YOUTH GANG MEMBERSHIP: MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

By

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis was to examine ways of better understanding the experiences and needs of gang members. Psychological theories of gang membership highlight the interaction between individual, peer, and sociocultural processes which occur in the context of the gang. As such, broadly speaking, each chapter considers one of these factors in turn.

Chapter 2 focusses on the individual-level factor of mental health problems. It is the first systematic literature review undertaken to date, which explores the association between mental health problems and youth gang members. A positive association was found between young male gang members and a range of mental health problems. Limitations are noted including the type of comparison samples used, variations in sample sizes and measurement instruments.

Chapter 3 relates to the impact of peer-related factors and presents an empirical study with gang-involved youth, based in London, United Kingdom (UK). Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study gained an in-depth understanding of the experiences of social support as perceived by five male gang-involved youth. Three superordinate themes were identified: *"For me, it's just how life was"*; "*The gang and I: A sense of belonging"* and "*Finding a new path"*. The findings are discussed with respect to clinical implications, whilst outlining suggestions for further research.

Chapter 4 has a socio-cultural focus in that it provides a critique of Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence (CREV, Cooley, Beidel, & Turner, 1995) and the Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence-Revised (CREV-R, Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009); these are self-report screening tools which measure exposure to community violence in children. The critique concluded that the measures would benefit from wider sampling with different populations, including youth who are gang-involved, in

addition to revising some of its items that affect the way it currently measures exposure to community violence.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Violence begets violence, but violence also begets victimisation…while it is possible gang members join gangs for protection from victimization, the presence of violent victimisation increases concomitantly with level of gang involvement".

(Beresford & Wood, 2016, p.149)

There have been growing concerns about the presence of gangs and their violence-related activities in the United Kingdom (UK). Since 2009, it is estimated that over 700 young people have been stabbed or shot to death (Centre for Social Justice, 2018), and more than half of gun and knife crime in the UK has been attributed to gangs. There are an estimated 70,000 gang members in the UK (Longfield, 2018), with estimates of approximately 250 gangs with 4,500 members in London alone (Whitaker et al., 2018). There are problems in ascertaining the true extent of gang-related crime in the UK, as currently there is no agreed-upon measure used by the police to determine gang-related criminal activities across England and Wales. However, it is understood that whilst gang-involved youth are a minority, they are responsible for a significant proportion of interpersonally harmful offending, resulting in serious injury (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, 2018).

In the UK, concerted action to prevent gang-related violence ensued nearly a decade ago. In August 2011, there was a nationwide surge of youth and gang involvement in crime and disorder across the country, following the fatal shooting of a male, presumed to be gang-involved, by police in Tottenham, London. Whilst acknowledging that less than 10% of those arrested for disorder and violence in the cities of London, Birmingham, Manchester and Nottingham were gang members, the incident led to an in-depth analysis of gangs in the UK. This, in turn, led to recommendations for interventions in a document entitled 'Ending Gang and Youth Violence' (Centre for Social Justice, 2009). The implementation of these

recommendations led to the compilation of a further report which highlighted the importance of addressing the mental health needs of gang-involved youth (Hughes, Hardcastle, & Perkins, 2015); an important yet often overlooked issue. Given the centrality of violence and delinquency within the lives of gang members, together with the significant levels of exposure to violence and victimisation that gang-involved youth are subject to (Taylor, Peterson, Esbenson, & Freng, 2007), the findings regarding the prevalence of mental health problems are perhaps unsurprising.

1.1 Defining gangs

A number of factors contribute to how gangs are defined, such as where the phenomenon is being examined. The study of gangs has predominantly taken place in the United States (US) and it was the pioneering work of Frederick Thrasher in 1927, who for the first time undertook in-depth studies into youth gangs (Thrasher, 1927), in order to provide an explanation to the pertinent questions of what leads young males to become members of a gang. In comparison, practitioners and policy makers in European countries have, only in the last 15 years, begun to acknowledge that they too face a "gang problem" (Ariza, Cebulla, Aldridge, Shute, & Ross, 2014, p.172). Cross-cultural comparison reviews of research show that whilst differences between gangs from the United States and those from Europe exist, there are also a number of similarities in findings (Decker & Weerman, 2005). For example, gangs are as prevalent in Europe as they are in the United States, and there is consistency in risk factors linked with gang membership (Sharp, Aldridge, & Medina, 2006). However, gangs in the United States are considered to exhibit a higher and more fatal level of violence than their European counterparts (Klein, Weerman, & Thornberry, 2006), and there are differences in gang characteristics and culture, with US gangs more likely to have initiation rituals, symbols or certain codes or rules (Winfree et al., 2007).

It is well established that street gangs or "troublesome youth groups" (Weerman et al., 2009, p. 19) differ from other offending youth groups. Whilst policy makers, social scientists, academics and the Criminal Justice System have devoted vast amounts of time and resources into the area of gangs, the lack of consensual agreement regarding the definition of a gang has made it challenging to compare research findings across disciplines, and therefore challenging to compile the research together to form an evidence base for intervention (Ball & Curry, 1995).

One area contributing to the lack of consensus in defining gangs is whether criminal activity should be a feature (Bennett & Holloway, 2004). Some academics have argued as to whether there is a need for the term gang itself, as the identification of gangs criminalises black and minority ethnic youth (Pitts, 2007), or holds gangs responsible for all street crime (Hallsworth & Young, 2008). However, the exclusion of criminal behaviour when defining gangs risks grouping disparate groups for the purposes of research. In turn, groups not involved in offending behaviours would be labelled as a gang and acquire a 'gangster identity' (Bullock & Tilley, 2008). Studies support the notion that there are specific factors related to gangs which enhance the likelihood of perpetrating violence compared with non-gang-involved violent adolescents (Klein et al., 2006). Melde and Esbensen (2013) found that gang membership increased the likelihood of being involved in a violent incident by 21%, with involvement in general offending remaining high even after leaving the gang. As such, some researchers (e.g., Wood & Alleyne, 2010) have advocated for criminal activity to be a key defining aspect of gang membership.

1.2 Obtaining gang membership data

One method of obtaining gang membership data is through official records obtained by agencies such as the police. However, the use of a non-definition approach (i.e., one which

relies on the official person reaching a judgement as to whether or not they would classify a youth as a member of gang; Klein & Maxson, 2006), led to under-and-over-reporting of gang membership (Curry, 2000). To overcome the issue of subjectivity, it was proposed that self-nomination of gang membership should be permitted (Ball & Curry, 1995). Self-nomination has been shown to be a valid and acceptable method of identifying gang membership between gang and non-gang youth, and appears to be an effective strategy in the United States where there appears to be a greater level of familiarity with its meaning (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003).

In contrast, from a cross-cultural perspective, there seems to be less consensus as to what 'gang' means, as some of the terms used have different meanings in different languages (Weerman, Lovegrove, & Thornberry, 2015). A further difficulty is that researchers from other countries, and indeed other parts of the States (Maxson & Klein, 1995), utilise stereotypical US-based gangs in creating definitions of gang members; however, such gangs are highly structured in their organisation and are notorious for their high levels of violence and criminal activity (e.g., Chicago-based gangs). As such, groups with lower levels of violence or criminal behaviour do not meet the criteria for being a 'gang'. This phenomenon is known as the 'Eurogang Paradox' (Klein, 2001).

To address this dilemma, in reference to youth street gangs (which is the focus of this thesis, and will hereafter be referred to as 'gangs'), the Eurogang network formed a consensually agreed upon and widely used definition of street gang membership. It consists of four key components: street orientation; durability; youth; and an identity defined by criminal activity. The definition is as follows: "a street gang is any durable, street-orientated youth group whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity" (Weerman et al., 2009, p. 20). The Eurogang Program identifies street gang members to be young people, and one of the

measures which is used to ascertain gang membership, the Youth Survey, specifies the ages to range between 12-25 years. In terms of general offending, official data shows offending to be at its highest during adolescence with the greatest amount occurring at the age of 17 years, followed by a decline as the individual moves into early adulthood (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987; Farrington, 1986). The Eurogang definition has been criticised for increasing the risk of criminalising non-delinquent groups by its inclusion of criminal activity (Joseph & Gunter, 2011), and for not differentiating between street-based gangs and groups of youth whose primary objective were drug-taking activities (Medina, Aldridge, Shute, & Ross, 2013). Therefore, combining the self-identification method with the use of official records can provide a universal assessment of gang membership (Wood & Alleyne, 2010).

