presence of the groupwork facilitator and researcher, is provided in chapter eight.

Compared with the London average household income for 2018 (£45,000), this London borough is slightly lower (£41,500) (Borough Profile, 2019). However, there are stark geographical differences that exist in average weekly household income across the Borough, with a considerable divide evident between the east and west of the Borough, with the east being considered much more deprived. The Index of Multiple Deprivation measures deprivation by combining several social and economic indicators (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019). On almost all indicators, this London Borough is one of the most highly deprived Outer London boroughs (The Borough Profile, 2019) and in 2015 was ranked as the 12th most deprived London Borough, out of 32. Nationally, it was ranked 64th most deprived out of 326 local authority areas in England.

The 'Children in Low-Income Families Local Measure' shows the proportion of children living in families in receipt of means-tested benefits or in receipt of tax credits (Department for Work & Pensions, 2020). When considering rates for children (under 16) living in relative low-income families, this London Borough (18%) ranks similar for Great Britain averages (18%). However, geographically, these rates are higher in the East of the Borough (Borough Profile, 2019). The youth offending team (YOT) that acted as the contact point for participants was also based in the East of the Borough (low income, high levels of deprivation) and so the question of financial compensation for participants arose during discussions with the YOT manager but were not implemented (see full decision-making process in chapter five).

Children's services in the London Borough

Single Point of Entry (SPOE) was initiated in the Borough in 2012, to offer a streamlined service for professionals with concerns for vulnerable young people. It is a multi-agency team who jointly assess risk and make decisions regarding support and intervention (Borough Council[5], 2017). In this London Borough, during 2017/18, the service saw an increase in cases (13%) on 2016/17, where this rate of referrals was also higher than London as a whole (The Borough Profile, 2019). With a disproportionate number of young people entering the youth justice system who also have experience of the care system (Barn & Tan, 2012) it was necessary to establish at the start of the focus group which young people present had both care and youth justice experience. Out of the seven young people present, none chose to self-identify when asked who had experience of the care system in England and Wales. Using a simple measure of care experience such as this was deemed most appropriate as it directly asked the young people their permission to disclose this information, rather than requesting it through the staff at the YOT. As this research was interested in placing young people at the centre of the project and considered them to be fully capable of making their own decisions relating to participation etc, this way of recording information intended to reinforce this approach, reaffirming to the young people that they had the power to decide how much or how little they wanted to disclose.

Crime rates in the London Borough

Based on recorded figures by the Metropolitan Police, this London Borough had the highest rate of serious youth violence in London, in the year ending 2018, with an 8.8% increase on the previous year. This was much higher than the average in London, which saw a 5% decrease overall (Allin, 2019). Serious youth violence is defined by the Metropolitan Police as "any offence of most serious violence or weapon-enabled crime where the victim is aged 10 to 19" (Allin, 2019: 1). Knife crime offences rose here by 20%, with the Borough's overall crime rate rising by 10%. Despite these figures

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[5] The reference has been altered slightly to anonymise the London Borough where this research took place, in order to protect the identities of the young people who participated.

for the Borough, overall knife and offensive weapon offences committed by children decreased by 1% across England and Wales (YJB, 2020)

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) works with young people aged 8-19 years, who have been involved in, or are at risk of involvement in, crime or antisocial behaviour. All the young people who engaged in the primary research were accessed through the Borough's YOT. Participants were not asked to report any information regarding their involvement, or risk of involvement, in crime or antisocial behaviour as part of the research. It was important to treat the participants as young people in their own right, rather than focusing on their offending behaviour. The understandings and experiences of young people who have offended has largely been ignored in research that investigates the meaning of 'family', despite there being a large focus on 'family' as a main risk factor for youth offending behaviour, with parenting coming under intense scrutiny, particularly since the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)* when parenting orders were introduced. Understanding how the young people conceptualise the term 'family' is important, with several intervention and prevention programmes focused on the 'family'. With a lack of definition and understanding of this term, it would be unclear to youth justice practitioners how 'family' fits into explaining youth offending behaviour. Furthermore, children and young people have the right to explore and express their thoughts and opinions, under article 13 (UNCRC, 1989), which states that all children should have the right to 'freedom of expression'. As such, there has been an increasing emphasis on young people being enabled to actively participate in research, as collaborators rather than as subjects. The primary research complemented this approach through the methods that were used, and a full reflection on this is provided in chapter eight.

The Youth Justice System (YJS) in England and Wales

The main aim of the youth justice system in England and Wales is to prevent offending behaviour by children and young people. The current age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10 years old, with young people being tried as adults once they reach 18 years old. A young person charged with an offence will be tried in the youth court, which is typically a magistrate's court that has been adapted to accommodate minors, with the magistrates and district judges who sit in this court receiving specialist

training to deal with young people. Unlike the magistrate's court, a youth court does not open to the public and remains a private affair (Harding et al, 2017). Additionally, there are restrictions on reporting of youth details, including pictures and names, in media reports. There is a wide range of sentences available in the youth court, including but not limited to: detention and training orders, youth community orders, referral orders, reparation orders. For community-based orders, the young person will be supervised by the local youth offending team (YOT). The young person is allocated a caseworker, who will support them for the duration of their community order. The youth justice caseworker is responsible for making assessments and preparing reports, delivering, and reviewing intervention plans, and ensuring appropriate liaison between multiple agencies that are supporting the young person. In England and Wales, the care system and the youth justice system are two separate systems, although they may occasionally liaise with one another.

Questionnaire Findings

This section will present the findings from the questionnaires that were completed by both staff (n=20) and young people (n=37) at the YOT. The first three questions captured data on the participant's age, gender and ethnic origin (full data can be found in appendix H). Question four asked participants 'who currently lives in the same household as you?' For the young people, the majority reported living with their 'mother' (95%, n=35), but less than half reported living with their 'father' (38%, n=14). Few reported living with a 'stepmother' (n=1) or a 'stepfather' (n=3), 'mother's partner' (n=2) or 'father's partner' (n=0). One participant added in the 'other' box that they lived with their uncle. A large proportion of the young people reported living with a sibling, whether that was a 'brother' (51%, n=19), 'sister' (32%, n=12), 'stepbrother' (n=2), or 'stepsister' (n=1). The same participant that added uncle, also added cousin in the 'other' box, and they did not tick any of the other options that were available. These findings demonstrate a range of living situations for the young people that participated, which echoes the range of household compositions that have been reported in the most recent publication of the *Families and Households survey* (ONS, 2017).

For the staff questionnaire, the options available for answering this question were adapted slightly to reflect the age difference and the assumption that majority of

respondents would likely be living independently of parents. Therefore, there were less variants of 'mother', 'father', 'brother' and 'sister' available on the questionnaire, but with the possibility to tick 'other' and specify anybody that was not provided as an option. The findings show that less than half the staff who completed questionnaires reported living with a partner, whether this was someone they were married to (25%, n=5) or co-habiting with (35%, n=7). Only one person reported living with a housemate. Despite assuming that this age range would not still be living with parents, some reported living with a 'mother' (n=3) or a 'father' (n=1), and two participants ticked the 'other' box, with one stating they were living with a 'grandmother' and the other stating they were living with a 'stepfather'. This finding reflected what Isengard and Syzdlik (2012) found, that it is increasingly common for adult children to remain in the 'family home' for longer, due to changes in economic and academic circumstances. Finally, less than half reported living with a 'child/children' (35%, n=7), and only two of the staff members did not tick any of the boxes, indicating that they lived on their own. These findings echo those from the Families and Household survey (ONS, 2017) in terms of households 'with dependent children' being lower (n=7983) than those 'without dependent children' (n=11014). However, findings from the primary research do differ slightly from the Household and Families survey (ONS, 2017), in that the staff were more likely to report living as a co-habiting couple than a married couple, which contradicts the national statistics.

Questions 5 – 20 asked participants to read the statements and rate them on a scale of 1-5 (1=strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree) based on their own opinions and/or experiences. However, during the analysis stage, the responses were grouped into 'agree', combining strongly agree and agree, and 'disagree', combining strongly disagree and disagree (for full discussion on this see chapter five). The statements were adapted slightly for use on the staff questionnaire, as a potential point of comparison with the young people. As the focus of the primary research was on the young people's understandings and experiences of 'family', the findings from the questionnaires for the young people have only been reported here.

For the majority of questions, the young people responded with 'agree', with only two of the questions generating a 'disagree' response. Question 14 gave the young people the statement 'a family member is my role model', with the findings demonstrating that just over half the cohort voted for 'disagree' (54%, n=20). The purpose of this question

was to draw on the social learning theory, and the assumption that a close family member who is seen as a role model will have the most impact on a young person's life (see chapter three for a detailed review of the social learning theory and role models from the 'family'). Despite the majority of the findings from the questionnaires indicating positive attachments and relationships between the young people and their 'family', question 14 contradicted this to some extent. However, it is argued that this could be one of the reasons why these young people have offended. Previous research has shown family cohesion is crucial in improving the well-being of children and young people (Lietz et al, 2018), and that having a positive role model can provide necessary support and encouragement in a young person's life (Meltzer et al, 2018). If the young people feel they are lacking in having a positive role model in their life, then this could indicate an underlying cause for their involvement in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour.

Question 9 gave the young people the statement 'my parents/carers know who my friends are'. The findings for this were close, with slightly more young people responding with 'disagree' (46%, n=17), than 'agree' (35%, n=13), with a few responding with 'not sure' (19%, n=7). This question was important to ask of the young people, as it has been reported in previous research that parents who have knowledge of, and potentially an impact on, their child's friendship group, demonstrates an authoritative parenting style. As discussed in chapter 3, authoritative parenting styles have been highly correlated with positive outcomes in children and young people, and the levels of warmth and involvement a parent can exhibit in a child's life, the more likely the young person is to desist from anti-social or criminal behaviour (Johnson, 2016). As such, the findings from the questionnaire suggest that supervision by parents may be quite low among the cohort. The level of parental supervision has been argued by social control theorists as being important in determining the likelihood of young people becoming involved with criminal peers (Church et al, 2009) and rates highly in public perceptions on who should be held accountable for dealing with children and young people who offend (Aizpurua et al, 2020). On its own, this finding looks important, but when taken in the context of the other questions that were asked of the young people, its significance is reduced.

Question 15 gave the young people the statement 'I can count on my family when things go wrong'. The findings show that nearly three quarters of the participants

'agreed' (73%, n=27) with this statement, demonstrating a strong support for the importance of good relationships and strong attachments to 'family'. As discussed in chapter three, attachment theory has played a significant role in understanding the relationship between 'family' and youth offending behaviour, which has been strongly supported by the findings from this primary research. Despite the responses for question 14 and 9 suggesting that the young people were not strongly attached to their 'family', the findings from question 15 indicate the opposite. As with any likert scale findings, it is important to consider the responses not only in the wider context, but to also consider how relevant the statement or question being asked is relevant to their own experiences (Joshi et al, 2015).

Question 18 gave the young people the statement 'my parents/carers would be unhappy if I got in trouble with the police', with an overwhelming majority vote of 'agree' (95%, n=35). This question was important to ask the young people, as the primary research was interested in collecting the views and opinions of young people who have offended. Accessing the young people through a local YOT was the first step in this but asking the young people directly about their parent/carers' reaction to them getting in trouble with the police was useful in terms of understanding how they perceived their parent/carers reaction. The primary research could have involved the parents/carers of these young people and asked them directly about how they felt when their child was in trouble with the police. However, the primary research was interested in the voices of the young people, and not their parents/carers. The findings from these two questions alone provide evidence that although parental/caregiver supervision may be reduced in terms of knowing who their friends are, overall, the young people reported high levels of emotional support and genuine concern from their parents/caregivers for their wellbeing. Holding strong social bonds like this with others has been found to have a positive impact on young people's behaviour and decreases the likelihood of rearrest (Craig et al, 2017). This also reflects what the social bond theory states in terms of the importance of a child feeling strong bonds to society, through 'family' and school. The full implications of this finding are discussed in chapter nine.

The findings from the remainder of the questions for the young people have been split into two groups. The first group of questions asked the young people more about the relationship that they hold with their 'family' and the second group asked the young

people questions about their parent/caregiver's behaviours. Question 5, 6 and 8 all saw similar findings, with over half the respondents 'agreeing' with statements regarding talking to 'family' about personal problems (68%, n=25), 'family' being more important than friends (59%, n=22), and always telling parents/carers where they were going (62%, n=23). Most important was question 11 though, which gave the statement 'I have a good relationship with my family'. The majority voted for 'agree' (71%, n=26) with only a few voting for 'disagree' (10%, n=4). Holding a good, strong relationship with 'family' has been demonstrated in previous research as crucial in supporting young people to desist from crime and/or time spent in criminogenic environments (Janssen et al, 2017). However, nearly one fifth of the cohort voted 'not sure' (19%, n= 7). These findings indicate that either the young people were unsure of what was being asked, and that the term 'good relationship' was not clear, or that they genuinely could not decide whether their relationship with 'family' was good or not. This could be a reflection on how their involvement with the youth justice system was impacting on their relationship with 'family' and could signal an important area for development within youth justice.

Questions 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19 and 20 focused more on asking the young people their views about their parent/caregiver's behaviours within the 'family' home. Children and young people's experiences of 'family' life has largely been ignored in research that concerns young people who have offended; therefore, these types of questions were important to capture the young people's voices and opinions on their parent/caregiver's behaviours. Question 7, 16 and 20 asked the young people about the level of interest their parent/caregivers take in their lives, either in the form of asking about their day, telling them 'well done' for good behaviour, or punishing them for bad behaviour. There was a slightly higher rate of 'agreement' (57%, n=21) for question 7, which posed the statement 'my parents/carers tell me 'well done' when I do something good', compared with the rate of 'agreement' (38%, n=14) for both question 16, which stated 'my parents/carers often ask me how my day has been', and question 20, which stated 'my parents/carers punish me when I've done something wrong'. These findings indicate that the young people were more likely to receive praise from their parents/carers, or simply that they acknowledged or remembered instances of praise more. The uncertainty in responses, indicated by a high prevalence of 'not sure' for all three questions (question 7 32% n=12, question 16 32% n=12,

question 20 30% n=11), supports the argument that recall bias had an impact on the responses for these questions, and so they should not be considered as accurate measures of parental interest in their lives.

Questions 10 and 12 asked the young people about restrictions on their behaviours at home, with question 10 posing the statement 'my parents/carers give me household jobs to do at home' and question 12 stating 'my parents/carers give me a time I should be home'. Both of these questions were important to measure the extent young people felt they had their behaviours monitored by parents/carers. The responses for both these questions were very similar and with not much difference between 'agree' (question 10 49% n=18, question 12 46% n=17), 'not sure' (question 10 22% n=8, question 12 24% n=9) and 'disagree' (question 10 30% n=11, question 12 30% n=11). Again, it is argued that these findings should not be taken on their own as measures of parental/caregiver control over the young people but indicate poor recall on the part of the young people, or simply that they did not view the statement as being relevant to their own experiences of 'family'. This echoes what others have argued as a potential challenge when using 5-point likert scales, that responses may cluster around the middle if the respondent does not consider the statement particularly relevant to their own opinion or experience (Joshi et al, 2015).

Finally, questions 13 and 19 asked the young people about the presence of parents/carers in the 'family' home in the mornings and evenings. These questions were, again, relevant in terms of assessing the level of supervision in the 'family' home from the young people's perspectives. Again, the responses on both these questions were very similar, with the majority voting to 'agree' (question 13 48% n=18, question 19 51% n=19), and slightly less voting to 'disagree' (question 13 35% n=13, question 19 32% n=12). However, for these questions, the 'not sure' responses were lower than in other questions (for both 16% n=6). Therefore, it is argued that these findings are more valid, as more of the young people gave decisive answers, indicating that they were more relevant to their own experiences. Question 17 gave a more specific statement, 'sitting down and eating a meal together is something we do at least once a week, in my family'. Despite providing clearer parameters in this question, the responses were similar to that of questions 13 and 19, with only a few more voting 'agree' (46% n=17) than 'disagree' (37% n=14). Again, the 'not sure' option received a lower vote (16% n=6). This question was important, as it has been argued by others

that the display of 'family-type behaviour', such as sitting down for a meal together, demonstrates the cohesiveness of a 'family' unit but also the sense of belonging that the young people may feel to a 'family' (Finch, 2007). However, there may be a wide range of reasons why a 'family' may not engage in this specific type of family behaviour, and so is not considered a significant finding in this primary research.

The final question asked: 'what does the word 'family' mean to you?' and gave the participants the option to tick all that applied. Both staff and the young people were given the same question and the same set of possible answers: (a) family means the people who you are biologically related to (b) family means the people who live in the same household (c) family means the people who you feel safe with (d) none of the above.
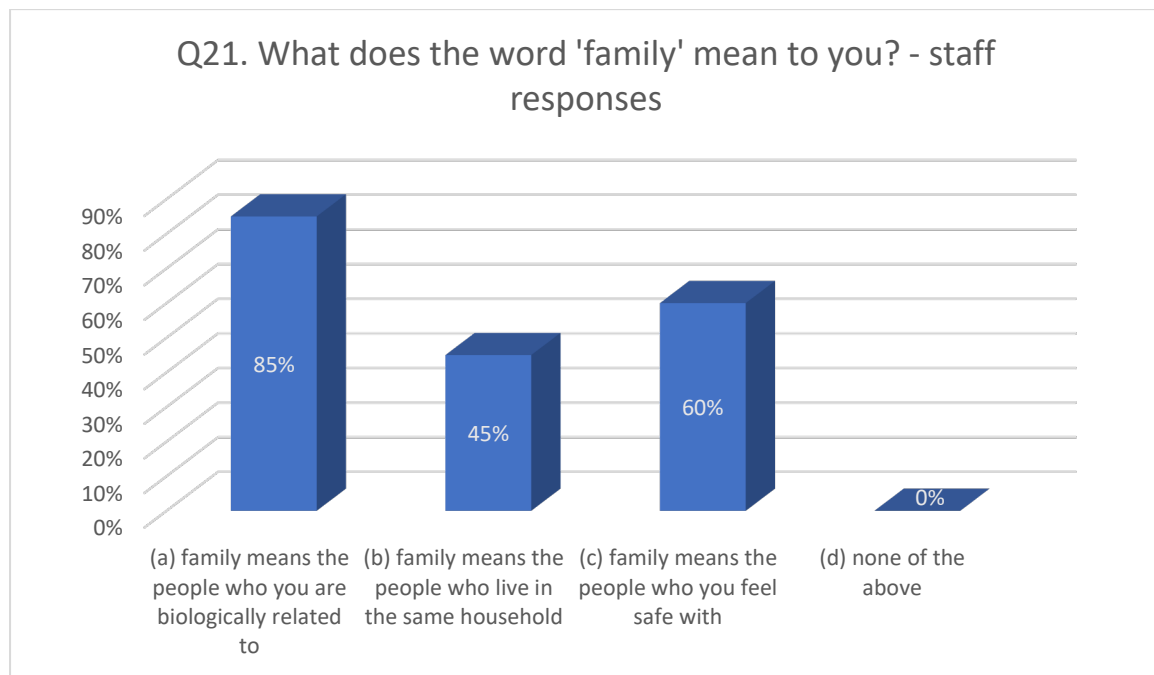
A large majority of the staff from the YOT voted for 'family' as being those you are biologically related to (85%, n=17). However, over half of the respondents also voted for 'people who you feel safe with'. This option was important to include, as previous research with young people which focused on their conceptualisations about safety indicated that 'feeling safe' was fundamental to holding a trusting relationship with others (Moore & McArthur, 2017). Findings from the primary research demonstrate that the staff placed more weight on biological relations when defining 'family', with less than half the cohort voting for those 'who live in the same household'. This finding echoes the changing nature of 'family life' over the last few decades, and the visibility

of a wider range of 'family types' and structures (see chapter four for a detailed review of 'family' as a sociological concept).

Q21. What does 'family' mean to you? - young people responses
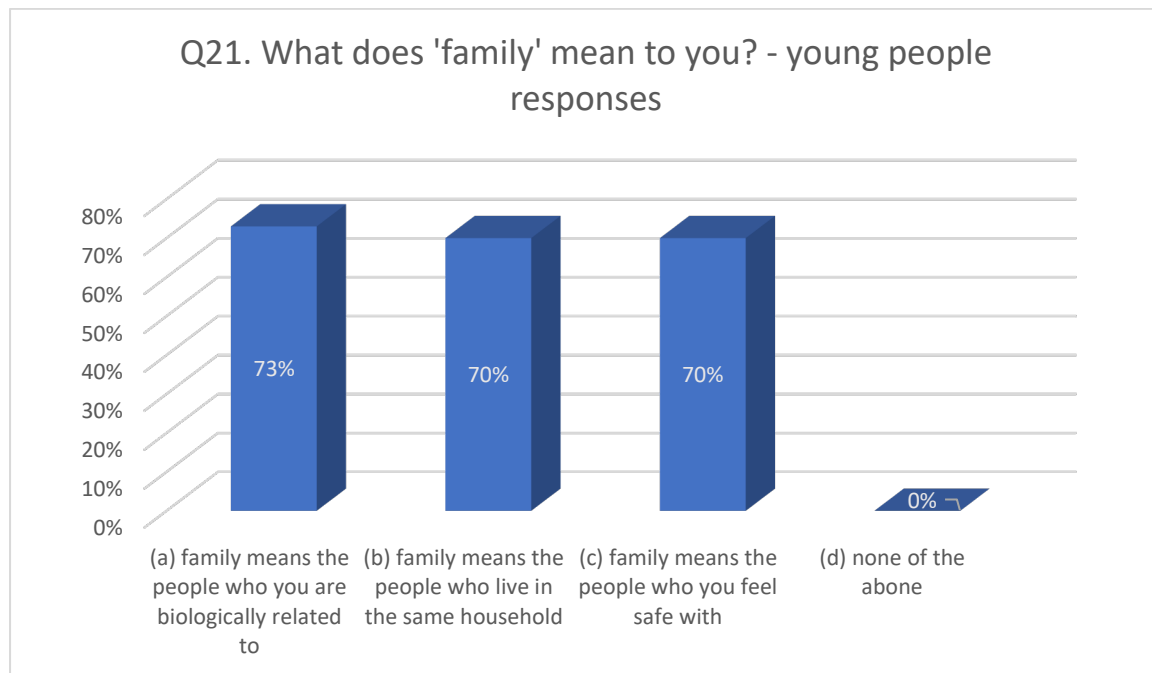
For the young people, they placed almost equal weighting on all three definitions of 'family'. These findings echo previous research with young people that aimed to understand their conceptualisations of safety, with findings indicating that trusting relationships were the foundations for 'feeling safe' (Moore & McArthur, 2017). 'Family' has been established as playing a central role in much research and theory surrounding youth offending behaviour (see chapter three), in particular, attachment theory has demonstrated the importance of strong positive relationships for children and young people. Further to this, the range of different definitions the young people considered important on this questionnaire reflected findings by Thomas et al (2017), and the 'complex webs of relationships' that their research participants spoke about when discussing the meaning of 'family'. Therefore, the difference in responses between staff and young people indicated that further research was needed in order to explore the question: 'what does 'family' mean to you?' with the young people.

This section has presented the findings from the questionnaires that were completed by the staff and young people, based at a YOT in London. The following section will present the key themes that emerged from a focus group that was conducted with a group of young people, also from the YOT in London.

Focus Group Findings

This section will present the findings from the focus group that was conducted with young people (n=7) at the YOT in London. There was a total of six boys and one girl present, all ranging between the ages of 14-17 years old. As the young people had decided not to have the discussion audio-taped, observational field notes were made instead. These notes have been analysed according to grounded theory methodology (GTM) following a 'bottom-up' approach (see chapter five for full description of this analysis process). As such, the findings that are presented in this section demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge, as young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise and speak about 'family'. Their discussion was largely based on their personal experiences of 'family' and 'family life', with key themes that emerged during the analysis. The aim of this chapter was to answer research question five:

How do young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'?

Each theme that emerged from the data will be discussed in turn, but be aware that these were not standalone themes, and at various points there was some crossover between them. However, for the purpose of readability and following a coherent and logical progression of the research journey, they have been presented here as separate and distinct themes.

Important Relationships

The first key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was relationships. When asked about their 'family' the young people spoke predominantly about their parents and the relationships that they held with them. This echoed what was explored in chapter four, on the parent-child relationship typically acting as the major defining feature and function of a 'family'. Throughout much of the group discussion, parents were the main people who were referred to by the young people, indicating that this relationship was predominantly who they considered to be their 'family'. Holding close relationships with other people formed an important part of the discussions with the young people, which was demonstrated by the use of typical 'family' terminology such as parents and mum, to identify these important 'family' members. This echoes what was explored in chapter four in terms of the language that is used when defining

'family' and 'family members', and the reliance on typical 'family' terminology that comes with assumptions about who people are referring to. This echoes what McCarthy (2012) has stated, on the power of the use of 'family' language for individuals in conveying the importance of close relationships.

The young people all spoke positively about their parents and the close relationships that they hold with them. In particular, this echoed key concepts from the attachment theory (chapter three), whereby holding strong and emotional attachments to others is identified as being important to children and young people's development. Echoing findings from previous research by Backett-Millburn et al (2008), the young people in the focus group mentioned the importance of giving and receiving love between 'family' members, and in particular, their parents. However, it was also acknowledged by one of the young people, Zain, that, "mums can choose whether to still love us" (Zain). This indicated that love is not a given but is a choice. Therefore, if love is connected to identifying 'family' members, then this finding further supports the idea that one can choose who is their 'family' (Smart, 2007). This is in contrast to policy that was analysed and presented in chapter six, which often defines 'family' through legally prescribed 'parental responsibilities', rather than allowing the child to draw on their own understandings and experiences to identify who is their 'family'. As such, policy does not allow children and young people to actively 'choose' who their family are. The implications of this are discussed in further detail in chapter nine.

Another important relationship that was drawn on during the focus group discussion was the relationships that were held between the young people and their siblings. The young people predominantly spoke about younger siblings and that they had a responsibility to protect them and to be good role models for them. Again, this echoed what was explored in chapter four in terms of relationships between siblings, which can act as a form of positive peer role models. This draws on elements from the social learning theory (chapter three) and how important others, such as parents and siblings, can act as role models and influence an individual's behaviour. In research conducted by Walters (2017) it was found that delinquent behaviour in siblings was predictive of delinquent behaviour manifesting in the research participants. However, findings from the focus group discussion suggests that sibling influence was mostly positive. This was demonstrated by one of the young people, Jay, who spoke about older siblings offering a degree of protection and care to him throughout his childhood.

He described in some detail about his personal family situation, living in a large family with parents that worked a lot, so to him, his older siblings had been 'like-parents' at certain points throughout his childhood, and he still held a lot of trust and respect for them. This echoed previous research into the positive influence that siblings can have throughout childhood and into adolescence (McHale et al, 2012). In particular, this discussion was highlighted during the analysis stage, as it corresponded to notes made in the fieldwork journal shortly after the focus group had been conducted, with the researcher writing: "follow up on this = siblings as important, but missing from policy?" The policy documents analysed had only mentioned parents, and this was in their legal role of 'parental responsibilities'. As such, this theme of relationships, and in particular sibling relationships, provides a new contribution to knowledge in demonstrating the important relationships that young people who have offended draw on when describing and defining who is their 'family'. These definitions, which include parents and siblings, are largely missing from the youth justice policy that concerns them.

Care and Support

Another key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was on care and support. The young people spoke about defining 'family' through the people who are around to provide care and support. They spoke about how peoples' needs change over time, and about how babies require a certain level of care and support from their parents. They explained that as people grow up, the level of the care and support required, is likely to change. From this discussion, the young people spoke a lot about expectations about care and support, whether these are general expectations in society that are held about parents looking after their children, or whether these are personal expectations that someone might hold, which are based on their own personal experiences. When reading back through the field notes during the stages of analysis, a secondary theme emerged from this primary theme of care and support. Not only did the young people identify that evidence of care and support may help when defining or identifying someone as a 'family' member, but also that these concepts are not static. Through the ways in which the young people spoke about care and support in relation the central concept of 'family', it became evident through analysis, that care, and support is dynamic and flexible and can change over time.

This echoed findings from research conducted by Wyn et al (2012) whose young research participants highlighted the role of 'transitions' in their experiences of 'family' as they moved from childhood, through adolescence and towards adulthood. However, for the young people in the focus groups in the primary research, this did not mean that someone became less of a 'family' member. The young people acknowledged that these displays of care and support change over time, just in much the same way that someone's 'family' can change over time. Importantly, this lends further support to the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis provides, in that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to think about and speak about 'family', which is missing from youth justice policy.

For the young people in the focus group, showing support was also considered to be an important part of being a 'family'. When the young people were talking about their own experiences that demonstrate how they would identify a 'family' member, one young person, David, stated that, "family will turn up when you're in hospital" (David). For some of the young people in the focus group, these outward displays of care and support were important in determining who they considered to be their 'family', which was not always based on legally prescribed 'parental responsibilities'. Instead, there was an expectation held by the young people, that family members would want to help, and to provide care and support to other family members, and not just because they have to. To the young people, it was clearly important that 'family' members should demonstrate caring behaviours towards others that were in the same 'family'. The researcher asked the young people to give some more examples, like David, on what kind of behaviours would demonstrate someone was 'family'. This approach echoes what has previously been used in research by Anyan and Pryor (2002), who explored what criteria young people would use when deciding whether or not a group of people could be defined as a 'family' (see chapter four). Some of the young people in the focus group described instances where they have cared for younger siblings, or where their older siblings had cared for them. One young person, Jay, stated that, "family can give you support if something bad happens to you" (Jay). This echoes what is stated in the social bond theory (chapter three), which places importance on feeling connected to, and supported by, important others, such as parents and siblings. Again, the young person, Jay, was asked to explain what he had meant by 'something bad happening'. The example he gave was getting seriously injured or ill and requiring the

physical support of 'family'. This echoed findings by Vandevivere et al (2015) who found that young adolescents reported 'physical discomfort' as the most-likely condition under which they would require maternal support.

However, others in the room drew on their own experience of being arrested and prosecuted, and now serving a community sentence with the YOT. As such, for many of the young people, parents had been supportive in helping them through the youth justice process and were active in ensuring they were attending all the appointments on time so that they would complete their order promptly. This echoed research conducted by Holt (2009), which collected the experiences of parents when having to parent young offenders. She found that, despite the additional responsibilities placed on the parents, they were supportive of their children and assisted in managing the requirements of the court order. Furthermore, hearing that parents were supportive of the young people, despite their offending behaviour, demonstrated the importance of a strong and positive relationship between a parent and their child. This echoes what the attachment theory states about how parents can influence children's behaviour from an early age (chapter three).

Trust and being trustworthy

A further key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was trust. This theme actually emerged part way through the earlier discussion on receiving support from 'family' members, such as parents. Trust was considered to be very important to the young people and was included as part of a clear statement when directly asked to describe their 'family'. One young person, Omer, replied, "people you can trust and who give you advice" (Omer). Trust is considered an important aspect of social and emotional development and wellbeing in children and young people, and echoes what the attachment theory (chapter three) states in terms of building strong and trusting relationships with others. Goldsmith (2005) has previously spoken about the nature of trust and how it is rooted in experience. In turn, these experiences create expectations that individuals will hold about certain people or certain environments. Prior to this, Bernath and Feshbach (1995) had stated that parents play a significant role in influencing their child's behaviour and their development of trust. This was echoed by the young people in the focus groups, who spoke about 'family' members, and in

particular, parents being trustworthy. As one young person, Ali, succinctly put it, "parents are less likely to lie to you" (Ali). This statement reinforced the earlier theme of holding strong relationships with 'family' members, but also further demonstrates one of the main traits that he considers important in his family. Unlike youth justice policy that places an emphasis on 'parental responsibility' (chapter six), Ali and many of the other young people in the focus group, placed an emphasis more on parents being trustworthy and not lying to their children. This further reflects research by Thomas et al (2017) and the 'complex webs of relationships' that their young research participants identified during discussions about 'family'. In particular, their hybrid understandings of 'family' being dependent on permanence, connection and performance of 'being there' for one another.

To the young people in the focus group, the people who they considered to be their 'family', they also held an expectation around them being able to provide advice. Although this discussion on giving and receiving advice was only brief, it did centre mostly around parents and older siblings, with one of the young people even including their grandparents as a key source of advice and support, which reflected findings from research into the role of grandparents in the lives of young people (Dunifon & Bayracharya, 2012). When Omer described 'family' as people "who give you advice" (Omer), it could be argued that this is a 'parental responsibility', and so some of what the young people said does support the definitions of 'family' that are provided in youth justice policy (chapter six). On the whole though, the majority of what the young people discussed in relation to defining who is 'family', the primary research found that they used a variety of diverse and flexible ways of defining 'family', which were mostly drawn from their own personal experiences. As such, this provides an original contribution to knowledge, as previous research concerned with exploring definitions of 'family' has largely ignored 'young people who have offended' as a participant group. From what the young people in the focus group discussed, clearly, they have strong thoughts and opinions on who should, and should not, be defined as 'family', further highlighting the issue that young people's voices and experiences are missing from youth justice policy that concerns them.