The area of study within this thesis is youth involved in gangs and the Eurogang definition is employed, given that it defines a member of a gang to be no older than in their early twenties (Weerman et al., 2009). Historically, adolescence has been defined as the stage of life between 10 and 19 years (World Health Organization, 2005). However, this age bracket may be too restrictive given there is growing recognition that the period of time in which a young person transitions from childhood to adulthood takes longer than previously believed (Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne, & Patton, 2018). More specifically, research suggests that the development of brain areas which manage emotion regulation, executive functioning and socio-emotional functioning (e.g., areas that influence peer relationships and decision making) continue until an individual reaches their mid-twenties (Crone & Dahl, 2012). Furthermore, the age at which certain milestones that typically mark adulthood, such as becoming a parent, marriage and cohabitation, is occurring at a later stage of an individual's life. Transitioning into adult-related social roles takes longer because of changes in societal norms and expectations around the completion of training and education for

employment, the increased presence of women within employment, and the time taken to become financially independent (Sawyer et al., 2018).

1.3 Theories of gang membership

There are a number of theories which purport to explain gang membership. Early theories explained gang membership to be a consequence of a breakdown in social institutions (e.g., the family, school and church) (Thrasher, 1927). As a result of social and economic breakdown, bonds between youth and social institutions became weakened as the needs of young people were not met, resulting in social institutions having little control over their behaviour. Thrasher proposed that the failure to offer support or have control over youths' lives by the institutions was offset by groups such as gangs, offering youth the opportunity to engage with a group who shared their interests, and provided excitement. Thrasher defined gangs as groups which had a formal structure, occupied a local area and involved itself in conflict with not only other gangs but social institutions (Thrasher, 1927).

Strain theory expanded these theories further by purporting that society is to blame for selectively identifying who will achieve goals, as the means to achieve goals in prosocial ways will not be available (or will not be perceived to be available) to everyone (Merton, 1938). It is suggested that this leads to people adjusting their behaviour so that they only achieve what they believe their circumstances will allow them to. As suggested by Thrasher (1927), it is proposed that gangs form as a result of youth rebelling against the system and the limitations they believe it to have placed upon them (Cohen, 1955).

With time, the theories broadened to include factors such as the presence of delinquent/pro-criminal skills and attitudes irrespective of social class (Sutherland and Cressey, 1960, 1974). Cloward and Ohlin (1960) emphasised the importance of having the opportunity to offend, with youth brought up in poorer economic conditions having more

opportunities to offend than youth from middle-class backgrounds. There is support for theories outlined above within empirical studies which identify risk factors for gang membership. For example, neighbourhoods where gangs reside are considered to experience economic deprivation, victimisation and fear (Howell, Egley, & Gleason, 2002; Huff, 1996; Spergel, 1995). Youth who experience high rates of delinquency within their neighbourhoods are at an increased likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts than youth who live in areas where delinquency is low (Hill, Lui, & Hawkins, 2001). Furthermore, higher levels of delinquent behaviour outside of the gang appears to precede gang involvement (Eitle, Gunkel, & van Gundy, 2004). In addition, having a family member who is in a gang increases the likelihood that a youth would become involved with a gang (De La Rue & Espelage, 2014; Miller, 2001), and associating with delinquent peers correlates positively with gang involvement (Craig, Vitaro, Gagnon, & Tremblay, 2002). Youth with families who were hostile and characterised by conflict and fighting were noted to join gangs as a form of escapism (Vigil, 1988), and relatedly, Morales (1992) claimed that gang-involved youth viewed the gang as their family where they felt supported, recognised and cared for.

Some theorists have suggested that theories with a criminological and sociological focus have overlooked the importance of the socio-psychological underpinnings relevant to gang membership (i.e., the mechanisms by which others impact upon an individual's behaviour; Thornberry et al., 2003). Specifically, this would suggest the need to examine individual-level psychological processes and the potentially strong influence others in a group or social setting can have upon individual decision-making (Harkins & Dixon, 2010, 2013; Wood & Alleyne, 2010).

Thornberry et al. (2003) developed the interactional theory of gang membership which incorporates earlier control and social learning theories to suggest that gang membership

occurs as a result of reciprocal interactions between an individual and their peer group and environment (i.e., social structures, family environment, school and neighbourhood). The theory emphasises bidirectional relationships between the individual and risk factors, focuses on socio-psychological processes, and is not confined to the behaviours occurring during childhood; instead, a life course perspective is offered. A strength of the theory is that it recognises individual differences between gang members. Interactional theory purports that gang membership occurs in one of three ways: a) selection - where gangs identify and recruit already delinquent youth; b) facilitation - where gangs create the conditions for non-offending youth to engage in delinquent and criminal activities; and c) enhancement - where delinquent high-risk youth are recruited and, as gang members, engage in more delinquent activities. Underpinning all three pathways to gang membership is the role of delinquency, which is present in some youth before gang membership, and also functions to maintain their gang membership. The theory highlights the way in which the gang acts to facilitate or increase delinquent acts.

Howell and Egley (2005) expand on interactional theory to develop a sequential model from birth to preschool through to childhood, and continuing into adulthood, to demonstrate that youth exhibit risk factors for gang involvement at much earlier ages than previously thought. Starting from a preschool age, children may be disruptive and aggressive (Coie & Miller-Johnson, 2001), come from dysfunctional families (Kalb & Loeber, 2003), and as a result of their disruptive behaviours, such as aggression, are likely to experience rejection from prosocial peers. Consequently, they are susceptible to influence from antisocial peers with an increased likelihood of engaging with peers who are involved in antisocial and delinquent acts (Coie & Miller-Johnson, 2001). During the early adolescence stage, there are more risk factors within the individual domain for gang membership than the other domains.

The increased association with antisocial youth over time, whilst simultaneously experiencing a weakening in social bonds and a commitment to school, are considered contributory to increased affiliation with delinquent, and subsequently gang-involved peers. Howell and Egley (2005) note the significance of the key concept underlying Interactional Theory (Thornberry & Krohn, 2001; Thornberry et al., 2003) which highlights that the onset of offending behaviours early on arise from the way in which individual, parent and social structural processes interact with one another.

One influential theory which has helped to conceptualise offending trajectories is Moffitt's (1993) theory of adolescence-limited (AL) and life-course time persistent (LCP) offending. AL offenders are characterised as adolescents who engage in criminal acts for a time-limited period and desist from offending once they reach adulthood, which then enables them to form prosocial adult roles. The AL offender may seek independence in multiple areas of their life (e.g., alcohol, financial independence, social relationships) because of the developmental stage they are at, where they perceive themselves to be mature enough to take on adult responsibilities. It is through observation of antisocial peers' engagement in acts which are considered to represent independence and adulthood that AL offenders begin to copy their peers' behaviours in an attempt to demonstrate that they too can undertake adult related tasks.

LCP offenders are more likely than AL offenders to have a biological or neurological vulnerability (e.g., inherited traits, maternal substance misuse) to developing antisocial personality disorder, and, in addition, they are more likely to have experienced childhood abuse which may lead to impairments in their temperament and cognitive functioning (Moffitt & Caspi, 2001). Issues such as these are thought to be more substantive than those experienced by AL offenders; as such, they are more likely to result in offending into

adulthood. This theory lends itself well to Thornberry et al.'s (2003) interactional theory, whereby non-criminal youth can become involved in gangs through a process of facilitation.