Feeling safe and being protected

Another key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was on feeling safe and being protected. This was initially given as an option on the questionnaires, "Family means the people who you feel safe being with" (appendix A), which scored high on the responses by the young people at the YOT (see earlier section on 'questionnaire findings'). Therefore, it was important to revisit this during the focus groups. Due to the high crime rates in some of the areas within this London Borough, and the rising concerns with youth violence more generally, this gave further importance to explore how 'feeling safe' was experienced by the young people in the focus group (Michelmore et al, 2019). This topic of discussion was raised when the conversation turned from speaking about care and protection within the 'family' home, to the contrast of being out on the streets and hanging out with friends (Ahlin & Antunes, 2017). As one young person, Ali, stated, "keeping safe is hard but important y'know" (Ali). The researcher followed this up with a question to find out why 'keeping safe' was considered important. Ali explained that it was important to keep safe whilst out on the streets, as he would not want to put his parents and siblings through the pain if anything were to happen to him. This echoed and reinforced the earlier key theme of important relationships, in that Ali considered his safety when outside of the house intrinsically linked to the important and loving relationships he holds with his family. He clearly has some concern for the impact his behaviour and safety have on the rest of his family members, so it is not just about how he feels for his family, but how he perceives they feel about him.

As this discussion around safety on the streets and 'keeping safe' developed, the researcher asked some questions about the difference between friends and family. Previous research has suggested that as children become adolescents, they may start spending more time away from the family home, and become dependent on a wider range of people, such as teachers and friends (Wight et al, 2009; Gayman et al, 2011; Margolis et al, 2014). As such, the researcher wanted to hear from the young people in the focus group, whether they considered some of their friends as being 'like family' and holding some of the same attributes that had already been discussed (providing protection, care and support, and being trustworthy). However, as David explained, "you can't always rely on other people to protect you" (David). This was in direct response to being asked about their friends. As the discussion progressed, it soon

became clear that the young people did not hold their friends with the same regard that they held their 'family'. For one young person, Jay, when asked whether he could rely on his friends in the same way that he felt he could rely on his 'family', his strong response of "no" (Jay), made his thoughts on this clear. As such, the theme of 'feeling safe' was very much attributed to describing the way in which 'family' made the young people feel and was not used when discussing the relationships they held with friends. This echoes findings from research conducted by De Groof (2008), which sought to understand parental impact on adolescents' fear of crime. The findings demonstrated that strong attachments with parents lead to better adjustment within the young people who participated in the research. This further supports the thesis claim to providing an original contribution to knowledge, in that young people who have offended conceptualise 'family' not just based on the presence of certain 'family' members, but also on the emotional ties they hold with them, and the feelings that they instil.

The struggle to find a singular definition of 'family'

The final key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was the difficultly in deciding on a singular definition of 'family' that everyone agreed with. The focus group began with a simple question, posed by the researcher to the young people, "what does the word family mean to you?" (Nicola). Based on the pre-study literature review that had been conducted, it was anticipated that the young people would find it extremely difficult to put this into one sentence. This was partly based on the simple fact that the term itself is used so often, but very rarely or clearly defined. The reason for this is that it is presumed to carry an assumptive and shared meaning in society (see chapter four), and so does not warrant a definition being provided all the time. As such, asking any group of people to provide a clear and concise response to the question "what does the word family mean to you?" could prove difficult. More specifically, asking young people who have offended to clearly and concisely provide a definition for the term 'family' was anticipated to prove difficult, due to the high rates of poor literacy amongst this group, that has been found in previous research (Anderson et al, 2016). The potential for poor literacy skills was taken into consideration when designing the questionnaire, and so it was kept in mind when running the focus group sessions. This ties in with the decision to run it as a group session, rather than as a one-to-one interview with young people who had offended

(see chapter five for full discussion on this). Furthermore, as 'family' is a socially constructed term (see chapter four), it was necessary for an active discussion about it to take place. This was identified by Clark (2009) as being one of the deciding factors, when choosing a data collection method in research that involved children and young people.

When posed with this question, "what does the word family mean to you?" right at the start of the focus group session, one young person, Omer, stated quite simply, "family means family init" (Omer). After all the different stages of analysis were complete, as part of this primary research, the researcher kept coming back to this one quote. Omer, without realising it at the time, had very neatly demonstrated the main reason for this thesis and the necessity for primary research to be conducted with young people who had offended. The research was important because 'family' has played such a central role in policy, theory and research concerning young people who have offended, but that their own understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored. As such, the definition of the term 'family' has come to be assumed, which Omer has clearly demonstrated in his response. As has been demonstrated (see chapter four), this can prove problematic for a range of reasons, but most importantly of all, is the methodological challenges this can create for research that involves a measurement of 'family'. If 'family' is not clearly defined and is to be assumed by participants and researchers alike, then there is the potential for differences in understandings to occur. One of the young people in the focus group, Ali, demonstrated this point well. When asked to describe some features of 'family', he replied, "you mean who we live with yeh?" (Ali). As such, this opened up further discussion with the young people and the researcher was able to better explain the purpose of the focus group, that was to hear from the young people themselves as to how they defined the term 'family'. It was not surprising that Ali asked whether they were being asked about who they lived with, as historically, the term family has been seen as synonymous with the term household Previously, researchers have often used 'number of parents present in the home' as an objective way of measuring 'family' and attributing a numerical format to it (see chapter four). Despite the researcher stating that, "no, I don't just mean who you live with" (Nicola), the young people in the focus group did keep referring to 'family' members who they lived with. As such, the young people did not state, for instance, that 'mum' was who they lived with, but instead would speak about certain things or

people being 'at home'. The way in which they used language to speak about things and people 'at home' implies that, for the most part, when they thought about 'family' and 'family life', they would predominantly be thinking about who they lived with. However, none of the young people specifically stated that 'family' meant who they lived with. This supports much of the previous research that has used 'household' as a way to measure 'family' (chapter four), however, it does also highlight the importance of providing a clear definition of 'family' in research, so that the participants know who they are referring to. Furthermore, this echoed conclusions drawn by Edwards and Graham (2009), which stated that the different forms of communication by individuals about their family and family life is important. One of their primary findings demonstrated that the way in which individuals choose to speak about and present different family members, or different aspects of family life, can provide an important insight into their understandings of the term 'family'.

Towards the end of the focus group session, and after a great deal of discussion on different things that were all related to 'family' and 'family life', the researcher asked the young people again, "what does the word family mean to you?" (Nicola). By revisiting this first, but crucial question, after the young people had had a chance to discuss it and consider what it meant to them, it was interesting to hear their thoughts. One young person, Zain, stated that "most of the time it's blood related" (Zain). When asked to expand on this, he explained that he was referring to who people normally consider to be their 'family', and that "most people would agree" (Zain). The certainty with which he stated this, echoes what is evident both in law (chapter two) and also in the understandings on the impacts of 'family' on youth offending behaviour (chapter three). Although never explicitly stated that preference is given to the biological and blood-related parents, much of the previous research and theories that have linked youth offending behaviour to 'family' factors, have used language that implies this. For instance, when 'biological parents' are referred to, or when terms such as 'stepparents' are used, these all imply that the standard measurement for 'family' is through the biological relationships with the child. This was all echoed by the young people in the focus group, as they relied on these common terms when identifying certain people in their own 'family', with Zain's proclamations reinforcing this. This echoed findings from previous research, which was conducted with young people who lived in 'stepfamilies' and sought to understand the process of stepchildren 'claiming' stepparents. As such,

one of the key findings demonstrated that the young people being interviewed would use biological parents as a 'benchmark' for deciding when to actively 'claim' stepparents as parents. Furthermore, if these stepparents were co-resident with the young person, then they were more likely to be 'claimed' by the young person, through the language and labels they would use (Ganong et al, 2018).

The final way in which this key theme was exemplified by the young people in the focus group, was by David. When asked to revisit the question of "what does the word family mean to you?" at the end of the focus group session, David announced that "family means everything!" (David) whilst also pointing to all of the flash cards, which had been spread out across the table we were sat at. Again, this demonstrated very nicely the group consensus as to the difficulty in deciding on a singular definition for the term 'family', as the range of cards on the table covered everything, from biological relations to household to feelings and emotions (see appendix E for the full list of words that were written onto flashcards for use during the focus group). With a wide range of themes emerging from the discussions conducted with the young people during the focus group session, it is clear that this lends further support to the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis provides, in that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to think about and speak about 'family'.

Conclusions

In summary, the questionnaires and focus group conducted with the young people based at a London YOT has highlighted some important areas for consideration and further research, in order to develop understandings of how 'family' is being conceptualised through expectations and lived experiences. Also, that affective factors such as love, trust and support are more important to young people who have offended in defining who should be considered 'family'. This is in comparison to the vague definitions of 'family' that is provided in youth justice policy that concerns them, which lends support to central argument of this thesis, that children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored in policy and research. The next section of this chapter will present the key themes that emerged from a focus group that was conducted with a group of young people who had offended, that were based in Glasgow.

GLASGOW

Introduction

This section presents the findings from data generated and collected with the young people who were accessed through a youth group based in Glasgow. A focus group was conducted with this group of young people who had offended, for exploring the concept of 'family' with them. This section presents the key themes that emerged from the focus group discussion, and also included the findings from the analysis conducted on the pictures that the young people drew during the focus group.

Glasgow: Setting the Scene

Demographics

Glasgow is the largest city, by population size, in Scotland, and the fourth largest in the United Kingdom. Glasgow has a higher percentage of ethnic minorities than Scotland as a whole (Understanding Glasgow, 2018). During the census in 2011, 'white Scottish' accounted for 80.1% of Glasgow's total population, compared with 84% for Scotland (Scotland Census, 2011). As of 2019, it was reported that 12.6% of the overall population in Glasgow was represented by the 16-24 age group: with an equal split between males and females for this age group (NRScotland, 2020). All the participants in the focus group were between the ages of 16 and 24 and were all reported as being from a White ethnic background. In terms of gender, there was an even split, with 5 girls, and 6 boys present during the focus group.

There were a higher percentage of single people residing in Glasgow (49.2%, compared with other cities in Scotland, and a much lower percentage of married people (30.8%) compared with other cities in Scotland (Understanding Glasgow, 2018). Furthermore, it is reported that Glasgow has more lone parent households than Scotland as a whole, as well as higher levels of child poverty and a higher proportion of children living in overcrowded households (Understanding Glasgow, 2018).

Children's services in Glasgow

There are a few ways that a child may be classed as 'looked after' in Scotland. Children may be referred to the children's reporter, become voluntarily looked after or come via the criminal justice system (Scottish Government, 2020). The total number of children classed as 'looked after' has fallen for the seventh consecutive year, with the number of children leaving the care system greatly outweighing the number entering the care system. Foster care and kinship care were reported as the most common placement settings for 'looked after' children in 2019 (Scottish Government, 2020), with 59% of care leavers returning to 'home with (biological) parents'. Pathway plans ensure appropriate aftercare services continue to be available to care leavers. Since 2015, aftercare eligibility has been extended to include all care leavers up to, and including, those aged 25, where it had previously only covered care leavers up to their 21st birthday (Scottish Government, 2020).

The number of children on the child protection register decreased slightly in 2019, with the most prevalent causes for concern being related to emotional and domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, and neglect. Cases are raised where abuse or neglect has taken place, or in situations where a likelihood of harm or neglect has been identified (Scottish Government, 2020). Child protection case conferences are held to discuss the concerns raised, and the appropriate measures to be put in place. Other concerns that are likely to be raised, aside from abuse (emotional, domestic, physical and sexual) and neglect, include parental substance misuse, parental mental health problems and 'non-engaging family'. In 2019, rates for children placed on the protection register in Glasgow city were among the highest in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2020).

Crime rates in Glasgow

Drug related deaths and problematic drug use in Glasgow are particularly high and are both almost double the Scottish average (Understanding Glasgow, 2018). Damaging behaviours are, in the main, more common in the more deprived areas of the city. This is particularly notable for smoking, alcohol and drug related harm (Understanding Glasgow, 2018). In 2018/19 the largest number of crimes recorded

were in Glasgow City, which accounts for 12% of Scotland's population but accounted for 18% of all recorded crime in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2019).

Based on official data from 2017/18, violent crime experienced by people in Scotland has decreased. However, trends vary for different groups in society. Despite young people aged 16-24 years reporting the greatest reductions, this group still remains most likely to report 'violent victimisation' (Batchelor et al, 2019). Furthermore, "fear of violence was highest amongst those young people who lived in disadvantaged areas with perceived problem of youth gangs" (2019: 19). Official data also suggests that the number of children and young people involved in violent offending in Scotland has reduced (Batchelor et al, 2019). The majority of offences committed by young people are non-violent and often property-related (Whyte, 2004). 'Breach of the peace' which covers a wide range of activities and can include both violent and non-violent acts is also commonly reported. Despite this, Scotland has high rates of imprisonment for young people compared with other countries in Europe (Barry, 2011). The Prison Reform Trust (2008) has previously raised concerns regarding the impact of imprisonment on children's well-being and re-offending trajectories.

The Children's Hearings System in Scotland

Unlike England and Wales, the care and justice system for young people in Scotland is combined into one, called the Children's Hearings System. The fundamental principles of this combined system are that children and young people who commit offences and who need care and protection are supported (Children's Hearings Scotland, 2020). Decisions are made by members of the Children's panel, which consists of specially trained volunteer members from local communities in Scotland. The Children's Hearings System was developed in response to the recommendations made by the Kilbrandon Committee (1964). These were that decisions on what action should be taken with children and young people, should be removed from the courts, and placed within a newly developed hearing system with the primary focus being on the welfare on the child or young person. It was stated that there are far more similarities than differences between young people who offend and those who need care and protection (Whyte, 2004). As such, a new system was required in order to

deal with all young people who are experiencing problems, whether this be offending behaviour or abuse and neglect.

In Whyte's (2004) review of the Children's Hearing System, a large proportion of the young people involved in the review were reported to be living in "relatively poor economic and social circumstances" (2004: 398), regardless of whether they had entered due to offending or not. One of the main indicators for this measurement was through the type of accommodation the young people were residing in. Two-thirds of the young people in the study (69%) reported living in public authority accommodation (Whyte, 2004), compared to the national average found in Scotland (27%).

Focus Group Findings

This section will present the findings from the focus group that was conducted with young people (n=11) at the youth group in Glasgow. There was a total of six boys and five girls present, all ranging between the ages of 16-24 years old. As the young people had decided not to have the discussion audio-taped, observational field notes were made instead. These notes have been analysed according to grounded theory methodology (GTM) following a 'bottom-up' approach (see chapter 5 for full description of this analysis process). As such, the findings that are presented in this section demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge, as young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise and speak about 'family'. Their discussion was largely based on their personal experiences of 'family' and 'family life', with particular attention paid to their experiences of the care system in Scotland. The aim of this chapter was to answer research question five:

How do young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'?

Each theme that emerged from the data will be discussed in turn, but be aware that these were not standalone themes, and at various points there was some crossover between them. However, for the purpose of readability and following a coherent and logical progression of the research journey, they have been presented here as separate and distinct themes.

Drawings by the young people

The researcher started this focus group in a similar way to the focus group in London, by asking the question, "what does the word family mean to you?" (Nicola). In response, one young person, Harry, asked if he could draw out what 'family' meant to him, as he felt he would find it difficult to put into words. What followed was four drawings made by some of the young people in the group, and the subsequent discussion about what 'family' meant was largely based around these drawings. As such, the drawings will be presented throughout this findings section, and in relation to the key themes that emerged during the focus group discussions. As the drawings formed the basis for many of the key discussion points, and due to only four being created, they were not analysed as a separate piece of data, but instead were included as part of the data generated by the observational field notes that were made.

Relationships and Connections

The first key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions concerned relationships and connections. This was a strong theme that permeated many of the discussions that occurred during the focus group. A range of relationships were drawn on by the young people throughout the session, which included parents, siblings, friends, extended family members, professionals and even pets. This demonstrated the importance of asking young people to define, in their own words, what 'family' means to them, as they are much more likely to draw on a wider range of people and things (Irvine & Cilia, 2017). Younger children in particular often see things in more positive light, and consider what is important to them, rather than what is determined by society. This was demonstrated to some extent by a review of previous research, which was conducted by Rappaport (2013), whereby he concluded that a large majority of children who experience parental divorce are not negatively affected directly by the divorce, but that the negative outcomes are likely to be due to other factors, such as parental disagreement that led up to the divorce, or financial constraints that have resulted from the divorce.
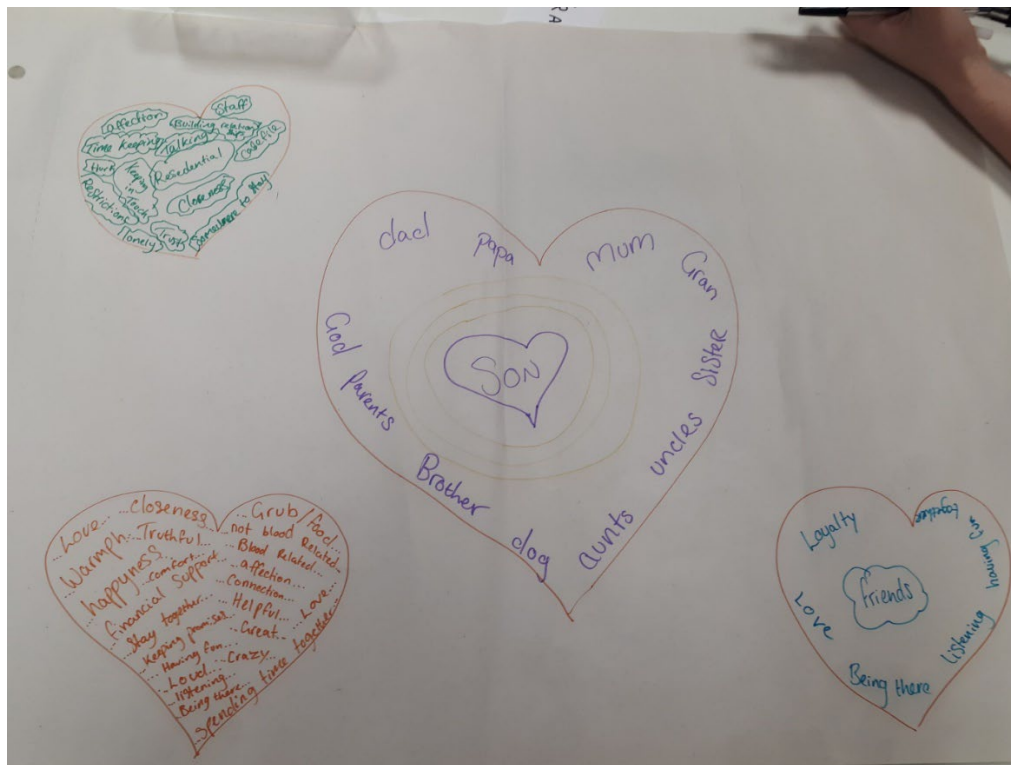
For this young person, Emma, she explained the picture that she had drawn was a way of categorising various parts of her 'family life'. For her, the most important part of 'family' was the close emotional connections she held with other people, and she demonstrated this by placing all her "actual family" (Emma) in the central heart, with her son being the very centre of her drawing. Majority of the people who Emma identified as "actual family" were blood relatives, which supports the standard assumption about 'family' as being those who are related by blood. However, some of the individuals included in Emma's definition of "actual family" also included relatives by legal ties (e.g., Marriage), and close family friends (e.g., God parents). The differentiation between various types of 'family' members was reminiscent of findings from research conducted by Becker and Charles (2006), and in particular, when one of their participants identified 'immediate' family as being distinctly separate from other 'types' of family members.

Furthermore, Emma explained that she had chosen to put friends in a separate heart, as although they could often provide the same or, at times, even better support for her, they could not be grouped in the same heart as her "actual family" (Emma). For Emma, she considered her friends and her "actual family" (Emma) as separate entities. "Actual family" (Emma) was defined by Emma, as being the 'family' who had been present for most of her life, even if she had not been living with them, or even had much contact

with them for a while. These were people who she thought of as her 'family', which even included her dog. This echoed similar findings from Irvine and Cilia (2017) whose participants described pets as 'part of the family'. This finding further supports this thesis as an original contribution to knowledge, in that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to understand the term 'family', which includes drawing on their own personal experiences of 'family life'.
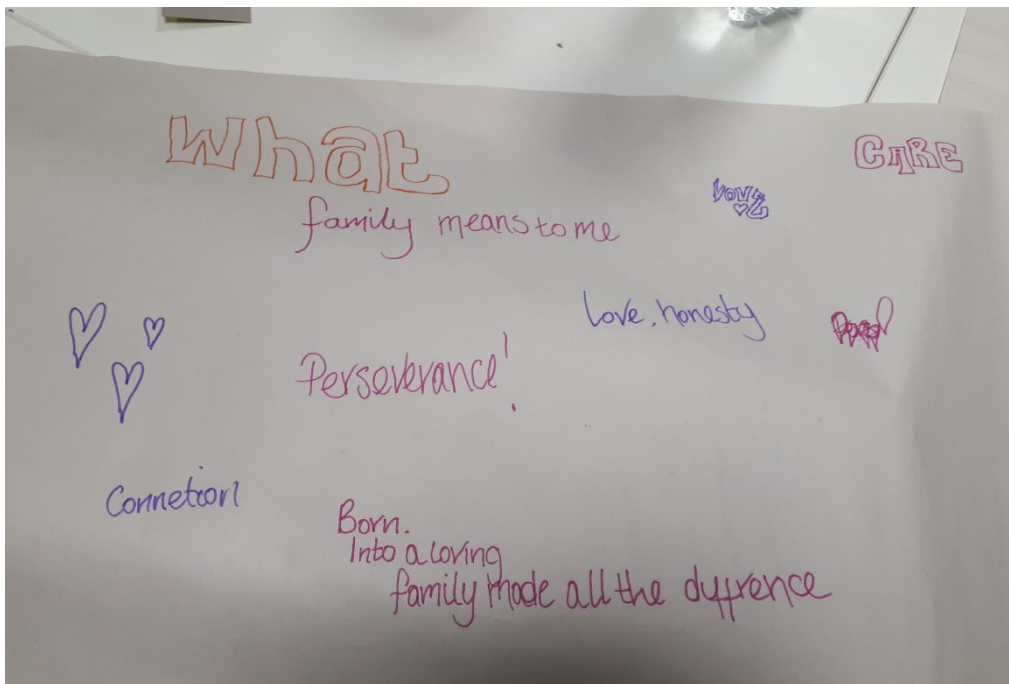
For another of the young people, Alex, being "born into a loving family made all the difference" (Alex). He explained this further, that experiences from his early childhood were happy and full of love, and that this was what his understandings of 'family' was largely based on. Again, echoing the attachment theory and social bond theory (chapter three), it was his strong connections with his birth family that had helped him through much of his childhood. Even with some of the negative and traumatic experiences from his adolescence, and having to move into a children's care home, he described the love that he felt for his birth family as helping him to persevere. This echoed findings from research conducted by Wilson et al (2012), where love from 'family' of origin was seen as symbolic and enduring. Furthermore, this internalisation of 'family values' and norms learned during childhood has been described as integral to children developing a strong sense of 'self' and self-control as they mature (see chapter three).

Finally, Katie presented the group with two different discussions regarding important relationships. The first of which concerned siblings, and in particular, the anger she had felt at being separated from her siblings when they were first placed into the care system. She described having a strong and close emotional relationship with her siblings, which she desperately wanted to maintain when they were placed in care. She believed that had she been able to maintain this relationship and connection, she would recall having a better experience of 'family life'. This echoes what has previously been reported by Wojciak et al (2018), and the positive impacts a close sibling relationship can have, in terms of social and emotional development, for children who are in the foster care system. Secondly, Katie also raised a discussion about friendship, and the important role that her friends now played in her life. This discussion eventually developed into one about requiring alternative language for describing those close emotional connections and 'important others', where she did not want to use the word 'family' or 'like-family' to describe them, due to her negativity towards the word 'family'.
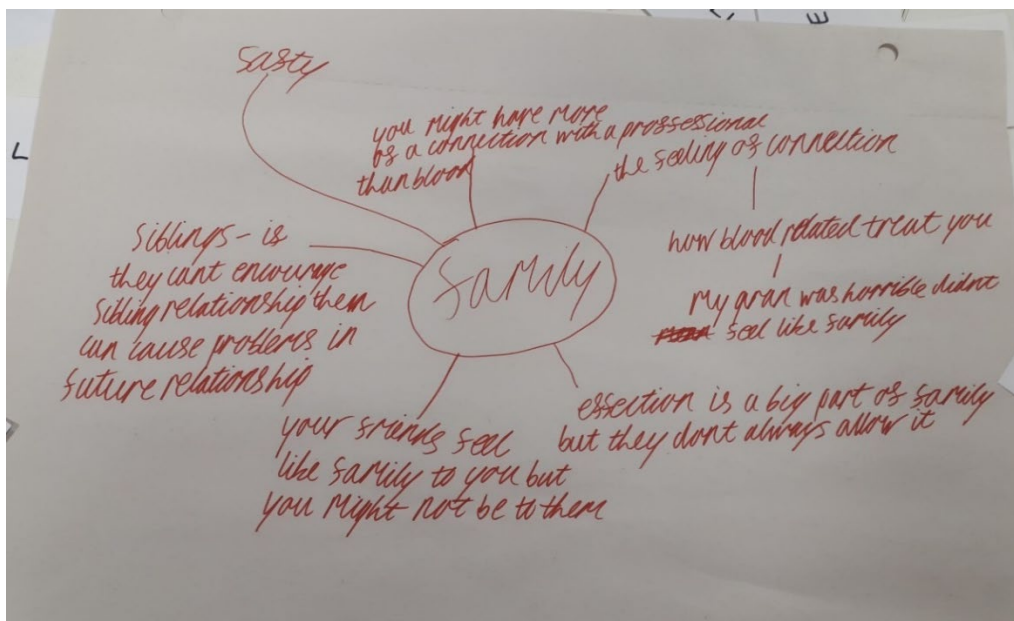
However, the early part of this discussion about friends and friendship developed from the picture she had drawn, and how she had described the relationship with her friends. Again, drawing on her negative experiences of the care system, and subsequent negativity towards the word 'family', she described the relationship she held with her friends, that she felt they were 'like-family' to her, but that she might not

necessarily be considered 'like-family' to them. On the surface, this explanation spoke about how to describe 'family', but once analysis had begun, it emerged that this part of her drawing was saying something much deeper about the importance of close emotional connections and relationships with others. The conversation about the importance of friends and friendships culminated in Katie's sarcastic comment that, "friends come and go but family is forever – not!" (Katie). She used this popular saying to demonstrate her personal experiences that 'family' was definitely not forever, and that her friends had been more supportive, both physically and emotionally, throughout her later childhood and early adolescence. The importance that Katie placed on the relationships she held with her friends was reminiscent of findings from research conducted by Thomas et al (2017) into the discourses of 'family' from individuals who had experienced foster care during their childhood. The participants in Thomas et al (2017) study spoke about a range of different relationships, which also included friends who had become 'like-family'. This theme that emerged from the data demonstrates a clear contribution to knowledge, with regards to young people who have experience of both the care and youth justice system, and that their experiences of 'family life' are very different to the way in which 'family' is presented through the youth justice policy that concerns them. As such, it is clear to see how policy and research has largely ignored young people's understandings and experiences of 'family', despite 'family' playing a central role.

Change

The next key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was change. In particular, the young people spoke about how their concept and understanding of 'family' had changed over time, which was mostly due to their experiences of the care system. This echoed findings from Meakings and Selwyn (2016) study, which found that difficult experiences and lack of integration into family life during a care placement had negative impacts on children's perceptions and expectations about family life (see chapter four). During the coding phase of analysis, it emerged that this theme of change could be further categorised into two concepts. The first of these categories crossed over with another key theme, as it was instances when the young people spoke about change in levels of care and dependency on others. As one young person, Kieran, stated, "in childhood we are more reliant on others around us for

providing our basic needs" (Kieran). Although this would appear to demonstrate the next theme of care well, it is given here, in the theme of change, to exemplify this through the context of the conversation. This statement made by Kieran was part of a wider discussion about change in 'family' and relationships over time, and a consideration by some of the young people about how their dependency on others had changed since early childhood to more recently, and therefore, this had perhaps impacted on who they saw as 'important family members'. This specific theme was also, in part, related to some of the early conversations that were held regarding the connections and relationships with others, and how these had changed over time, and that during early childhood many of the young people had good memories of their birth families. However, as time had gone on and they moved from childhood to adolescence, they could reflect better on their experiences of 'family life'.

The second of these categories, found within the key theme of change, was more specifically related to their personal experiences of the care system and constantly moving between foster families and children's homes. Therefore, this category was coded during the analysis stage, as instances when the young people spoke more about the physical change in living arrangements, as opposed to the previous category, which was more based on the care and emotional side of change in circumstances. Again, this coding for physical change in living arrangements was occasionally crossed over with instances of the negative experiences of 'family', as the young people spoke about some of the downsides of the constant moving, which included not having many personal possessions or a place that felt "like home" (Sam). The language that was used by many of the young people, was largely based on their own personal experiences of family and family life, and in particular, drew on experiences from growing up part of the care system in Scotland. In turn, these personal and specific experiences have enabled the thesis to expand the exploration of the concept of 'family' with young people who have offended, to also include these 'cross over' youth who have experienced both the care and youth justice system. As such, these findings contribute to the original knowledge that is presented in this thesis, that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to describe and understand the term 'family'.

Care and a sense of belonging

Another key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was the concept of care and having a sense of belonging. This theme in particular crossed over with many of the other themes that are presented. However, it was important to present it as a standalone theme in order to fully appreciate the many times that it was coded throughout the observational field notes that formed the main base of the data. This theme was present during discussions about change in 'family' circumstances from childhood through to adolescence, and also in discussions concerning some of the more negative experiences of the care system that were associated with 'family' life (Winter, 2010). Care was understood by the young people as an expectation that everyone had a right to, but that people who were in a position of power, whether as professionals or as parents, should be responsible for providing a certain level of care towards those they were 'looking after'. As one young person, Ewan, stated, "care – it's in the name!" (Ewan), when speaking in reference to the care system and how it had impacted on his expectations of being placed with a foster family. This echoed findings from research conducted by Mitchell et al (2009), who collected the experiences of children from the care system, to develop advice for other children entering the care system, but also various foster parents, carers and professionals that are involved in the care system. Many of the children interviewed as part of Mitchell et al (2009) research, reported on the importance of building a trusting relationship between themselves and their caregivers, and also the importance of being involved in decisions that concerned them. As such, Ewan highlighted some of the similar expectations about the care system and foster homes as some of the young people from Mitchell et al (2009) research.
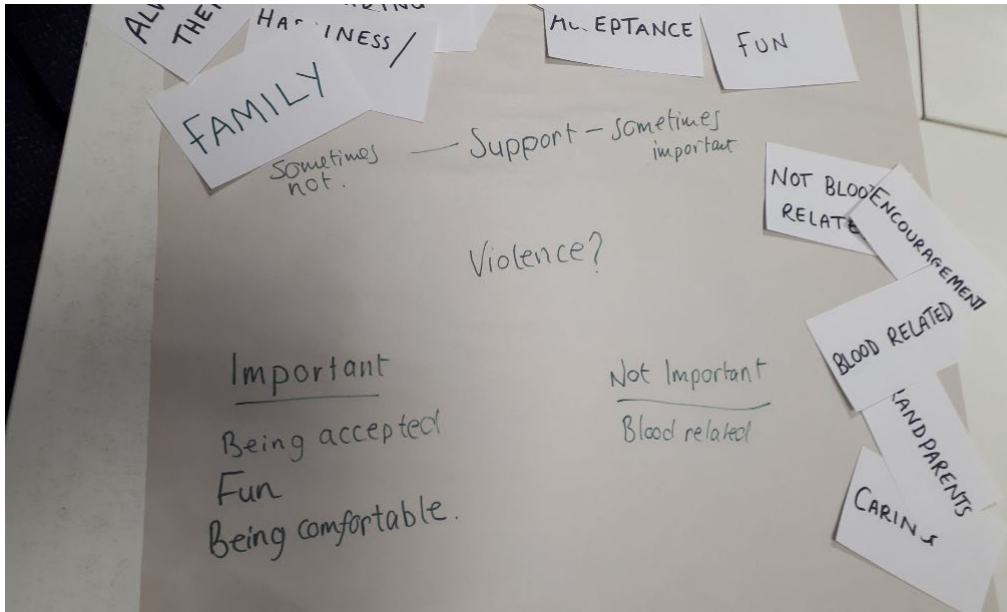
At the beginning of the focus group session, a small group of the young people decided to use the flashcards on the table and began organising them into two categories of 'important' and 'not important'. When we came to discuss what they had been doing, they explained to the rest of the group that they had taken each card in turn and contemplated how 'important' each would be if they were choosing a 'family' to join. This was a novel way of thinking about how to define a 'family' and what attributes were important to them. It was from this discussion that this key theme of having a sense of belonging first emerged. When asked to explain this, the young people described categorising 'being accepted' and 'being comfortable' in the important column, as they would want that emotional connection and sense of belonging if they were to join a family on a permanent basis. Holding a strong sense of belonging has not only been stated as an important concept in attachment theory (see chapter three) but has further been supported in research that particularly concerns children and young people who have experiences of the care system (McCarthy, 2012; Biehal, 2014) (chapter four).