Wood and Alleyne (2010) present the 'Unified Theory of Gang Involvement' that, through a process of theory knitting, integrates criminological factors with psychological theory to explain reasons why young people may or may not join gangs. The consideration of psychological processes within the theory (e.g., hyperactivity, heightened levels of anxiety, psychopathic traits, low self-esteem identity, and personality factors), has been lacking in previous theories. The model begins with social factors (e.g., school success/failure, family bonds), individual characteristics (e.g., mental health, cognitive abilities) and environmental aspects (e.g., neighbourhood).These factors are considered critical to an individual's social cognition (i.e., the way they perceive gangs and the attitudes they form towards others, such as authority figures). Peers are then selected who are identified as having shared values or similar experiences as themselves which may well be determined by the experiences they have had growing up and their general life circumstances. Depending on the type of peer group they have selected, individuals are likely to identify an illegal or legal path. The model purports that the pathway to criminal activity does not have to automatically result in gang membership; it can occur independently to criminal activity or in addition to it. The model argues that gang membership occurs for reasons beyond those which explain engaging in criminal acts. The gang gives an individual more than delinquent friends in that it offers protection, social support, status, excitement, and the opportunity for power. It also offers social controls in the form of rules that gang members must adhere to. The gang provides opportunity for further criminal learning which, in turn, increases involvement in criminal activity. This theory's strength is that gang membership is seen as a changing and evolving process. It accounts for criminal lifestyle with and without gang membership; as such, it can

demonstrate ways in which youth may join, stay or leave groups. The theory has reiterated the need to focus on investigating psychological processes and theories, and is one of the first theories to pay attention to understanding individual-level characteristics which make youth vulnerable to joining gangs.

Extending the idea of utilising a social psychological view to understanding gang membership, Wood (2014) highlights the importance of understanding the significance of group processes operating in gangs. Adolescence is the stage during which youth undergo an identity formation process (Erikson, 1968), and friendships are established through having shared interests and goals. Youth who join gangs are less confident in their educational abilities and in their ability to achieve success in a future career than youth who do not join gangs (Dukes, Martinez, & Stein, 1997). Consequently, they are at an increased risk of disengaging from school at a young age. They leave behind familiar groups which increases uncertainty regarding their identity and encourages identification with a new group, as outlined by uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2000). Youth define themselves as a part of the group by adhering to the behaviours and attitudes that are central to group membership. Within social identity theory, belonging to a group leads to positive feelings within an individual because their membership affirms their value as an individual, leading to enhancement of their self-esteem (Dukes et al., 1997). As such, the group's priorities and aims have greater importance than those of the individual (e.g., apprehension from crime and facing consequences) (Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012).

Relevantly, the Multiple Perpetrator Sex Offending framework (MPSO) (Harkins & Dixon, 2010, 2013) can be applied to gang membership. The authors consider the role of, and interactions between, individual, sociocultural, and situational factors which lead to multiple perpetrator rape. Group processes are observed when there is an interplay between individual

and situational factors, and the authors note several key processes that are considered to be pivotal to group-based sexual violence taking place. For example, 'Social Comparison' theory purports that for an individual to meet the need of acceptance and inclusion within a group, they will show support for the beliefs and actions of the group (Etgar & Ganot-Prager, 2009). Alternatively, consistent with 'Social Dominance' theory, some individuals might be motivated to engage in group sexual violence as a way of meeting their need to have status and power in a group (Harkins & Dixon, 2013), not only in respect of the victim but also with other members of the group to assert self-importance (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979). Extending this theory to gang membership, some individuals may join gangs to enhance their social status within the group, and therefore assume positions as leaders (Dmitrevia, Gibson, Steinberg, Piquero, & Fagan, 2014).

Linked to the need for being one of the group, the process of 'Conformity' outlines how individuals are likely to adjust their attitudes, opinions and behaviours to fit in with those of the group (Baron & Kerr, 2003), and because they wish to avoid being rejected if they disagree. The 'Social Corroboration' process involves group members having increased levels of acceptance towards committing offences. Increased alliance with the group can lead to the process of 'Deindividuation', which is characterised by an individual's loss of individuality as they become 'at one' with the group (Goldstein, 2002), leading to a greater willingness to commit antisocial acts which are characteristic of the group (Baron & Kerr, 2003), thereby allowing the individual to feel less responsible for how they behave (Zimbardo, 2007). Significantly, Harkins and Dixon (2013) outline the subcultural context, which is the interaction between wider sociocultural factors and specific situational contexts. Group members are influenced by the group's normative rules, which consist of beliefs and

perceptions of how the group conducts itself, which subsequently shapes the behaviour and thinking of group members.

1.4 Aims of thesis

Research suggests that there is no single factor that can explain gang membership; gang membership should rather be viewed as the result of an interaction between individual, peer, and sociocultural factors. Therefore, broadly speaking, this thesis aims to add to the knowledge base regarding psychological factors (individual, peer and sociocultural) involved in gang membership. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the nature of the relationship between gang membership, mental health, and exposure to violence. Chapter 2 seeks to examine specifically what the nature of the relationship is between gang membership and mental health problems. Relatedly, if a gang forms in a similar way to a group, with the group giving members an increased sense of belonging and enhanced well-being (Goldstein, 1991; Haden & Scarpa, 2008), it could be inferred that gang-involved youth perceive the function of the gang to be a supportive one, which potentially buffers the negative emotions and symptoms indicative of poor mental health. As such, the premise of Chapter 3 is to explore participants' experiences of social support within the gang. As stated, the relationship between violent victimisation and exposure to violence in the context of gang membership is well-established (Taylor et al., 2007), and as such, Chapter 4 seeks to evaluate a tool designed to measure exposure to violence.

More specifically, the thesis aims are as follows:

- To provide a review of the current literature regarding mental health problems in adolescent gang members, as this is one of the key individual factors which has not, thus far, received sufficient attention.

- To explore the life journeys of gang-involved youth and their perceptions of social support within the gang, in order to gain a better understanding of the role of peers in understanding gang-involved youth.
- To understand the importance of assessing community violence exposure as an indicator of the sociocultural context for gang involved youth.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of three main chapters: a literature review following systematic principles (Chapter 2); a qualitative research study (Chapter 3); and a critical review of an assessment tool (Chapter 4).

Chapter 2 explores the association between gang membership and mental health problems in adolescent male gang members. The review is the first known attempt to focus on adolescent gang members' mental health problems. Furthermore, understanding the mental health needs of gang-involved youth is particularly relevant at present, in light of a renewed focus by policy makers (Hughes et al., 2015) in order to implement some of the key recommendations which included mental health needs, which were made nearly a decade ago in their in-depth publication "Ending Gang and Youth Violence" (Centre for Social Justice, 2009).

Chapter 3 explores the lived experiences of gang-involved youth and the way in which they experience social support in the gang. Social-psychological reasons for joining a group are explored, such as whether the gang serves as a support system and creates a sense of belonging which may have been lacking in an individual's life. The study aims to provide practitioners with an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of gang members which may help them to better understand the needs of such individuals, and importantly, the role and impact of their peers through exploration of participants' experiences. Although it is

recognised that findings cannot be generalised, the results of this study are thought to have implications for clinical practice, and recommendations for future research are made.

Chapter 4 provides a critical evaluation of The Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence Scale (CREV) (Cooley, Beidel, & Turner, 1995) and The Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence Scale-Revised (CREV-R) (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). Increasingly, the negative impact of exposure to community violence (ECV) is reported within research and assessing levels of violence exposure can assist in identifying those most at risk of exposure and subsequently those at an increased risk of adverse problems, including mental health problems (Lynch, 2003; Margolin et al., 2009). Both the CREV and CREV-R are discussed in terms of their utility with gang-involved youth.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings of each chapter, along with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

The association between gang membership and mental health problems in adolescent gang members: A systematic review of the literature

2.1 Abstract

The main aim of this review was to examine the association between gang membership and mental health problems in adolescent male gang members. In addition, the review aimed to examine the types of mental health problems experienced by gang members.