However, one of the young people, Ewan, did admit that sometimes when he had been moved to join a new foster family, he did hold some resentment towards them, and did not feel that he wanted to be part of "another new family" (Ewan). This discussion around not wanting to integrate or develop a sense of belonging with a foster family echoed findings from research that was conducted by Mariscal et al (2015), who found similarly that children and young people may experience conflicting feelings about a

new foster family, that are borne out of guilt and loyalty to their birth family (See chapter four). For the young people that did not feel this way, developing a strong sense of belonging and feeling genuinely cared for and treated "like part of the family" (Harry), was important. This echoes research conducted by Lambert et al (2013) who found that for individuals who reported feeling a strong sense of belonging, they were more likely to also report positive social relationships and interactions more generally. This links to what social bond theory states about holding a sense of belonging and feeling socially connected, as a way of reducing the risk of (re)offending (see chapter three).
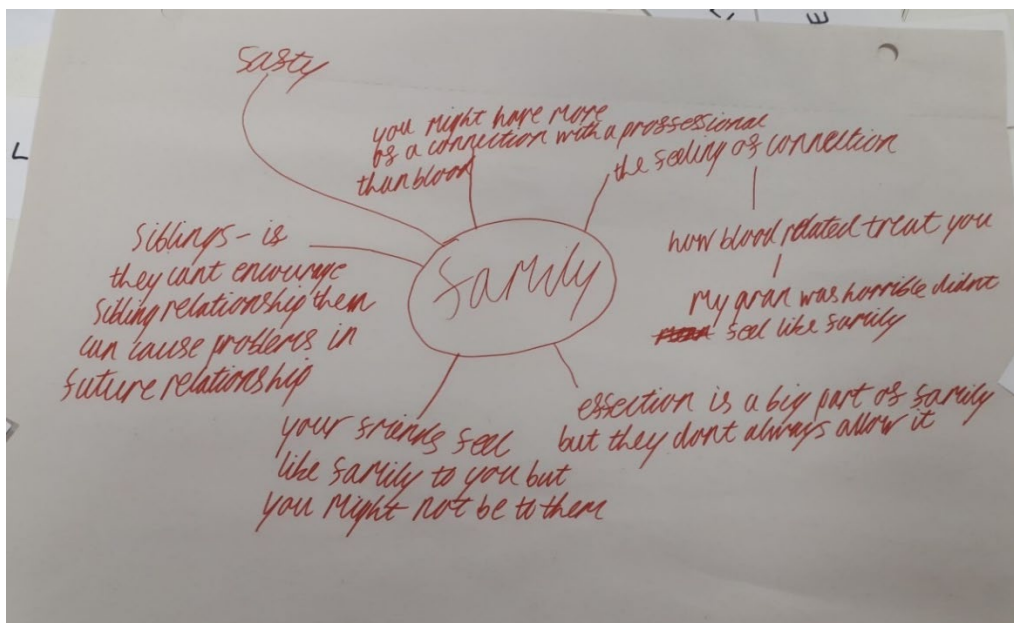
For another of the young people, Katie, she described feeling rejected by some of her blood relatives, and so had turned to developing good connections and relationships with professionals, such as her caseworker. This echoed some of the discussions reported in research conducted by Naert et al (2019), where youth reflecting on their care pathways reported continuity that their caseworkers could provide in an otherwise chaotic life, was important to them. Again, this theme crossed over with the key theme of relationships and connections, as care and a sense of belonging was seen as intertwined with emotional connections that the young people held with others that were present in their lives. For some of the young people, they described 'blood relations', for others, they considered friends as providing them with a clear sense of belonging.

Negative experiences of 'family'

The next key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was the negative experiences of 'family'. As all the young people in the Glasgow focus group had experience of the care system in Scotland, most of them drew on these experiences when discussing what the word 'family' meant to them. A reoccurring theme that emerged very early on in the data analysis was the negativity associated with these experiences, and the impact this had on their understandings of 'family'. One of the young people, Sam, described how the constant moving between foster families and children's homes throughout childhood had led him to, "feeling like you are material" (Sam). Although this particular quote was highlighted during the coding phase as covering a few of the emerging themes, it provided a good example of the type of negativity that was significantly linked to experiences of the care system by the young people in the focus group. The negative feelings expressed by the young people echoed previous research with young people with long-term experience of the care system (Children's Commissioner, 2019). As their experience of the care system seemed to impact greatly on the experiences and understandings of 'family', it was necessary to conduct more of a review on relevant literature (see chapter four).

Another example of the way in which this theme emerged, was from a discussion that occurred towards the end of the focus group session. As the researcher asked the young people to consider the question, "what does the word 'family' mean to you?" (Nicola), which was given at the start of the session, more of the young people felt able to answer this by the end of the session. In particular, one of the young people, Sarah, offered her thoughts on this. She explained her bumpy journey through the care system, and the way this made her feel. As she reflected on what the word 'family' meant to her, she explained that "'family' doesn't mean anything in the end" (Sarah). When asked to explain this further, she drew on past experiences of "bad" foster families she was placed with and feeling forcibly separated from her siblings during childhood. This theme of negative experiences of 'family' crossed over significantly with the theme of relationships and connections during the coding phase, and it was difficult to decide which section it should be included during write-up. However, when reading the context and wider discussion around this quote from Sarah, it was decided that it exemplified well the theme of negative experiences of 'family' and the significant impact that these had on a number of the young people's understandings and ways of

defining the term 'family'. Some such as Sarah, even decided that the term 'family' held very little meaning to them in the end, and that perhaps "other words" (Harry) should be used to describe those they felt close to.

Choosing alternative language

The final key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was the notion of choosing alternative language. This theme emerged out of a specific discussion that was held with the young people towards the end of the focus group session. However, during the coding phase of the data analysis, it was found that this theme was also present in some of the earlier discussions without realising it at the time, highlighting the importance of multiple stages of coding and understanding the relationships between the themes that emerge. For the young people in the focus group, it was not so much the lack of a definition for the term 'family' that was problematic, but it was the term 'family' itself. When revisiting the question, "what does the word 'family' mean to you?" (Nicola), at the end of the session, some of the young people in the focus group decided to outrightly reject the term, stating they would prefer to use "other words" (Harry) to describe the people they felt closest to and who cared about them.

One of the young people, Katie, explained that the session had helped her to reflect on the word 'family' and what it meant to her, and that she had come to realise that she very rarely used the word. Instead, she explained she would refer to her close friends and important others as "my people" (Katie). This was her way of demonstrating her close emotional connection to others, as she wanted to avoid using the phrase 'like family' to describe and refer to them. A few of the other young people shared these feelings and also expressed their difficulty in choosing the right words to describe those who were important to them, especially when talking about them or introducing them to strangers. This echoes what Smart (2007) states about needing alternative language that is more meaningful, but which conveys the same message about emotional closeness, love, care, trust and support – all of the themes that have emerged from this primary research conducted with young people who have offended.

Conclusions

In summary, the focus group conducted with the young people based at a youth group in Glasgow has highlighted some important areas for consideration and further research, in order to develop understandings of how 'family' is being conceptualised through expectations and lived experiences. In particular, that 'cross-over youth' who have experience of both the care and youth justice system should have their understandings of 'family' considered, as they used a variety of diverse and flexible ways to define the term 'family'. This is in comparison to the vague definitions of 'family' that is provided in youth justice policy that concerns them, which lends support to central argument of this thesis, that children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored in policy and research.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided the findings from the empirical research that was conducted with two groups of young people who have offended. The aim of the empirical research was to engage directly with young people who have offended, and ask them the question: 'what does family mean to you? This research was important because 'family' has played a central role in policy, theory and research. However, children and young people's understandings and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored, and in particular, young people who have offended. As such, the findings from this research project demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge, that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise the term 'family'. The language used by the young people was largely based on their own personal experiences of 'family' and 'family life', which for some of the young participants, was significantly affected by their time spent in the care system. The next chapter will provide a discussion of the key findings and reflections on the research journey.

CHAPTER EIGHT – DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the key findings from both the primary research and the policy analysis that was conducted. These will then be discussed, with reference back to the earlier chapters (two, three and four), which provided a review of the existing literature that demonstrated the relevance of 'family' in the lives of young people who have offended. Despite the repeated stress on family relationships in research on youth justice, and despite the central role that the family has been afforded in youth justice policy, few researchers or policy makers seem to have asked the question, 'what does family mean to you?', of young people who have offended. As such, the key findings from the primary research that was conducted with young people who have offended, and did ask them this question, should be considered with regard to wider issues concerning the importance and value of young people's voices.

Furthermore, this study sought to explore how young people who have offended conceptualised the term 'family', as it was demonstrated through the literature review that this particular group of young people had not previously been involved as participants in research that had specifically asked them what the term 'family' meant. Considering that so many of the theories that explain youth offending behaviour highlight 'family' as being a prominent source of 'risk' in young people's lives, this contributed to the necessity to conduct research with them. Further to this, the majority of the research that was reviewed demonstrated some significant correlations between certain family 'types' and youth offending behaviour, but never provided clear definitions of 'family' based on the young people's understandings and experiences, and so it was necessary to explore these.

Therefore, this discussion and reflections chapter has been split into three sections, the first of which will discuss the primary research findings in relation to the literature that was reviewed in chapters two, three and four. The second section of this chapter will provide a discussion on the positioning of these findings within the wider societal context, but in particular, will focus on the developing 'positive youth justice movement' that is being implemented in the youth justice system at the time of writing (2021).

Finally, the third section will provide some reflections on the journey of this thesis, and more specifically, will consider some of the comments that were recorded in the fieldwork journal as the primary research was being conducted.

Section 1: Discussion of primary research findings in relation to the literature that was reviewed

The first section of this discussions chapter will present the key findings from the primary research that was conducted with young people who have offended, to understand how they conceptualise the term 'family'. These key findings will be discussed in relation to the theories and research that were previously reviewed, and which identified the central role that 'family' has been afforded.

Relationships and Attachments

The first, and most important of the key findings from the primary research conducted, identified the variety of relationships that were considered by the young people to be significant in their lives. For the young people from the London YOT, they mostly referred to parents, grandparents and siblings, however, for the young people from the Glasgow group, who self-reported as having spent time in the care system in Scotland, they also referred to caseworkers, foster parents and friends. As such, during discussions about what the term 'family' meant, a much broader range of relationships were identified by the young people, which extended beyond the 'typical' relationships that are studied in research concerning young people and their 'families'. Chapter four provided a review of research that had explored 'family' as a sociological concept, which identified the focus of much research as primarily concerned with the parental relationship (whether they are married, cohabiting or separated), and the parent-child relationship (and how the parent actively 'parents' their child). The finding that young people who have offended use the term 'family' to refer to a much broader range of relationships that they hold with others, demonstrates that the previous focus on the parental relationship and parent-child relationship in theories and research is limiting. As such, previous correlations that have been found between youth offending behaviour and poor parent-child relationships may not be as significant as previously suggested, particularly if the young person at the centre of the research holds a

stronger, and more influential, relationship with another family member or 'trusted' adult. Although attachment theory was first developed with the mother in mind, it can be applied to any adult person the child feels most attached and connected to. Therefore, this theory could be applied to explain the different relationships that the young people spoke of as being most important to them.

Not only did the young people identify a much broader range of relationships than simply the parent-child relationship, but they also spoke about varying qualities of these relationships. For all of the young people, across both the London and Glasgow groups, they spoke about 'trust' as being an important part of deciding who they would include in their definition of 'family'. This reflected what had been reviewed from previous research, particularly concerning young people who had experience of the care system and how their negative experiences could impact on their ability to develop trust in others. Therefore, it was not simply the presence of relationships that were used to identify who they considered to be 'family', but it was the quality of these relationships, and the emotional attachment that was felt. This echoed what was reviewed in terms of the attachment theory, and how important strong and positive attachments are in children's development. With attachment theory identifying primary caregivers (such as parents) as integral, it is important to understand from the young people themselves, who they consider to be most influential in their lives, and who they are most strongly attached to. If researchers and policymakers are to assume that parents are the primary caregivers, then subsequent findings may be skewed.

Further to this, throughout both the focus groups, the young people spoke about the people they considered to be 'family' and the varying degrees of love they felt. As such, love was a reoccurring theme throughout both the discussion groups and clearly played an important role in the young people's lives. The young people from the London YOT spoke about love as being a given within a family. This was discussed in relation to how family is likely to change over time, that things might happen, but that love should always be a constant. In particular, the young people spoke about parents and siblings as both being important sources of love in their lives. The young people in the Glasgow group also spoke about the expectations one might have in receiving love and protection from those they are closest to and how these expectations are likely to change over time. Despite being identified as a similar theme running through both groups, the way in which the concept of love was discussed, differed at times.

For the young people in London, love was spoken about as if it were something that was always present amongst family members, regardless of the situation. In comparison, the young people in Glasgow spoke about love as if it were something to strive for. They drew on their experiences of being in care, moving between various group homes and foster homes, and identified love as something that demonstrates a strong emotional connection to someone else. For most of them, this was an important thing to have in their life, and some even described feeling that sense of attachment to other adults throughout their life, in place of a parental figure. Again, holding a strong emotional attachment to others, who were considered 'family', 'like family', or the closest equivalent to 'a family' was seen by all the young people as an important quality for defining 'family'. From a social constructionists' perspective, these conversations with the young people about the importance of love and drawing on various experiences of 'family' and 'family life' are integral to developing a full understanding of exactly how young people who have offended use the term family. When comparing these findings from the focus groups, with the findings from the policy document analysis that was conducted, it is clear to see how the young people are constructing and using the term 'family' differently to those in power who have been responsible for writing and implementing the policy. Crucially, this indicates a significant gap in policy, where children and young people's voices are missing.

Within this theme of love, was also the notion of protection, and that an expected outcome of a loving relationship should also encompass some decent standard of protection. The young people identified this as an expectation that is held by children, and by society, that parents should love and protect their children from harm. This echoed what had been reviewed in theories concerned with 'good parenting', and in policy that holds parents responsible for their children's youth offending behaviour. As discussions continued, and personal life experiences were drawn upon, it was highlighted that protection may be expected, but not always provided by family. This was primarily discussed by the young people in Glasgow, who were very open in their discussions about their experiences of the care system and how these have impacted on their understandings of what 'family' means. They wanted to draw a contrast between what is expected of a family, and what might be the reality for some children, in order to highlight the importance of asking children and young people what they need. In contrast, for the young people in London, it was implied that their experiences

were much more positive. These were reflected in the way that they spoke about relationships with family members, and the enduring nature of love as one moves from childhood towards adulthood. Again, recording these constructions about 'family life' from the young people's perspective are important so that policy makers and youth justice practitioners may have a better understanding, not only of the role that 'family' plays in the young person's life, but also the important relationships they hold and what their expectations are of these relationships.