Three academic databases were searched resulting in 1,188 studies which were then sifted based on abstract, title and in some instances a reading of the whole article to ascertain whether the article was relevant. Fifteen studies were assessed as meeting the inclusion criteria and, following a quality assessment, ten were chosen to be included in the review.

Overall, the studies reported an association between gang membership and mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, symptoms indicative of conduct disorder, hyperactivity and inattention, trauma, and suicidal tendencies. The findings of two studies suggested that a central aspect of gang life, namely exposure to violence (a measure of which will be examined in Chapter 4), was linked to suicidal behaviour. However, some studies did not find support for an association between gang membership and mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and childhood trauma. Conclusions are tentatively drawn given that a number of studies suffered methodological flaws.

The review highlights the need to routinely assess adolescent gang members' mental health. Recommendations for future research in the area of mental health of gang members are made.

2.2 Introduction

It is well established that gang membership is linked with serious offending and violent behaviours (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Melde & Esbensen, 2013). In an American longitudinal study of school-attending youth living in rural and urban areas of Rochester, gang-involved youth (compared with non-gang youth) were found to have committed greater levels of violence (with a larger difference reported during active gang membership) (Klein, Weerman & Thornberry, 2006). Concerningly, there is a growing recognition that gangs are assuming disproportionate levels of responsibility for their perpetration in violent acts in Europe, and therefore is not simply a problem confined to the United States (US). For example, Esbensen and Weerman (2005) investigated a school sample of youth aged on average 13 and 15 years old, and found youth who reported gang involvement were approximately four times more likely to be involved in violent acts than non-gang involved youth. These findings were comparable to US-based data of a similar youth population, with a similar level of gang membership, and ratio of involvement in violent acts reported compared to non-gang youth (Weerman & Esbensen, 2005). Such outcomes continue to be of interest to politicians, sociologists and clinicians who attempt to establish and understand factors which are considered to increase the risk of youth joining a gang. This interest has generated extensive research from scholars with a sociological (Eitle, Gunkel, & van Gundy, 2004), criminological (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Melde & Esbsenson, 2013; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003) and, recently, a psychological stance (Beresford & Wood, 2016; Wood & Alleyne, 2010).

The literature base demonstrates that risk factors for gang membership emerge from five domains (i.e., individual, family, school, neighbourhood and peer), with the greater the number of risk factors experienced by an individual, the greater the likelihood of them joining

a gang (Hill, Luis, & Hawkins, 2001; Howell & Egley, 2005). Similarly, there is growing evidence that risk factors from each of the five domains outlined above may also increase youths' vulnerability to developing mental health problems (Hughes et al., 2015; Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007).

In terms of prevalence, the findings of the last survey of mental health problems in young persons aged between 5 and 16 years in the UK (Green, McGinnity, Meltzer, Ford, & Goodman, 2005) reported that 850,000 (9.6%) children and young people aged between 5 and16 years, and 510,000 (11.5%) young people aged between 11 and 16 years, were considered to have mental disorders. Being socially disadvantaged and living in poverty (i.e., growing up in a neighbourhood where there is a lack of social network opportunities, scarce resources, poor nutrition, inadequate schooling, and violence exposure) are correlated to mental illness (Deater-Deckard, Reiss, Hetherington, & Plomin, 1997; O'Connor, Heron, Glover, & Team, 2002).

As noted, youth gangs are often in unsafe and disadvantaged neighbourhoods characterised by exposure to violence (Vigil, 1988). Incidents of exposure to violence within the home setting such as childhood victimisation, neglect, and physical and sexual abuse (Bocanegra & Stolbach, 2012; Howell & Egley, 2005; Thompson & Braaten-Antrim, 1998) can increase the risk of gang membership. Exposure to violence has been linked to mental health problems (e.g., suicidal ideation and depression) (Li et al., 2002; Madan, Mrug, & Windle, 2011). As such, it can be assumed that individuals in gangs may be vulnerable to developing mental health problems, possibly as a result of experiences prior to gain joining, but once becoming part of the gang, issues with their mental well-being may also be related, in part, to the violent acts perpetrated within the gang (Coid et al., 2013). Given the established association between exposure to violence and the experience of mental health

problems (Kelly, Anderson, Hall, Peden, & Cerel, 2012; Kulkarni, Graham-Bermann, Rauch, & Seng, 2011), it is perhaps surprising that little attention has been paid to the mental health needs of gang members until recent years. Indeed, emerging research has shown that gang members are not only a concern to the Criminal Justice System but are also prevalent in healthcare and hospital settings. However, the recent focus on theories drawing on a psychological perspective to explain gang membership has led to a better understanding of how individual-level factors, such as mental health problems in adolescence, might also be linked to gang membership.

2.2.1 Risk factors for mental health problems in youth

Risk factors for mental health problems can be conceptualised as stemming from individual, family, community and societal levels, and as such, can have a cumulative effect upon an individual's mental health, with a young person showing risk factors across the different areas (Bellis, Hughes, Leckenby, Perkins, & Lowey, 2014). As such, mental health problems are understood to have a biological, psychological and social basis; known as the well-established biopsychosocial model (Engel, 1980). There is substantial support for the role that biological and genetic factors play in youth mental illness (e.g., depression, personality-led behaviour problems, and psychosis) (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007; Raine et al., 2005). Consistent with the biopsychosocial model, youth may have an increased vulnerability to mental health problems as a result of their experiences and circumstances (Department of Health and NHS England, 2015). For example, the presence of neurodevelopmental conditions and disabilities (such as learning disabilities) may increase their susceptibility to experiencing a number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Howell & Egley, 2005). ACEs have been linked to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and PTSD (Anda et al., 2006). In a US study, 130,000 school attending

adolescents (who completed questionnaires every 3 years at the ages of 11, 14 and 17), demonstrated that the cumulative impact of ACEs was linked with violence perpetration, including weapon-carrying, fighting and delinquency, and self-directed violence, such as self-harm, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation (Duke, Pettingell, McMorris, & Borowsky, 2010). With the addition of each of the six ACEs examined, the risk of perpetrating violence rose by 35-144% (Duke et al., 2010). However, it is important to note that not all youth who experience adverse life events and circumstances will go on to develop problematic mental health issues, and it is noted that mental health problems may occur in the absence of established risk factors in youth.

2.2.2 Mental health problems and gang membership

The relationship between gang membership and mental health problems is considered to be bi-directional. Youth may join gangs as a coping strategy to help manage pre-existing mental health problems (i.e., using the gang as a means of support and protection) (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Wood, 2014). In addition, upon becoming a member of a street gang, mental health problems can be worsened as a result of exposure to violence (Gover, Jennings, & Tewksbury, 2009; Taylor, Freng, Esbensen, & Peterson, 2008). Gang members are at a higher risk of becoming violently victimised than non-gang members (Katz et al., 2011). Internally, gang members might be negatively affected by the violence they have witnessed, leading to internalising symptoms such as depression, anxiety, fear and post-traumatic stress disorder (DuRant, Getts, Cadenhead, Emams, & Woods, 1995; Kulkarni et al., 2011).

Gang members may conceal their feelings of anxiety and fear due to concerns of being rejected by the gang, due to their perceptions that showing or expressing their anxieties may be construed as a sign of weaknesses that are not compatible with the gang's objectives of showing fearlessness and "toughness" (Melde, Taylor, & Esbsensen, 2009, p. 586). Creating

distance at an emotional level (e.g., desensitisation) means that they can adopt the belief that violence is an acceptable way to solving conflicts (Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2004). This is particularly relevant to gang-involved youth, who, through their increased exposure to violence within the gang, adopt normative beliefs (i.e., placing the gang's views related to the acceptability of committing crime in place of their own views regarding negative consequences of their involvement in crime) of the gang that support the use of violence (Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012; Taylor, Peterson, Esbensen, & Freng, 2007). As such, violence might be a way of coping with the experience of traumatic victimisation in youth who are actively avoiding negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression (Garbarino, 1999; Paton, Crouch, & Camic, 2009). Avoiding certain feelings may be counter-productive to young gang members' psychological well-being, as the very act of supressing negative emotions has been found to make such emotions stronger (Wegner, Schneider, Carter, & White, 1987).

Emerging research suggests that gang members not only suffer trauma symptoms as a result of victimisation experiences (Mrug et al., 2011), but in fact may suffer from perpetration-induced trauma (PT), as a consequence of the violence they have perpetrated themselves against others within the gang (Kerig, Chaplo, Bennett, & Modrowski, 2016; McNair, 2002). This is similar to the way individuals in combat situations may experience posttraumatic PT symptoms and reactions (Burton, Foy, Bwanausi, Johnson, & Moore, 1994; Kerig, Wainryb, Twali, & Chaplo, 2013). PT symptoms, which are similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder, can include emotional numbing and posttraumatic dissociation as a result of their own role in committing violent acts, at times under compulsion, as the alternative would involve facing violent consequences if they do not abide by gang rules (Klein, Weerman, & Thornberry, 2006; Vigil, 1996).

2.2.3 Prevalence of mental health problems in gang-involved youth

In a UK study screening health problems and risk factors (such as family conflict, homelessness, victimisation and histories of mental health difficulties) with youth aged between 10 and 18 years, it was found that at the point of arrest nearly 40% of male and female gang members showed behavioural problems (indicative of conduct disorder) before the age of 12 years, in comparison to 13% of non-gang-involved youth (Khan, Brice, Saunders, & Plumtree, 2013). A quarter were considered to meet the criteria for a mental disorder with one in ten male and one in three female gang members showing signs of self-harm and suicidal ideation. Adolescent-aged females who were gang-involved were more likely to report poor relationships with their parents and peers, which then led them to seek out relationships within the gang which served the purpose of creating secure attachments. However, the estimation of prevalence rates is difficult to calculate due to firstly, the minority of youth (e.g., 80 youth females out of sample of 8,029 young people) within this particular study having self-reported gang membership (Khan et al., 2013), and secondly, the limited availability of national figures to identify the extent and patterns of the identified factors that are considered to increase the risk for gang involvement and mental health problems in young people.

2.2.4 Definitions

For the purpose of this systematic review, the definition of mental illness as outlined by the DSM-5 is used in view of it being a widely-used system in research: "a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological or developmental processes underlying mental functioning" (5th edition; American Psychological Association [APA], 2013, p.20).

2.2.5 Current review

A preliminary search of the following databases was undertaken in September 2018 to determine the need for the current review: Campbell Collaboration, Cochrane Library and Google Scholar. One literature review was found within the peer-reviewed literature which provided an overview of the published data identifying the mental health needs in gang members (Madden, 2013). However, the review was narrative rather than systematic, and there was no attempt to critically evaluate the studies based on their design or quality, and as such it may be sensitive to sources of bias and error (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). It was therefore deemed necessary to conduct a systematic literature review in order to further the literature base in this area.

The aims of the current review are to synthesise and evaluate the research findings in relation to the association between gang membership and mental health problems. Whilst the links between the two have been identified, to date no systematic review has been conducted in this area. Gang membership tends to be quite short-lived as demonstrated by longitudinal studies (albeit conducted in the United States) where between 55-69% of gang members stayed in a gang for one year or less (Esbensen, Huizinga, & Weiher, 1993; Hill et al., 2001; Thornberry et al., 1993). Taking into account the relatively short time period during which youth are gang members, and the identification of ages of joining to fall between 14 and 18 years, with some studies reporting earlier ages (Klein, 1995), the current review focuses on male youths aged between 10 and 24 years of age, and therefore excluded adult gang members. It is noted that adolescent offenders differ from adult offenders in a number of ways. For example, during adolescence, the brain undergoes significant changes within the areas that regulate emotions, enable inhibitory control and facilitate making assessments based on the pros and cons of risk taking (Steinberg, 2005). However, adolescents engage in

much riskier behaviours than adults in spite of knowing what risks are involved because they are more likely to be influenced emotionally and socially. This makes adolescents more susceptible to influence of their peers' risk-taking behaviours (Gatti, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 2009; Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004), and, together with the urges to seek exciting experiences, encourages engaging in risky acts with peers (Romer & Hennessy, 2007). The reliance on peer support in friendships, in addition to developing maturity, can place adolescents at a greater risk of mental health problems (Richards, 2011). This suggests the need to distinguish between adolescent and adult populations when looking at gang membership and mental health.

The following questions form the basis of this systematic review:

- Is there an association between gang membership and mental health problems in adolescent gang members?
- What types of mental health problems are reported by adolescent gang members?

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Search Strategy

A search of the following bibliographic reference databases was undertaken on the 29th September 2018: Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA); PsychINFO; Web of Science. A search of reference lists of identified articles was conducted to identify further articles that were relevant to the aims. The following government policy websites were examined: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) UK; UK Ministry of Justice; Public Health England; UK Department of Health and NHS evidence.

The search terms were developed as broadly as possible to identify relevant papers in light of the limited past research exploring gang membership and mental health. The search

terms noted below were used and amended as required when applied to each database to meet the search requirements. The search syntax in full is reported in Appendix A.

Juvenile (s) OR youth OR adolescent (s) OR young

AND

Juvenile gang (s) OR Gang within any 3 words of offen and any letters following 'offen' OR Gang member (s) OR Street within 3 words of gang (s) OR Group within 3 words of offen any letters following 'offen'

AND

Trauma* OR hyperactivity disorder OR anxiety OR depression OR conduct disorder OR psychosis OR mental illness

In total, 1,188 papers were identified from electronic databases searched. There were 246 duplicates articles within the three databases, giving a total of 942. Following this search, the researcher analysed the titles and abstracts of all remaining articles to remove those which were considered irrelevant to the questions of the review. This process led to the removal of 871 articles, with 71 remaining. The remaining 71 articles were searched for relevant publications cited within them which were not identified through the electronic database search undertaken. This identified a further 6 articles for review, giving a total of 77 articles in full, which were assessed against the identified inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). The inclusion and exclusion criteria had been developed based on an earlier scoping exercise and to be compatible with the research aims. Once the criteria were applied, 62 articles were excluded, resulting in 15 articles to undergo quality assessment. The search results and study selection process are detailed in Figure 1.