Care and Belonging

The next key finding from the primary research conducted, identified the importance the young people placed on the giving and receiving of care among 'family' members, and the significance of holding a sense of belonging to a family unit. During the discussions about who might be considered 'family', many of the young people started with the notion of care. For the young people from the London YOT group, they spoke very positively about family members caring for them, both when they were younger and now as they were older, this care was displayed more as support, particularly as they had become involved in the youth justice system. As such, the terms 'care' and 'support' were often used interchangeably by this group, signifying the importance of both in the young people's conceptualisations of the term 'family'. However, for the young people in Glasgow, who were very open in sharing how their experiences of being in the care system had impacted on their lives, and subsequently on their understandings of the term 'family', led them to identify that when they were younger, they did not realise that who they considered to be family at the time, were not actually caring for them in the 'proper' way. Now that they were older and understood certain expectations that are held around parental responsibility and care, they could look back on their childhood and identify individuals who they no longer consider to be 'family', due to the lack of care that they had provided. Again, these findings echoed what had previously been reviewed in chapter three, concerning parenting styles and general expectations that are held by society regarding 'good parenting' and 'bad parenting'. Additionally, the language used by some of the young people in the Glasgow group, which linked the theme of care to the notion of parental responsibility, had already been identified during the analysis that was conducted on various pieces of youth justice policy (see chapter six). The term 'parental responsibility' is

predominantly used in policy to identify individuals who are held responsible and accountable for children and young people within their care. In the policy that was reviewed, this concept of 'parental responsibility' was used many more times than simply identifying individuals as 'parents', suggesting, as the young people did, that being a parent holds a certain degree of responsibility towards the child. That being said, this was the only time that the language used in youth justice policy was reflected by the young people in the focus groups. This could be interpreted that young people's voices are indeed represented in the policy that concerns them, however, all the other concepts that the young people used when talking about 'family' and 'family life', were not reflected in the policy. Therefore, it could be concluded that more needs to be done to better represent young people's voices in the youth justice policy that may directly impact them.

It was also recognised by the young people, in both focus groups, that as children develop physically and mentally, they become less reliant on adults to care for them and start becoming more independent. Identified in developmental theories as an important life-stage of *adolescence*, the young people spoke about family members and important others who had, and who were still, providing support in a variety of ways. As such, support was differentiated from care, in that care was a necessity for young children, whereas support for older children and adolescents was not a necessity but was considered an important feature when deciding who they should refer to as their 'family'. The importance that was placed on this concept, was applied during discussions to both day-to-day life and also at critical points in their lives, for example, as they became involved with the criminal justice system as offenders. As with some of the other themes already presented in this thesis, there was a clear distinction made by young people in both focus groups, as to the differences between expectations and reality surrounding levels of support. As presented in chapter four, research has previously found that children and young people, particularly those who have spent time in the care system, experience a complex web of relationships, with every person in their 'web' providing varying levels of support and care, at various points in their lives. This was similar to some of the ideas that the young people held about conceptualising the term 'family' and knowing who to identify as family members. Both social bond theory and attachment theory (chapter three) identify the importance of holding strong connections to others, as a way of desisting from

committing crime. This was implicit in the young people's descriptions of the varying qualities they considered when defining family, particularly when they identified 'support' from parents and other caring adults as important. This therefore demonstrates the importance of asking young people to provide their own definitions for 'family', which are often based on lived experiences.

Finally, the young people identified holding a strong sense of belonging as integral to feeling like they were part of a family unit. Specifically, this discussion came from the focus group with the Glasgow young people, who were keen to draw on their experiences from time spent in the care system. As such, they identified the constant moving between children's homes and foster homes, as having a great but negative impact on their sense of belonging. Although this part of the discussion did not entirely focus on who they considered to be 'family', it was a feature that had been identified during the preliminary stages of literature review. Firstly, it appears in theories, such as social bond theory, as a way of building and strengthening bonds and connections with wider society and 'institutions' such as family and school. For theorists working within social bond theory, it is these strong bonds that encourage desistance from crime (chapter three). Secondly, it appears in research which explores 'features of family life' rather than family structures, as a way of 'measuring' the concept of 'family'. Having a sense of belonging to a family unit, overlapped with several other themes that emerged from the data collected during the focus groups, such as love and relationships, suggesting that all of these qualities that were identified by the young people as important in their conceptualisations of 'family', are interrelated and reliant to some degree on one another. Importantly, when considering the literature concerning looked after children (chapter four), the importance of holding a sense of belonging to a (family) unit becomes even more prevalent. The findings from research that was reviewed in chapter four on the importance of having a sense of belonging, emerged as a main theme during the discussions with the young people in the Glasgow group, as they drew on their own experiences of the care system. This suggests that the concept of 'sense of belonging' plays a fundamental role in the lives of young people considered to hold 'dual status'[6] and should be considered important in policy that concerns them; something which is missing currently.

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[6] The term often used to refer to young people who are involved in both the youth justice system and the care system (Bateman et al, 2018).

Problematic Terminology

The final key finding from the primary research conducted, identified that the term 'family' itself is potentially problematic, due to the assumptions that it holds. This was explicitly identified by some of the young people in the Glasgow focus group, who explained the difficulty that they had experienced, both at the start of the focus group and more generally in everyday life, on who to describe as their 'family'. When asked to explain what they meant by this, it became clear that it was the word itself, 'family', that they had issues with, as they did not feel that it 'properly' described the people who they felt closest to emotionally, and who had provided them with support when they needed it. This part of the discussion reinforced the need for primary research such as this to be conducted, as children and young people's understandings of the term 'family' is largely missing from previous research and policy that concerns them. Furthermore, these findings echo and lend support to some suggestions that have previously been made by sociologists, and the problematic nature of the word 'family', instead proposing other terminology to better suit the requirements of specific groups or individuals in society. In chapter four, some of this alternative language was explored during the literature review, drawing on concepts such as 'personal life' and 'kinship', which allow individuals to encompass a wider range of relationships and other beings into their network. This same approach of seeking alternative language was described by the young people in the Glasgow group, as a process that they had already completed unconsciously; preferring to describe people they were close to as 'my people', or simply using the word 'relationships' when identifying others (see chapter seven).

However, this finding of 'family' as a problematic term was also implicit in the discussions held with the young people at the London YOT. Unlike some of the young people in the Glasgow group who had actively chosen not to use the term 'family' when describing others they felt close to, the young people in the London group never raised this as an issue. Throughout the discussions in the London-based focus group, all the young people used the term 'family' and did not identify alternative language that they used in its place. However, it was implied several times throughout the session that the term 'family' can prove problematic. The first example of this was early on in the discussion when one young person asked whether by 'family' we meant the people who he lived with. This echoed research that was reviewed in chapter four, which takes

a more positivist approach and attempts to quantify and measure something as dynamic and flexible as 'family', choosing to categorise their participants based on who they live with, or the marital status of their parents (single, 'broken', divorced, etc). With young people assuming this is the 'measurement' of family that they were expected to use during the discussion, is reflective of the much wider use of the term 'family' in everyday life, and perhaps even how it is portrayed to them through the media (which will be discussed in section three of this chapter). The second example of how the term 'family' proved problematic during the discussions with the young people based at the London YOT, was when a young person pointed to all the flashcards that were laid across the table, to provide his definition of 'what family means'. The flashcards contain a wide range of words, including specific family members (mother, father, etc), emotions and 'features of family life', such as love, trust and care, and also included some more negative words, such as criminal, abuse and neglect. Importantly, the fact that the young person suggested all the words were relevant in describing and defining the term 'family', demonstrates and supports previous research (chapter four) that aims to expand the concept of 'family'. Furthermore, it lends support to this thesis, and its original contribution to knowledge that young people who offend choose to use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise the term 'family', and in some specific instances, even choose to use alternative language altogether. Furthermore, that the concepts they drew on were not reflected in the youth justice policy reviewed as part of the empirical research. As such, young people who have offended, draw on their own personal experiences, which may also involve time spent in the care system, when choosing who to describe as 'family'.

Section 2: Discussion on the positioning of these findings within the wider societal context

The second section of this chapter will provide a discussion on the positioning of these key findings within the wider societal context. As such, it will focus on whether young people's voices and experiences are reflected in youth justice policy, which brings into the discussion the policy analysis that was conducted as part of this research project. Then, it will focus on the developing 'positive youth justice movement' that is being implemented in the youth justice system at the time of writing (2021), and how the findings from this research complements this movement.

Are young people's voices and experiences reflected in youth justice policy?

The content analysis that was conducted, using a variety of key policy and legislation documents that are relevant to young people who have offended, intended to identify how the term 'family' is used in youth justice policy. What was found during the analysis was that the documents tended to speak in more formal, legal-based terms regarding family, and in particular, parents and 'parental responsibility'. Once the focus groups with young people had been conducted and the observational field notes were analysed, the themes that emerged suggested that young people who have offended use a wide variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise the term 'family' and draw on their own personal experiences of 'family' and family life. When using these findings to further analyse the policy documents, it was concluded that they are lacking a child-focused approach, as they are largely ignoring children and young people's understandings of the term. Furthermore, not only are these documents lacking in a child-focused approach, but in some of them, they are also missing a clear definition of the term 'family' completely. This lack of clear definition was reflected in both of the focus groups conducted subsequently, where the young people were unable to decide on a singular definition of family. Instead, they had a series of attributes, or themes, that they would use to describe either their own family, or to identify other families.

In much of the policy and government reports reviewed, when family is mentioned, it is often from a negative perspective. Those parental behaviours associated with 'bad parenting', such as poor mental health, drug and alcohol issues, and instances of reported child maltreatment and neglect, are all referred to as having short and long-term negative impacts on children and are all highly correlated with displays of youth offending behaviour. The significant impact that parental behaviour can have on their children's future behaviours, is key to the social learning theory and so should be considered here. It is clear in much of the policy reviewed, that 'parental responsibility' is important when discussing children and young people. It is also clear in much of the practice within the field of youth justice over the past thirty years, the significant role that social learning theory has played in advising and guiding the main principles of preventing and responding to youth offending behaviour. Increasing emphasis has been placed on responsibilising those assumed to play key roles in the social learning and education of young people. Furthermore, the *Taylor Review (2016)* refers to families displaying 'chaotic and dysfunctional behaviour' as being those most in need

of support. The most recent report that was analysed, titled *Improving Parental Engagement (2020)* spoke about the need for 'supportive relationships' in children and young people's lives as a more long-term prevention method for offending behaviour. These findings, when compared with the young people's own definitions and conceptualisations of the term, suggest that there is some movement towards considering young people's voices and could be a promising sign that more attention is being given to children and young people's experiences in matters that concern them. Despite this though, the argument does still stand that children and young people's voices have largely been absent from youth justice policy, and that the findings from the policy analysis contribute to the central argument of this thesis that children and young people's understanding, and experience of the concept 'family' has largely been ignored in policy that concerns them.

The importance and value of young people's voices

In contrast to this, the more recent developments within the field of youth justice, and the progressive 'children first' model of youth justice, draws on children's rights as a base line for involving children and young people not only in the decisions that are made about them, but also places emphasis on the importance of involving children in policy development (Case et al, 2020). As such, the field of youth justice in England and Wales, has seen a marked shift in the approach towards young people who have offended (Gray, 2019), with the 'children first' movement being championed and slowly integrated into the youth justice system (YJB, 2019). The overarching premise of this approach is that "responses to all offending behaviour by children must be Children First and non-criminalising" (Case & Haines, 2020: 9), drawing on the labelling theory, and the impacts that negative labels such as 'young offender' can have on children (see chapter three). Furthermore, that children should be placed at the centre of the decisions that involve them, and that the responses should be to their needs and be both 'child-focused' and 'child-appropriate' in nature (Haines & Case, 2015). This consideration of children's needs first is even more necessary when dealing with children and young people with 'dual status', who have experience of both the youth justice system and the care system and may have multiple needs and underlying issues that should be dealt with first before the offending behaviour (Bateman et al, 2018).

With the increasing amount of research related to this 'children first' movement, it is vital to provide a discussion about how the findings from the focus groups 'fit' within this approach and complements some of the initiatives already being implemented by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) within the youth justice system. Empirical research that is being conducted within this 'subdiscipline' of youth justice, is utilising child-friendly methodologies, which seek to 'ground' the data in the lived experiences of children and young people who have offended. As such, the primary research that was conducted as part of this thesis, and which draws on the personal experiences of young people who have offended in both England and Scotland, followed these same principles of placing the young people at the centre of the data collection. In practice, the young people were given the power in the focus groups, to disclose and discuss as much or as little as they liked about their experiences of family and family life, and to draw conclusions about their own conceptualisations about the term 'family'. From a social constructionist perspective, importance was placed not only on what the young people said about 'family' but also the ways in which they constructed meaning through conversation with one another. As such, the research was designed with the young people in mind, placing them as the centre focus and asking them 'what does the word 'family' mean to you?'. Therefore, the findings from this research not only provide an original contribution to knowledge in the varied and dynamic ways in which young people who have offended choose to describe and define the term 'family', but the findings also complement and add to the emerging but limited evidence-base of research that seeks to place children and young people's voices at the centre (Case et al, 2020). As such, this is considered a significant strength of the research project and this thesis, with importance being placed on the participation of the young people, as without them, this project could not have been possible.

Section 3: Reflections on the journey of this thesis

The final section of this discussions chapter will present some reflections on the journey of this thesis, and more specifically, will consider some of the comments that were recorded in the fieldwork journal as the primary research was being conducted. As such, these questions and comments that were recorded during the research project, have been conceptualised as important discussion points to be included in this penultimate chapter.

Impact of the focus group setting

The first discussion point in this section, considers the impact the focus group setting in both locations may have potentially had on the discussions that followed. When analysing and comparing the data collected as observational field notes, it was clear that there was a great difference in how the young people responded to the discussions on family. In the London-based group, the young people were more positive in their discussions, which suggested that if they were drawing on personal experiences, then these had largely been positive experiences of family, and family life. However, in comparison, the young people in the Glasgow-based group were, at times, very negative, and made it known that they were drawing on personal experiences about being involved with the care system. Despite it being known that high percentages of young people involved with the youth justice system also have experience of the care system (Summerfield, 2011), the young people based at the London YOT, chose not to disclose whether they had experiences of the care system. In contrast, the young people from the Glasgow group made it known throughout the discussions that they all had some degree of experience of the care system in Scotland. In reflections recorded in the fieldwork journal, it was suggested that perhaps the focus group setting did have an impact on the young people's ease to disclose personal information such as this. Consideration was given to the fact that the focus group setting was not with their normal group of friends, nor was it on a topic that they would 'normally' have discussions about, and so some degree of participant-bias may have occurred, in that the participants (young people who have offended) gave answers and discussions on what they thought was more socially acceptable, rather than on what their honest opinions and feelings were.

Does the setting matter?

The second discussion point in this section, considers the impact the physical setting may have had on the discussions during the focus groups. When planning this research project, a range of locations for focus groups were considered. However, in both instances, the final decision was made in agreement with the professionals involved. Under their guidance, the focus groups were held in the same place where they would normally meet with their young people. For the London group, this was the YOT offices where all one-to-one meetings with caseworkers and group work sessions

were held. For the Glasgow group, this was in a meeting room at the local University, where their regular meetings were held. Providing the young people with a familiar environment and minimal disruption to their normal routine was considered key when deciding on the locations for focus groups and was something that was recorded in the fieldwork journal early on as being essential to the research.

Despite this, when reflecting on the differences in responses by the young people in both groups, it was important to reconsider the impact the focus group setting may have had on their responses. For the London group, although it was the best option to host the discussion group at their regular meeting place, in hindsight, this might well have also encouraged demand characteristics (Devlin, 2018). Attending the YOT offices on a regular basis and having to adhere to their strict behaviour policies, results in internalising these expectations and displaying institutionalised behaviours (Stanley, 2017), whether consciously or subconsciously. If the young people had been conditioned over a period of time on how to behave whilst at the YOT, and the type of responses that would result in minimal intervention, then it could be argued that hosting the focus group at the YOT offices was conducive to the type of responses generated during the discussions. With most of the discussion with the young people in London being positive, and with no mention of having experiences of the care system, the overall impression of 'family' and family life was very different to that generated in Glasgow.

In contrast, the setting for the Glasgow focus group was not based within a formal youth justice environment. Furthermore, the purpose for the young people's regular meetings in Glasgow was part of an ongoing youth work project, which brings together the voices of young people that have experienced the children's hearing system in Scotland. As such, their discussion felt to be much more open and honest, with them disclosing from the outset that they all had both care and criminal justice experience. When young people are more comfortable and at-ease with their surroundings, they are more willing to be open. Therefore, it was reflected on in the fieldwork journal that the setting in this instance allowed the young people the opportunity to reflect on a deeper level, their opinions, and experiences of 'family'. Again, there may well have been some preconceived expectations about their behaviour and their discussions (on the part of the young people), however, with the setting being associated with one of openness and trust, they felt able to give their honest thoughts on the matter.