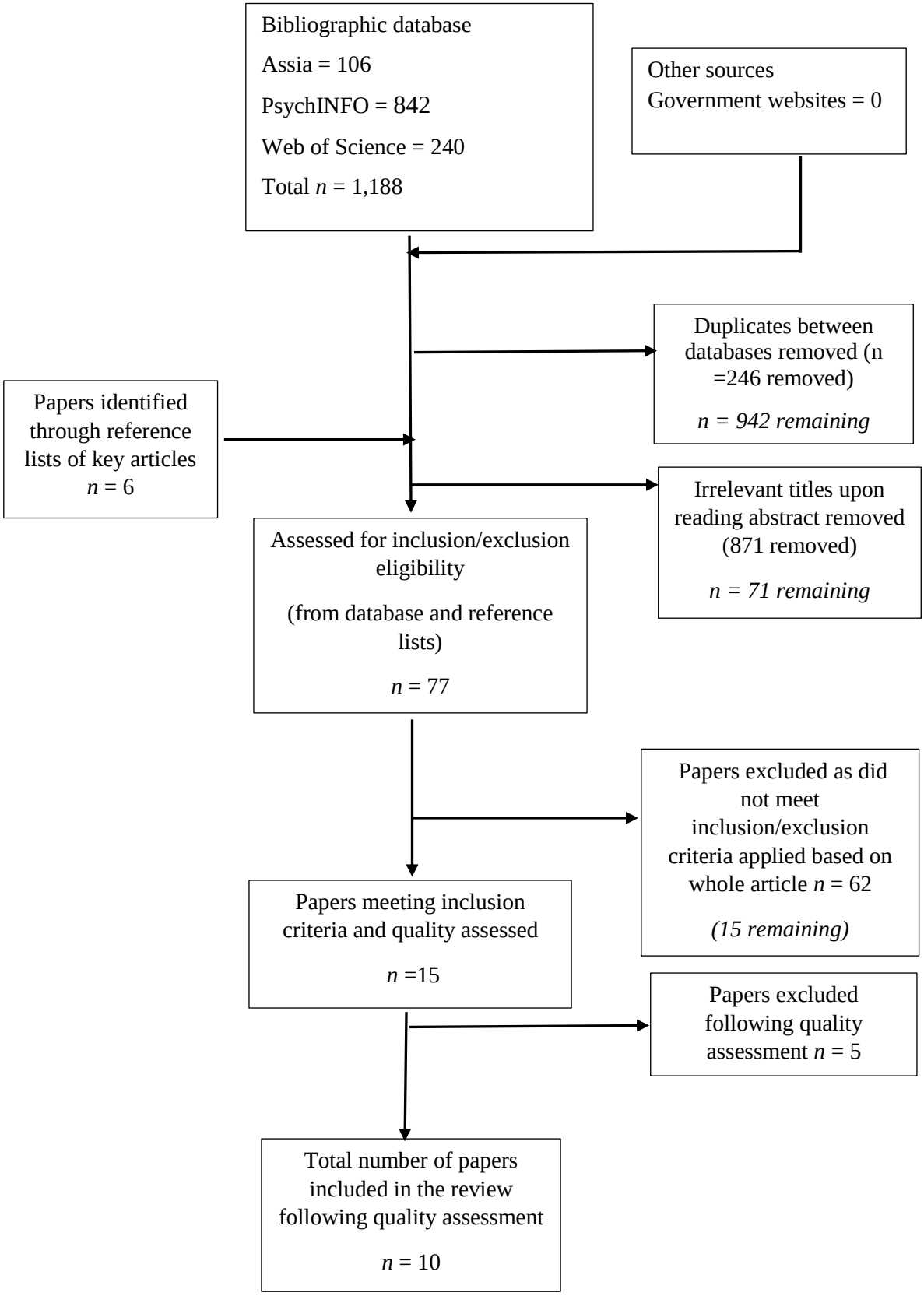

Figure 1 *Literature review study selection process*

The final remaining 15 papers were examined using inclusion/ exclusion criteria developed for the purpose of this review (see Appendix B).

Table 1

PICO Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

	Inclusion	**Exclusion**
Population	Male and female adolescents aged between 10-24 years at the time of study who identify themselves as gang members.	Adult gang members aged 24 years and above. Where the study was longitudinal, studies were only included if participants did not exceed the age of 24 years at the final stage of the study. Studies with samples of exclusively of female gang members. Sexual offenders who formed groups with the primary aim of sexually offending or grooming victims. Homeless or refugee gang members were excluded because these populations are considered to present with a unique set of mental health problems based on the experiences of their homeless/refugee experiences, and may have experienced increased victimisations as a result. Studies with samples of extremist groups.
Comparator	A comparison group of non-gang affiliated males or females within each study.	
Outcomes	Comparison of mental health problems reported between gang and non-gang affiliated youth.	Studies exploring risk factors for gang membership which are not identified as mental health problems.
Study design	Observational (cohort, cross-sectional and case-controlled studies) studies. In English language only.	Qualitative studies. Editorials, commentaries, dissertations, single case studies, narrative reviews and literature reviews.

2.3.2 Quality assessment

Studies that were identified as suitable once the inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied were then assessed for their methodological properties and quality. Two types of studies, namely: cross-sectional and prospective observational cohort, were identified, and this led to the development of two quality assessment checklists (see Appendix C). The cross-sectional studies were assessed for quality using criteria adapted from the AXIS Tool (Downes, Brennan, Williams, & Dean, 2016), a relatively new tool which assesses the risk of bias and quality in cross-sectional studies, in addition to items adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) UK (n.d.). The prospective observational cohort studies were assessed using criteria adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP; 2004). The following scoring was applied to each quality assessment: 2 - Criteria is met fully; 1 - Criteria is met partially; 0 - Other (cannot determine, not applicable, not reported). Once quality assessments were completed, a total score out of 38 for cross-sectional papers and a total score of 44 out of prospective observational cohort papers was calculated and converted to percentages. The following quality cut-off scores were identified: >70% high quality; 40-69% moderate quality; >40% low quality.

Clinical judgment was used to assess risk of bias in each study. All included studies were assessed for their quality by the author and inter-rater reliability was assessed with 33.3% (5 of the 15 studies) by a second rater, who is a practising Registered Forensic Psychologist, with experience of conducting a systematic literature review and undertaking quality assessments. Any differences were resolved through discussion. Overall scores and individual scores for each category of bias assessed can be found in Appendix D. The method of statistical analysis is also reported within Table 2. All included studies were considered to be of moderate and high quality and were therefore suitable for inclusion in the review.

2.3.3 Data extraction

A data extraction form was created for included studies which passed the quality assessment and inclusion criteria (see Appendix E). Using a systematic approach, the author completed the form for all included studies. The information included comprised of information about the study (title of study, authors, year of publication, country of origin, quality assessment score), information pertaining to the study eligibility (recruitment of participants, participant characteristics, sample size, study type), measures and type of statistical analysis (validity and reliability of measures statistical tests), as well as results and limitations.

2.4 Results

Following quality assessment, ten articles remained and were included in the review. Table 2 provides a summary of the information extracted from each study.

Table 2

Characteristics of studies included in the review

	Author(s), Country, Year, Quality assessment score	**Study aims**	**Sample demographics**	**Comparison group**	**Measures/Design** *(only measures relevant to current review outlined here)*	**Findings and conclusions**	**Strengths and Weaknesses**
1	Craig, Gagnon, Tremblay The Road to Gang Membership: Characteristics of Male Gang and Nongang Members from Ages 10 to 14 Canada 2002 **66%**	Examined the stability of belonging to a gang in early adolescence, behaviour profiles, family characteristics, and friendships of gang and nongang members.	Participants taken from a larger sample of 1, 034 male youth, part of a longitudinal study in Quebec, 1984. Present study took a **sub-sample** of 142 boys with data on gang membership information Divided into three groups: -stable gang members (belonged at age 13 and 14) *n* = 25 -unstable gang (belonged at either age 13 or 14) *n* =51 -non-gang members *n* =66 Ethnicity not reported	Non-gang members *n* =66	**Quantitative Prospective Longitudinal** Looked at data over 4 year period (11-14yrs). **Mental health symptoms**: Social Behaviour Questionnaire (SBQ) (Tremblay, Vitaro, Gagnon, Piche & Royer, 1991) – measures fighting, oppositional behav, inattention, hyperactivity, anxiety-withdrawal & prosocial behav. Self-report, parent and teacher ratings through ages 10-14. **Gang membership:** One item assessed gang membership "in the last	Ratings by parent(mother): significant difference in ratings of anxiety depending on group F (2, 139) = 4.37, p <.01. Non-gang members more anxious than stable and unstable gang members. Ratings by teacher: Significant difference in ratings of fighting, F, (2,139) = 6.27, p <.01, anxiety, F, (2,139) = 6.87, P <.001, hyperactivity, F (1,139) = 4.5, p < .01, inattention, F(2,139) = 3.24, p <.05 & opp. behav. F(2, 139) = 5.43, p <.01. Stable gm's = more fighting, less anxious and more hyper. than non-gm's. Unstable gm's more oppositional and inattentive than non-gm's. Suggest pathway to gang membership comprises of behaviour problems, low anxiety levels, failure to learn	**Strengths:** - Measured behavioural problems prior to gang m/ship, reducing some measurement bias -use of a younger sample to show stability of gang m/ship occurs at ages 13-14years, not earlier. - Explored gang m/ship stability by repeated assessment -multiple ratings than reliance on only self-report -Validity of some measures such as the SBQ reported (e.g. demonstrated and reported internal consistency) **Weaknesses:** -Low agreement on items between assessors - suggests

					12 months did you belong to a group (gang) who did illegal things". Participants gave responses to gang question ages 11 and 14, parent at ages 13 and 14 and teacher at age 14.	prosocial ways and influence of deviant peers.	they are not able to give reliable reports on gang membership -Possible underreporting by parents of behavioural problems -Comparison group larger than gang members groups -Limited generalisability, as population selected from low socioeconomic area -Selection bias – given only those participants with parents both born in Canada and with first language as French included
2	Corcoran, Washington, Meyers The Impact of Gang Membership on Mental Health Symptoms, Behavior Problems and Antisocial Criminality of Incarcerated Young Men	Compared a sample imprisoned gang members with non-gang members on mental health problems, behaviour problems and antisocial criminality.	Participant total *n* = 82 imprisoned male youth aged between 13 – 19 years. 9 excluded from analysis as were female **Study sample total** *n* = 73. Gang members *n* = 24, average age 16.0 (*SD* = 1.5) Non-gang members *n*= 49, average age 16.6 years (*SD* = 1.4) Ethnicity not reported	Non-gang members n= 49, average age 16.6 years (SD = 1.4)	**Quantitative** **Cross sectional** **Mental health symptoms:** Oregon Mental Health Referral Checklist (OMHRC, Corcoran & Fischer, 2000) Self-report form used for this study. Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach, 1991) = measured internal (e.g.	OMHRC measure: Gang members reported more mental health problems than non-gang. CBCL measure: Gang members reported more external behaviour problems than non-gang members, including destructiveness and delinquency. Gang members reported more antisocial behaviour problems before imprisonment than non-gang members.	**Strengths:** - OMHRC and CBCL reported good validity, with the OMHRC showing good high reliability for the current sample (alpha = .93) and CBCL (alpha = .91). -Showed gang members continued to demonstrate high levels of criminality when mental health problems were identified as

	US 2005 **63%**				anxiety and depression, suicidal attempts) and external (e.g. attention problems, delinquency). **Gang membership:** Determined by responses to single item "are you a member of a gang".		covariates,which has implications for treatment needs **Weaknesses** -Limited generalisability as prison population -Small sample size -Cross-sectional, cannot infer causality -Some overlap in symptoms measured by OMHRC and CBCL
3	Dmitrieva, Gibson, Steinberg, Piquero & Fagan Predictors and Consequences of Gang Membership: Comparing Gang Members, Gang Leaders, and Non-Gang-Affiliated Adjudicated Youth US 2014 **76%**	Examined self-esteem, psychopathy and psychosocial maturity in youth with differing levels of gang membership: low level (follower), high-level (leader) and non-gang member, and to explore if these symptoms and behaviours predicted or were as a consequence of	Longitudinal study of serious male adolescent offenders transitioning into adulthood. Total participants taking part in study *n* = 1,170 Aged between 14-17 years at the start of the study African American = 44% Hispanic = 29% Gang members *n* = 305 Gang leader *n*= 130	Non- gang members = 735	**Quantitative Prospective Longitudinal** Looked at data over 7 year period. **Mental health symptoms:** Psychopathy was assessed with the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI; Andershad, Kerr, Stattin, & Levander, 2002) **Gang membership:** Adapted from existing questions assessing gang status (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, & Jang, 1994).	The three psychopathy dimensions measured were not predictive of low gang membership. However, the grandiose-manipulative dimension predicted being a gang leader. For consequences of gang membership, follower members was associated with impulsive-irresponsible dimensions as they became older. Being a leader also showed elevations with the impulsive-irresponsible traits but at a younger not older age. Longer time spent in a gang (as gang leader and follower member) was associated with increased grandiose-manipulative and impulsive-irresponsible traits.	**Strengths:** -Good internal consistency of YPI reported (Cronbach's alpha = .94) -Study design and examining mental health problems over 7 years – key period of adolescent transition and gang involvement -examined different levels of gang membership to examine how they related to psychopathic traits -comparison group was a delinquent non-gang-involved sample therefore can rule out mental health problems exist because of being

		gang membership.			Participants asked if ever been involved in a gang, currently in a gang and was a gang member or a top member.		involved in criminality or imprisonment. **Weaknesses** -Were only able to examine male participants as female sample was too small. -Reliance on self-report with this population could be problematic. For example, individuals with grandiose traits could over-report their status within the gang e.g., as gang leaders when they were not. -follow-ups were completed 6-monthly for Years 1-4, and annually for Years 4-7. This may mean that the associations between symptoms and status when assessed annually may not be as strong as the ones found when assessments completed 6-monthly.
4	Dupere, Lacourse, Willms, Vitaro, Tremblay	Explored the relationship between youth psychopathic tendencies and	**Sample** taken from a national longitudinal survey across Canada on children and adolescents.	Non-gang members n = 3,330 (96%)	**Quantitative** **Prospective** **Longitudinal**	One tenth of sample (10.7%) showed psychopathic tendencies.	**Strengths** **-**Conducted over several years.

	Affiliation to Youth Gangs During Adolescence: The Interaction Between Childhood Psychopathic Tendencies and Neighborhood Disadvantage Canada 2007 **66%**	neighbourhood characteristics in youth affiliated to gangs.	Started in 1994-5 and follow-up surveys every 2 years Participants who took part in Cycles 1 up to Cycle 5 included only, and one child from each household *n* = 3,522 Participants asked about g m/ship aged 14-15 years and symptoms aged 10-1 1 years old Male/female distribution – reports evenly divided, figures not reported Reported more than 90% Caucasian (exact figure not stated). Rest comprised of Asian or African descent – not clear how many Gang members (6%) – no figure given – reported as six percent		Used parent ratings to measure risk factors when youth aged 10 and 11 yrs. **Mental health symptoms:** Scales adapted from Montreal Longitudinal Study (Tremblay et al.1994) Hyperactivity – 8 items Low Anxiety – 7 item scale Low prosociality – 10 item scale Elevations on all 3 scales indicated psychopathic tendencies **Gang membership:** Measured bet.14 -15yrs Youth self-report for this item. Asked if in the last 12 months they were "part of a gang that broke the law by stealing, hurting people, damaging property, etc.,"	Adolescents with psychopathic tendencies in late childhood (10-11yrs) 1.6 times more likely to report youth gang affiliation in mid-adolescence than peers without the tendencies (odds ratio 1.60, 95% confidence interval 1.02,2.51). In neighbourhoods with high residential instability gang m/ship 5x higher (5.2 vs 26.5%) for those with psychopathic profile.	-Reduced measurement bias - psychopathic tendencies measured prior to outcome (e.g. gang m/ship). -Multivariate internal consistency of measures reported. **Weaknesses** -Does not provide exact number of gang members -Some selection bias given survey designed for use across normative populations, which also reduces number of gang-involved youth -Questionable validity of 3 scales used to identify psychopathic tendencies = benefit from using specific measure for Childhood Psychopathy -Cannot rule out impact of unmeasured variables such as increased exposure to opportunity to join a gang
5	Madan, Mrug, Windle	Explored whether gang membership in	**Sample**- taken from Wave 2 of a longitudinal study	Non-gang member = 95% (558)	**Quantitative** **Cross-sectional**	Gang m/ship positively associated with suicidal behaviour, delinquency and	**Strengths** -Use of some validated instruments for