Do the facilitators matter?

The third discussion point in this section, considers the impact the facilitators who were present during the focus groups, may have had on the discussions. For each focus group, two facilitators were present: the researcher and a professional from the organisation where access had been arranged. Decisions about who should be present during focus groups involving young people are varied, due to the necessity of striking a balance between safety and quality and to readdress the power imbalance likely to occur (see chapter five for a full discussion). As such, there was a need to reflect upon the impact of the facilitators' presence in both focus groups, as there was also the need to reflect upon the settings used for these discussions. Recorded in the fieldwork journal, were some reflections on how each of the groups not only responded to the facilitators, but also some reflections were made on how the professionals engaged with the young people and may have helped, or hindered, the facilitation of discussions. At the London based group, besides the researcher, the other facilitator present was the individual responsible at the YOT for organising group work sessions. Drawing on their experience of working in a group setting with young people was advantageous in terms of encouraging engagement in discussions and moderating in such a way to allow for equal opportunities amongst the young people. However, it was considered in the journal notes, that having a practitioner present in the room may have contributed to the conservative discussion held with the young people. This was demonstrated through their initial reluctance to engage, followed by their subsequent group consensus about the positive nature of 'family' and the various emotions and experiences involved with the term.

It is difficult to determine whether the nature of the young peoples' responses was influenced by either the setting or the facilitators presence. However, in contrast to the London group, the facilitators present in the Glasgow group comprised of the researcher and the practitioner who had been running the group meetings since the start of their project. Despite being a trained professional, this individual was not associated with any care or criminal justice organisation. Therefore, the reflections recorded in the journal suggested that for the young people in the Glasgow group, the setting and the facilitators present were much less formal, allowing for more open and honest discussions. In particular, they may have considered there to be a much lower risk of any unwanted interventions as a result of something they exposed during the

discussions, in comparison to the London group who were in a more formal setting. It is difficult to know for certain whether the responses and type of discussions held amongst the young people were influenced by the setting and the facilitators present. However, it is important to acknowledge the possibility for this influence, as a potential explanation for why the overall narratives from each group were slightly different, with the young people in Glasgow placing a much bigger emphasis on their experience of the care system impacting on their understandings of the term family, and the negative emotions associated with the word.

Media Representations of Family and Family Life

The final discussion point in this section, considers the impact that media representations of family and family life, may have had on the discussions during the focus groups. Although personal experiences have been demonstrated to have a considerable influence on young people's understandings of 'family' and 'family life', it is also important to consider the impact of media representations on these understandings. With developing technologies and increasing access to a globalised communications network, it is important to understand how the different representations of 'family' and 'family life' can influence a young person's expectations. Different class values have come to be portrayed through reality tv shows such as The Jeremy Kyle Show (2005). With popular makeover shows for people's physical looks, their houses and gardens, all these types of shows are seeking to universalise middle-class values and 'tastes' as being normalised (Skeggs et al, 2008). Furthermore, over the past two decades, there has been a fascination with dysfunctional and problematic families in society, broadcast either as a reality tv show, such as Super Nanny (2004) and Benefits Street (2014), or as a comedic take on chaotic and anti-social family life, such as Shameless (2004). Despite this fascination, it has been argued that these types of television programmes demonstrate an over-representation of a certain 'type' of family (Marsh & Bishop, 2014).

In addition to the various portrayals of family life in television and film, social media is increasingly becoming a popular source of information, particularly with the younger generations. A report concerning media use by young people aged 5-15 years has shown that a large proportion identify both TV and social media as important sources

of news (Ofcom, 2019). However, it was found that about half (54%) the young people who took part in the Ofcom study acknowledged that images and videos that are posted on social media sites are not always a true reflection of 'real life'. Increasingly, theories that explain identity formation are being applied to new digital technologies that are emerging, to understand how these impact on young people's formation of identities. In research conducted by Davis (2013), it was found that the use of social media can have direct and indirect impacts of varying degree on young people's identity formation and interpersonal relationships both online and offline. Upon reflection on the notes that were made in the fieldwork journal concerning the influence of social media, television and film may have had on the young people's expectations and perceptions of 'family', a useful way of moving forward from the current research project, would be to follow up with young people who have offended, to further explore and understand where their beliefs and opinions about 'family' and 'family life' have developed from.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion of the key findings and the key themes that arose from both the policy analysis and the empirical research. Reflections on the research journey were also presented, to provide some transparency on the process that was followed. The reason for conducting this research project was because, despite the repeated stress on 'family' relationships and experiences in research on youth justice, and despite the central role that the 'family' has been afforded in youth justice policy, few researchers or policy makers have asked the question to the young people involved: 'what does family mean to you?' The final chapter of this thesis will draw together all the findings from the current research project, to provide some clear conclusions, and to highlight the implications these have for both policy and practice within the field of youth justice. The original research question and aims will be drawn on, and the overall contribution to knowledge will be consolidated.

CHAPTER NINE - CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This final chapter will provide a summary of the research project and will discuss how the findings from the research have identified wider issues and implications for theory, research and policy concerning young people who have offended. At the outset of this research project, the primary aim was to explore how young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family', so that conclusions could be drawn, and implications highlighted for both policy makers and practitioners within the field of youth justice. With the concept of 'family' having no clear definition, it was necessary to explore how it is conceptualised by different groups in society, in particular, young people who have offended. With no previous research into the concept of 'family' using this group of participants, this was intended as a 'first step' exploratory study. As such, the research question was broad, and the only defining element was that the participants should be young people who have offended.

Careful consideration was given to the design of this research project, and it was important that young people were placed at the centre of this research project, as so much family research has typically been adult centric. The focus on young people who have offended stems from the vast amounts of risk factor research (RFR) and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) research, which identify 'family' as a main risk factor in predicting youth (re)offending behaviour. However, the lack of definition for 'family' is problematic, in terms of both policy and practice.

Research question and aims

At the outset of this research project, five research questions were identified, that helped to guide the journey and structure of this project. Research questions one (What role does 'family' play in youth justice policy in England and Scotland?), two (What theories are relevant to explaining the relationship between 'family' and youth offending behaviour?) and three (How has the concept of 'family' previously been researched? And what was found?) were all addressed through the literature review that was mostly completed prior to the primary research being conducted. Research question four (How is the term 'family' used in youth justice policy?) was addressed

through the youth justice policy analysis that was completed. Finally, research question five (How do young people who have offended conceptualise the term 'family'?) was addressed through the primary research that was completed, and which forms the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis provides. Participants were recruited in two different geographical locations, and a variety of techniques were used with the young people to generate the data sets. Following a basic grounded theory methodology, a thematic analysis was conducted on all data sets, to identify the main themes discussed by the young people. In alignment with Article 12 (UNCRC, 1989) it was necessary to generate data in collaboration with the young people. This was one of the main aims of the research, that the data generation was partly led by the young people themselves.

Key Findings

There are several main conclusions that can be drawn from the research project, which are all contributions to knowledge. Some build on findings from previous family research, and some offer new insights into how young people who have offended understand the concept of 'family' and whether these are evident in youth justice policy concerning them.

The concept of 'family' is dynamic and flexible

Typically, research that includes 'family' as a variable, often treats it as a static and measurable variable, with common categories of 'family' being, single parent and two parents. From a methodological perspective, this is problematic. For quantitative research, it is assumed that 'family' can be measured, given a value, and be subjected to statistical analysis. For qualitative research, it is assumed that both the researcher and participants hold the same shared definition of 'family', and that both are talking about the same 'thing' when recording discussions. Building on findings from previous family research, the current project has demonstrated that the concept of 'family' is dynamic and flexible and that who is considered to be 'family' is highly likely to change over time.

The young people in both research locations drew on this common theme of change throughout the discussions. Change in the level of care and support a family member

may provide a child with as they develop and grow into young adults. Change in the level of safety a family may be able to provide young people, depending on different circumstances. Change in the amount of love a mother may choose to display towards their child. All these elements were considered important by the young people in defining who they considered to be family, and how their own family circumstances had changed over time. This was particularly pronounced in the Glasgow group, as all the young people here had disclosed their experiences of being in the care system, and the impact that this had on their understanding of the term 'family'. Again, how their concept had changed over time was largely dependent on their personal experiences of being moved around in the care system. The policy analysis that was conducted also demonstrated how the concept of 'family' can change over time. Earlier pieces of policy and legislation reviewed demonstrate the responsibilising approach by government to hold parents more accountable for their children's offending behaviour. However, the more recent documents reviewed demonstrate a move towards a more understanding and supportive approach, both for the young people themselves, and their families. These recent developments are reflective of the move towards a more positive youth justice approach, one that is child-focused, rather than offender-focused.

There is a difference between expectations and lived experiences of 'family life'
When asking people to define the term 'family', it is also important to ask them to explain why they use that definition. Upon further interrogation, it may become clear that the definition they give is very different to their own lived experiences of family life. Understanding this difference between expectations one holds about family life, compared to their own lived experiences, is important. Negative emotions about family life and problems with developing interpersonal relationships with others may persist if the difference between expectations and lived experiences are too great. Understanding the complexity of the long-term impacts of ambiguity and negative experiences during childhood are slowly building. However, research within this area has a tendency to reduce lived experiences down to measurable factors, quantifying personal experiences rather than exploring with the individual from their point of view.

Although not explicitly discussed by the young people in the research project, analysis of both focus group sessions identified this as a main theme and an important finding. When reading back through the observational field notes made during each of the group discussions, it soon became clear that there was a marked difference in the way that the young people spoke about how family should be, compared to their own experiences of family life. The difference between these two views were more noticeable in the Glasgow group than in the London group. For the young people in Glasgow, who were quite at ease drawing on their looked after child (LAC) identity, talking about how family should be, used predominantly positive language, whereas talking about their own experiences of family life growing up, used more negative language. Research that considers the impact of media on children and young people's perceptions and expectations about family life would be interesting and important to develop this finding further.

Affective factors are more important in defining who is 'family'

With the term 'family' very rarely being defined, in research papers and policy documents alike, it is difficult to know precisely who or what the researchers/policymakers are talking about. The problematic nature of this results in the term being open to assumptions, with researchers and policymakers assuming that those reading their documents and reports know who or what they are referring to when they use the word 'family'. It has been demonstrated that people will draw on a stereotypical, nuclear family typology when a clear definition of 'family' is omitted. From this perspective, it is the presence of certain (biological) family members that defines a group of people as a family unit. However, as the findings from this research demonstrates, this is simply not the case for the young people concerned.

For the young people who participated in this research project, much of what was discussed in relation to the concept of 'family' was concerned with emotions. It was the presence of certain emotions, and displays of affection, that the young people mostly drew on in order to define who, or what, they considered to be 'family'. Love, trust, care and support were just some examples that were discussed, in both the London and Glasgow groups. Love, in particular, was a reoccurring theme throughout both discussion groups, highlighting the importance of allowing young people to

explore and explain how they understand the world, in their own words. Similarly, trust was discussed in terms of identifying family members, or 'like family' members; those who can offer advice and who are less likely to lie. Both these traits were considered important aspects of family life, something which friends were not always able to provide the young people. In contrast, these definitions and explanations of 'family' were not found during the policy analysis, and instead, more formal and legal-based definitions of family, parents and parental responsibility were identified. This demonstrates that children and young people's understanding, and experience of the concept 'family' has largely been ignored in policy that concerns them.

Experience of the care system can have negative impacts on the concept of 'family'

Many children and young people who come into contact with the youth justice system, also have some experience of the care system. The high correlation between these two groups means that consideration should be given to each on their own merits, but also what the combination of the two may mean for the individual concerned. As the same scenario can be experienced differently by different people, it is important to explore with individuals what the impact of past experiences is having on their present, and future selves. For the young people in the London setting, they primarily drew on their offender identity, when discussing family and family life. For them, it was important that their family – those who they were emotionally close to – could still provide a source of trust and support during the time they were spending on a community court order.

In contrast, the young people in the Glasgow setting drew heavily on their LAC identity. The findings that this discussion generated focused on the negative repercussions that poor experiences of the care system can lead to. Most research that explores the short- and long-term impacts of experiencing the care system during childhood, focuses on issues such as mental health, educational attainment and offending behaviour. However, the findings from this research project have highlighted the importance of exploring the impact on word-association and concepts. With the importance that 'family' often plays in both policy and practice concerning young

people who have offended, it was necessary to explore what this concept means to the young people themselves.

Alternative language is needed

There have been many academics over the years who have written theoretical papers, and who have concluded from empirical research, that alternative language for describing 'family', 'family members', and 'family life' should be sought. With the aforementioned assumption surrounding the meaning of the word, coupled with the lack of definition in many research papers and policy documents, 'family' is a very ambiguous and vague word. Without adequate understanding of how different people conceptualise the term, from a methodological perspective, research findings are difficult to interpret. From a policy perspective, the lack of a clear definition results in difficult implementation. Over the years, there have been many different suggestions for alternative language to be used. The findings from this research project support the need for alternative language to be used, particularly when dealing with young people who have offended and / or young people with experience of the care system.

The young people in the Glasgow setting, who had also chosen to disclose some of their negative experiences of the care system, were very clear on the need to use alternative language when discussing others who they felt emotionally close to. For these young people, the negative experiences associated with being removed from their own biological family, and being placed in 'other' family settings, had resulted in their outright rejection of the word 'family'. After much discussion around the term, it was interesting to see them come to this conclusion as a group. Mostly, they just wanted a way to identify those significant others in their life, who were considered important. In contrast, the group in London did not reject the use of the word 'family' and they seemed quite content with using the word and did not verbalise any issues with it. However, when asked to decide on a concise definition of the word, many of the young people struggled. The vastness of the word, and all that it may encompass, was succinctly summed up by one young person in the London setting who announced that 'family means everything': both literally and conceptually.

Implications for policy

It is important to now consider these findings in terms of the implications they may have for policy within the field of youth justice as this is where the research is situated. The findings from this research demonstrate the need for clear definitions of what 'family' refers to, especially in policy documents that concern young people. Ideally, these definitions should be based on what the young people themselves consider to be family, and not what the adult policymakers consider to be family. If this is not possible, then there should at least be some form of definition provided, to make it clear about who the policy document refers to under the subject of 'family'.

To exemplify, a thematic analysis was conducted on a variety of key policy and legislation documents, to identify whether these documents provided any clear definition of the term, and to draw conclusions as to whether these definitions were reflective of the young people's understandings of the concept. As an example, in the policy document titled: *Time for a Fresh Start* (Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Antisocial Behaviour, 2010), 'family therapy' was listed as one of the preventative strategies available for reducing "persistent childhood behaviour problems" (2010: 9), one would expect a clear definition of who, or what, 'family' refers to. Despite this, there are no definitions provided in this report. As has been demonstrated in the current research project, young people have a variety of ways in which they understand the term 'family', that do not always agree with the stereotypical nuclear family concept.

Furthermore, the recognition of young people's understanding of the term needs to be extended beyond youth justice policy. With a high percentage of young people who enter the youth justice system (YJS) also having experience of the care system, it is imperative that children's social work policy also be reviewed. With the high probability of this crossover occurring, both types of policy need to work in collaboration with one another. As the YJS moves towards a 'children first' approach, the likelihood of new, or renewed policy documents being released is imminent. Now is the ideal time for policy makers to consider including a clear definition of 'family', using words and concepts that children and young people incorporate in their own understandings of the term.

Implications for practice

With implications for policy identified, now attention must turn to the implications the findings from this research may have on practice within the field of youth justice. The methodology employed in this project aimed to place young people at the centre of the research. This was demonstrated through the methods used and the way in which the findings have been presented. Terminology used whilst writing up the project has been chosen on purpose to further exemplify the role the young people played, with 'data generation' being used to describe the process, rather than 'data collection'. Data was generated in collaboration with the young participants, handing a degree of responsibility and ownership over to them. This gave them the power to decide how much or how little they wished to disclose on the sensitive topic of 'family'. This approach to conducting research with young people should be used when dealing with young people entering the YJS.

Providing opportunities for children and young people to explore the concept of 'family' and what it means to them is vital to identify other people that are important to them. The implications of this research highlight the fact that how young people understand the term 'family' may vary considerably compared to the adult practitioners who work with them. Therefore, it is important to provide them with a safe space and opportunity to discuss it. Through these discussions, other issues may well come to light, that need dealing with first before attempting to deal with the offending behaviour. As such, this scheme would work in tandem with the 'children first' approach that is being developed and implemented in the YJS at the current time (2021).

Finally, the importance of opening these discussions about 'family' with young people entering the YJS is further demonstrated, when considering the young people who also have experience of being looked after in the care system. As the findings reveal, young people who have experience of both systems are likely to associate negative emotions with the term 'family' and in some cases, even reject the use of the word all together. It is extremely important to consider using alternative language with these young people, once the initial discussions about 'family' have been conducted. If established that the young person does have negative experiences attached to the word 'family', they should be asked what word they would like to use when discussing other people that are important to them. Giving young people this space to choose the words they use, rather than having to adopt the language used by the youth justice

practitioners, it can help to develop a better relationship and rapport, building trust and reassurance.

Summary

This research project sought to answer the question:

Q. What does the word 'family' mean to young people who have offended?

In doing so, two sets of data were generated with the assistance of young people; one group based in London, the second group based in Glasgow. The findings from both sets of data identified several common themes: that the concept of 'family' is both dynamic and flexible, and is not static; that there is a marked difference between expectations and lived experiences of 'family life', particularly in the lives of young people who have experience of both the youth justice system and the care system in the UK; that affective factors are more important in defining who is 'family'; that having experience of the care system can result in negative feelings being associated with the concept of 'family'; and that in some cases, alternative language is needed when talking about other people that are important in a young person's life.

Overall, this research project highlights the importance of asking young people who have offended, particularly those with the additional experience of the care system, what the term 'family' means to them. In practice, a clear definition of this term should also be included in any key pieces of policy that directly relate to, and impact on, young people who have offended, in order to provide much clearer guidelines and ones which reflect the young people's voices better. In conclusion, the findings drawn from this research project demonstrates support for the central argument of this thesis, that children and young people's understanding and experience of the concept of 'family' has largely been ignored in policy, practice and research that concerns them.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

This research was important because family has played a central role in policy, theory and research concerning young people who have offended. Children and young people's understandings and experiences of family has largely been ignored in policy and research that concerns them. Therefore, the original contribution to knowledge

demonstrated in this thesis is that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise the term 'family'. Furthermore, the language used by the young people was largely based on their own personal experiences of family and family life, which in some cases was significantly affected by their time spent in the care system. As such, with importance being placed on the participation of the young people, this is considered a significant strength of the research project and this thesis, as without them, this project could not have been possible.

Conclusion

This final chapter has provided a summary of the research project and discussed how the findings from the research have implications for policy, theory and research concerning young people who have offended. The research project was important because 'family' has played a central role in policy, theory and research concerning young people who have offended. The literature review (chapters two, three and four) and the policy analysis (chapter six) demonstrated the children and young people's understandings, and experiences of 'family' has largely been ignored in policy and research that concerns them. The empirical research aimed to address this. As such, this thesis presents an original contribution to knowledge, that young people who have offended use a variety of diverse and flexible ways to conceptualise the term 'family'. The language used to describe the term 'family' was largely based on their own personal experiences of 'family' and 'family life', which for some of the young people, was significantly affected by their time spent in the care system. The findings from this research not only provide an original contribution to knowledge in the varied and dynamic ways in which young people who have offended choose to describe and define the term 'family', but the findings also complement and add to the emerging evidence-base of research that seeks to place children and young people's voices at the centre.

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Appendix A – Young People Questionnaire

WHAT DOES 'FAMILY' MEAN?

Aim: to find out what the term 'family' means to a variety of people

Background: the background to this study is in understanding the relationship between family life and offending behaviour. The first stage of this, is to find out what the term 'family' means to a range of people involved with the youth justice system.

Participation: you have been invited to take part in the first stage of this study as you have been identified as having experience with the youth justice system. Your participation is greatly valued, and your contribution to this study is much appreciated. Taking part in this study is 100% voluntary and doesn't ask you to provide any personal information. The answers you give will be used to come up with questions to be asked in follow-up interviews, which you may be invited to take part in. By completing this questionnaire, you are giving your consent for your answers to be used in the study.

1   What is your age?   10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐ 18+ ☐
(tick one)

2   What is your   Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ *(please specify)*
gender? *(tick one)*   _____

3   What is your ethnic origin? *(tick one)*

White British ☐   Black British ☐   Asian British ☐   Chinese British ☐   British Other ☐

White Irish ☐   White & Asian ☐   White & Black African ☐   White Other ☐

White & Black Caribbean ☐   Black Caribbean ☐   Black African ☐   Black Other ☐

Indian ☐   Pakistani ☐   Bangladeshi ☐   Chinese ☐   Asian Other ☐

Arab ☐   Turkish ☐   Jewish ☐   Traveller/Romany/Roma ☐

Other ☐ *(please specify)*

_____

4 **Who currently lives in the same household as you?** *(tick all that apply)*

Girlfriend ☐ Boyfriend ☐ Carer ☐ Brother ☐ Sister ☐

Mother ☐ Step-mother ☐ Father's partner ☐ Step-brother ☐ Step-sister ☐

Father ☐ Step-father ☐ Mother's partner ☐ Half-brother ☐ Half-sister ☐

Other ☐ *(please specify)*

_____

For the following statements, please colour in the emoji that best describes your opinion

😀	🙂	😐	🙁	😞
Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Not sure**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**

5 I can talk about my problems with my family   😀 🙂 😐 🙁 😞

6 My family is more important than my friends   😀 🙂 😐 🙁 😞

7 My parents/carers tell me 'well done' when I do something good   😀 🙂 😐 🙁 😞

8 I always tell my parents/carers where I'm going   😀 🙂 😐 🙁 😞

9 My parents/carers know who my friends are   😀 🙂 😐 🙁 😞

10 My parents/carers give me household jobs to do at home   😀 🙂 😐 🙁 😞

11	I have a good relationship with my family	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
12	My parents/carers give me a time I should be home	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
13	There is always a parent/carer at home in the evenings	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
14	A family member is my role model	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
15	I can count on my family when things go wrong	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
16	My parents/carers often ask me how my day has been	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
17	Sitting down and eating a meal together is something we do at least once a week, in my family	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
18	My parents/carers would be unhappy if I got in trouble with the police	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
19	There is always a parent/carer at home when I get up in the morning	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔
20	My parents/carers punish me when I've done something wrong	😃 ☺ 😐 🙁 😔

21 **What does the word 'family' mean to you?** *(tick all that apply)*

A Family means the people who you are related to by blood ☐

B Family means the people who you normally live with ☐

C Family means the people who you feel safe being with ☐

D None of the above ☐

Thank you for taking part in this study 👍

The importance of knowing what *family* means to young people involved with the criminal justice system

You are being invited to take part in a focus group as part of a research study. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do get in touch if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research study forms part of a PhD thesis. The aim of this research study is to explore how the term *family* is understood by young people who are, or have been, involved with the criminal justice system as offenders. Legal definitions of *family* have traditionally focused on being related by blood, marriage or adoption, however, what it means to be a *family* has changed a lot over recent years. Therefore, it is important to understand how different groups of people in society choose to define the term *family*, as we are all different and all have different experiences to draw on.

Why have I been invited to take part?

Focus groups are being run with as many young people as possible across the UK. Youth workers were asked to nominate young people under their supervision that they felt would be happy to take part in the current research study. This study is particularly interested in understanding how young people who are involved with the Criminal Justice System choose to define the term *family.*

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform the researcher as soon as possible, so that they can assist with this. If, for any reason you wish to withdraw your data after the focus group has taken place, please contact the researcher to arrange your data being removed from the data set. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part will not affect your status with the youth offending services in any way.

What will I have to do?

This invitation is for a one-time participation in a focus group, which will last no longer than 1 hour. During the focus group, refreshments and snacks will be provided free of charge. During the focus group, participants will be asked to think up words and phrases that can be related to the main topic of *family*. These words and phrases will be written onto cards and arranged on a board to show how important they are when defining the word *family.* During this activity, you will be asked why you have chosen certain words and phrases to use in your definition of *family.* Photos will be taken of

the displays we create using the words and phrases, and our discussions will be audio recorded.

How will my data be used?

The audio recordings will be typed up and analysed by the researcher, to pick out the main themes and definitions that we discuss. The researcher has put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants, so that you cannot be easily identified in any reports that use the data. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act. The findings of the research study will be used as part of a PhD thesis, and may also be presented at conferences or in journal articles. However, the data will only be used by the researcher and at no point will your personal information, including your real name, be revealed.

Privacy note

Although the research doesn't involve asking participants directly about their family life, there is always the possibility of unexpected disclosures. In accordance with safeguarding policies, if significant risks of harm to, or from others, are disclosed these will be immediately reported to the relevant safeguarding officer. Aside from this safeguarding policy, anything discussed during the focus group will be treated in confidence by all people present in the room. This means not discussing other people's disclosures outside of the focus group to your friends etc.

This research study has received full ethical clearance from the School of Law Research Ethics Committee at Middlesex University.

Contact for further information

If you require further information, or have any questions then please contact the researcher:

Miss Nicola Coleman, PhD student in Criminology, Middlesex University, London. E: ███████████████

If you have read the above and have decided you would like to take part in the research study, please complete the slip attached and bring with you to the focus group. Keep hold of this letter for your information.

I would like to take part in the focus groups as part of the research study titled: **The importance of knowing what family means to young people involved with the criminal justice system**

_____   _____   _____

Name of Young Person   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Parent/Guardian   Date   Signature

Appendix C – Focus Group Plan

Focus Group Session Plan

Welcome (5minutes)

Introduce adult facilitators (myself as researcher, other as practitioner – person they already know)

Project Outline (15minutes)

What the project is about, and why. How the session will run. Discuss the Participant Information Form – to check young people understand completely what they are participating in. Get verbal agreement to turn tape recorder on.

Word Association Activity (30minutes)

Place flashcards on the table, encourage participants to think about what the term 'family' means to them – no need to talk about personal experiences, but may draw on these if they want.

Keep an eye on body language – if participants appear uncomfortable, remind them that they don't need to join in if they don't want to. Allow participants to just select key words from the flashcards without explaining.

Final Debrief (5minutes)

Thank participants for their time – very valuable to collect young people's experiences and opinions on matters.

Reminder – is everyone still happy for their contribution to be used. If not, make a note to remove their contribution from the transcript / final report.

Appendix D – Semi-Structured List of Questions

Semi-Structured List of Questions

Use these questions as prompts during the focus group if needed to generate discussion (approved by Ethics Committee)

1. In one sentence, how would you describe the word 'family'?
    a. How important is trust and loyalty in a family?
    b. How important is support in a family?
    c. How important is love and care in a family?
    d. How important is protection and safety in a family?
    e. How important are relationships in family?
        i. Does family just have to be blood relations?
    f. What about if there is conflict and arguments in a family?
    g. What about if there is violence in a family?
    h. What about if there is criminal behaviour in a family?
2. Who would you describe as your family?
    a. Would you consider your friends to be your family?

Appendix E – Word Association Activity for Participants

List of words for activity (write onto flashcards)

From Weigel (2008)

Kindness	Mother	Children
Respect	Security	Father
Crazy	Brother	Same-Sex Marriage
Bad	Marriage (Man + Woman)	Home
Loyalty	Forgiveness	Unstable
Conflict	Aunt	Grandparents
Honesty	Friends	Caring
Partner (Girlfriend/Boyfriend)	Uncle	Blood Related
Not Blood Related	Boring	Support
Always There	Violent	Cousins
Happiness/Happy	Dog	Sister
Acceptance	Encouragement	Comfortable
Fun	Affection (Hugs, Kisses)	Parents
Annoying	Sadness/Sad	Cat
Live Together	Love	Safety
Criminal	Broken	Trust
Good	Laughter	

Appendix F – Staff Questionnaire

WHAT DOES 'FAMILY' MEAN?

Aim: to find out how the term 'family' is conceptualised

Background: the background to this study is in understanding the relationship between family life and offending behaviour. The first stage of this, is to find out how the term 'family' is conceptualised by a range of people involved with the YOT.

Participation: you have been invited to take part in the first stage of this study as you have been identified as currently involved with the YOT as a member of staff, or volunteer. Your participation is greatly valued, and your contribution to this study is much appreciated. Taking part in this study is 100% voluntary and doesn't ask you to provide any personal information. The information collected will be used to determine questions to be used in follow-up interviews, which you may be invited to take part in. By completing this questionnaire and returning it to the drop box, you are giving your consent for your answers to be used in the study.

1   **What is your age?**   18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 65+ ☐
    (tick one)

2   **What is your**   Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ *(please specify)*
    gender? *(tick one)*   _____

3   **What is your ethnic origin?** *(tick one)*

| White British ☐ | Black British ☐ | Asian British ☐ | Chinese British ☐ | British Other ☐ |

| White Irish ☐ | White & Asian ☐ | White & Black African ☐ | | White Other ☐ |

White & Black Caribbean ☐   Black Caribbean ☐   Black African ☐   Black Other ☐

Indian ☐   Pakistani ☐   Bangladeshi ☐   Chinese ☐   Asian Other ☐

Arab ☐   Turkish ☐   Jewish ☐   Traveller/Romany/Roma ☐

Other ☐ *(please specify)*

_____

4 **Who currently lives in the same household as you?** *(tick all that apply)*

Partner (married) ☐　　　Partner (co-habiting) ☐　　　　　　Friend ☐

Mother ☐　　Father ☐　　Sister ☐　　　　　Brother ☐

Flat / Housemate(s) ☐　　　Child/Children ☐

Other ☐ *(please specify)*

_____

For the following statements, please circle the number that best describes your opinion

1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Not sure	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree

5　It is important to be able to talk about problems with family　　1　2　3　4　5

6　Family is more important than friends　　1　2　3　4　5

7　Family should provide emotional support　　1　2　3　4　5

8　Parents/carers should always know where their children are　　1　2　3　4　5

9　Parents/carers should know who their children's friends are　　1　2　3　4　5

10　Parents/carers should give their children chores to do at home　1　2　3　4　5

11　It is important to have a good relationship with family　　1　2　3　4　5

12	Parents/carers should set a time for when their children should be home	1 2 3 4 5

| 13 | There should always be a parent/carer at home in the evenings | 1 2 3 4 5 |

| 14 | Family should provide a source of role models | 1 2 3 4 5 |

| 15 | It is important to be able to count on family when things go wrong | 1 2 3 4 5 |

| 16 | Parents/carers should ask their children how their day has been | 1 2 3 4 5 |

| 17 | Sitting down and eating a meal together as a family is important | 1 2 3 4 5 |

| 18 | Parents/carers should be unhappy if their children get in trouble with the police | 1 2 3 4 5 |

| 19 | There should always be a parent/carer at home when children get up in the morning | 1 2 3 4 5 |

| 20 | Parents/carers should punish their children when they've done something wrong | 1 2 3 4 5 |

21 What does the word 'family' mean to you? *(tick all that apply)*

A   Family means the people who you are biologically related to ☐

B   Family means the people who live in the same household ☐

C   Family means the people who you feel safe with   ☐

D   None of the above   ☐

Thank you for taking part in this study

Appendix G – Template for notes taken during focus group

Date:
Time:
Place:
Group Co-ordinators Present:
Participants Present:
Structure the session took:
Main themes that emerged from the focus group:

Appendix H – Ethnicity + Age + Gender breakdown from questionnaires

Ethnicity + Age + Gender breakdown from London questionnaires

Young People Participants		
Ethnicity	**Number of Responses**	**Presented as a % of total responses**
Black British	11	29.7%
White British	10	27%
Turkish	6	16.2%
White & Black Caribbean	3	8.1%
Black African	2	5.4%
Asian British	2	5.4%
Black Caribbean	1	2.7%
Kurdish	1	2.7%
White & Black African	1	2.7%
Staff Participants		
Ethnicity	**Number of Responses**	**Presented as a % of total responses**
White British	6	30%
White Other	5	25%
Black British	2	10%
White & Black Caribbean	2	10%
White & Black African	1	5%
White Irish	1	5%
Black Caribbean	1	5%
Black African	1	5%
Bangladeshi	1	5%

Young People Participants	Number of Responses	Presented as a % of total responses
Age		
14	8	22%
15	9	24%
16	10	27%
17	10	27%
Staff Participants		
Age	**Number of Responses**	**Represented as a % of total responses**
25-34	7	35%
35-44	7	35%
45-54	4	20%
55-64	2	10%

Young People Participants		
Gender	**Number of Responses**	**Represented as a % of total responses**
Male	32	86%
Female	5	14%
Staff Participants		
Gender	**Number of Responses**	**Represented as a % of total responses**
Male	5	25%
Female	15	75%