	Brief report: Do delinquency and community violence exposure explain internalizing problems in early adolescent gang members? US 2011 63%	early adolescence was associated with depression, anxiety and suicidal behaviour and if the associations were brought about by delinquency and witnessing community violence.	undertaken in Birmingham, Alabama, USA in 2004-5. Study sample *n* = 589 Mean age = 13.2 years (*SD* = 0.9) Male/female distribution, male only reported, and as a percentage Male = 52% African American = 78% Caucasian = 21% (but this included non-African-American) Gang member =5% (*n*= 31)		**Mental health symptoms:** <u>Anxiety</u> – Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (Reynolds & Richmond, 1997) <u>Depression</u> – 6 items from DPS Predictive Scales (Lucas et al., 2001). <u>Suicidal behaviour</u> – 2 items - -plan or attempt to commit suicide in past 12 months (Reifman & Windle, 1995). **Gang membership:** One dichotomous item "I belong to a gang (true for me/not true for me" form the Attitudes towards Gangs questionnaire (Nal, Spellman, Alvarez-Canino, Lausell-Bryant & Landsberg, 1996).	witnessing community violence but not related to anxiety or depression. After adjusting for demographics, gang members were 3.4 times more likely to report suicidal behaviour than non-gang members. Delinquency and witnessing community violence were both linked with suicidal behaviour.	measuring mental health problems. Some measures report good reliability. **Weaknesses** -Cross-sectional – difficult to establish causality of the correlations. -Low number of gang members – lowering statistical power -Sampling bias – missing children excluded from school who might be high risk youth -Low reliability of some measures e.g. DPS Cronbach's alpha = .68. -Reliance on adolescent self-report. -Violence exposure not measured in terms of how chronic or severe it was and their relationship with the perpetrator
6	Merrin, Hong, Espelage Are the Risk and Protective Factors Similar	Examined risk and protective factors (at individual, family, peer school,	**Sample** – *n* = 17, 366 middle and high school students from 15 Mid-Western schools. Males = 49.9%	Non-gang member 90.8% (*n* = 15,768)	**Quantitative** **Cross sectional** **Mental health symptoms:**	Many individual level variables predicted gang involvement. Black youth were 6.49 (1/.154) times more likely to be in a gang (*p*<.001),	**Strengths** -Good sample size -Scale refined over time to increase validity for use in current study.

	for Gang-Involved, Pressured-to-Join, and Non-Gang-Involved Youth? A Social-Ecological Analysis US 2015 **66%**	neighbourhood level) for gang involvement in sub groups of youth (ranging from current or past gang members, non-involved and those who resisted)	Females = 50.1% Exact figures not given – expressed as percentages only White = 74.4% Black = 7% Hispanic/Latino = 6.6% Mixed race = 4.5% Asian = 4.5% Other = 3% Current or former gang member 3.6 % (*n* = 625) Being asked/ pressured to join a gang but resisted 5.6% (*n* = 973) Mean age = 14.84		<u>Depression and suicidal ideation</u> – measured with 3 items, taken from the Dane County Youth Survey (2009) **Gang membership:** One item: "Are you a member of an organized street gang?" Response options: a) no, and I have never been asked or pressured to join b) no, but I have been asked or pressured to join a gang c) I was in a gang, but am no longer d) yes, I am currently in a gang. (c and d were collapsed into one category due to the low freq. of responses)	Hispanic youth were 4.93 times more likely, and Asian youth were 3.23 times more likely to be gang-involved compared with White youth. A one unit increase in depression and suicidal ideation was linked with 2.90 times higher odds of gang involvement.	- Overcame limitation of other studies which over sample Black and Hispanic youth, given study consisted of 46.5% White youth. **Weaknesses** -Internal consistency for mental health measure reported just below good level (Cronbach's alpha = .65). - Sampling bias -study restricted to suburban and rural areas -Gang membership measure does not assess type or intensity of g m/ship -Some measurement bias in that Latino youth may self-identify as White -Measure of depression and suicidal ideation restricted to 3 items preventing a nuanced and fuller understanding of the symptoms
7	Thornton, Frick, Shulman, Ray,	Examined the association of	Sample – 1,216 adolescent boys from	Non-gang member never	**Quantitative** **Cross-sectional**	Being older at first contact with juvenile justice system	**Strengths**

	Steinberg, Cauffman Callous-Unemotional Traits and Adolescents' Role in Group Crime US 2015 **84%**	Callous-Unemotional traits with group offending (i.e. offending with others in a group and gang involvement) and the role played by an offender in a group offence.	three geographical justice areas in the States. -First time offenders only -English speaking only Mean age 15.29 years (*SD* = 1.29) White Latino = 46.2% Black = 38.1% White non-Latino = 15.7% Average intelligence = full scale IQ = 88.50 (*SD* = 11.87) Gang member past six months = 5% (*n*=123) Gang member in their lifetime = 5% (*n*=123) gang member never = 90% (n =1,092) One pt did not answer **Group offending – Index Offence** I.O. committed with others 62% (n = 754) I.O. committed alone 38% (n = 461) One pt did not answer **Lifetime group – ever committed with others**	= 90% (n =1,092) One pt did not answer	**Mental health symptoms:** <u>Callous-unemotional traits</u> - Inventory of Callous-Unemotional traits (ICU; Kimonis et al., 2008). <u>Impulse control</u> – Eight item subscale of Weinberger's Adjustment Inventory (Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). **Gang membership:** Asked whether ever part of a gang during past six months been or during their lifetime or never been part of a gang.	linked to lifetime offending, group offending over lifetime and instigator of index offence. Lower levels of IQ linked to leader during crimes with others. White Latino and White non-Latino youth more likely than Black youth to report group offending for index and lifetime group offending. Callous-unemotional traits associated with greater lifetime group offending and with being a member of a gang, and the association with gang membership was significant even after controlling lifetime offending. The relationship between C-U traits and gang membership not affected by age or race/ethnicity. C-U traits for gang members were independent of past offending, indicating the pattern of offending for gm's is more serious and chronic that group offenders.	-Modest effect sizes reported -Assessed cognitive functioning of participants -Demonstrated internal consistency (i.e. validity) of both mental health measures used. -Findings related to relationship between C-U traits and gm points to the need to explore the link further between the two variables. **Weaknesses** -Correlational study precludes making causal inferences of relationships between variables -Use of self-report – youth with C=U traits may overreport their crimes and their roles within them -Sampling bias = first time offenders as reported within the areas they reside in and were convicted in – could have offences in other areas -Limited generalisability to other

			I.O. committed in a group 45% (*n* = 552) I.O. committed alone 22% (*n* = 273) No response 2% (*n* = 19) Inconsistent reporting 31% (*n* = 372)				offender populations with prolific or more serious offending given focus on first time offenders
8	Cepeda, Valdez, Nowotny Childhood Trauma among Mexican American Gang Members and Delinquent Youth: A Comparative Exploratory Study US 2016 **66%**	Examined the association between childhood trauma and gang membership in Mexican American youth.	Data for the study comes from a larger study examining the relationship between acculturative and family stress, depression and childhood trauma to high risk substance misuse. Males participants **Random subsample** of gang members *n* = 50 mean age = 18.2 matched comparison group *n* = 25 mean age = 19.7 Study reported all participants to be Mexican American, although unclear how this was identified (i.e., participants self-report).	Matched control group of delinquent non-gang members *n* = 25	**Quantitative** **Cross-sectional** **Mental health symptoms:** Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) (Bernstein & Fink, 1994) to assess childhood trauma Gang membership: Identified through fieldwork, social mapping processes helped identify gangs. Validity and reliability of gang members checked using 3-4 sources.	Gang members had significantly lower childhood trauma total score than the delinquent youth. Significantly lower score on the emotional abuse and emotional neglect scales (8% vs 16% for delinquent group). Gang members had significantly higher levels of neglect 'not having anyone take them to the doctors' and 'not feeling care and protection'. Gang members reported higher level of sexual abuse than comparison group but higher percentage reported no or minimal sexual abuse. Both groups reported higher levels of physical neglect compared with normed sample of male youth inpatients.	**Strengths** -Use of stratified proportional sampling to randomly select study sample of gang members -Matched control group to balance specific covariates -Internal reliability coefficients reported, all very good apart from scale to measure physical neglect (alpha = .65) -identified the prevalence and nature of problems non-gang delinwuent youth present with linked with mental health problems. **Weaknesses** -Specific sample from a restricted geographical location, e.g., Mexican

							American limiting generalisability -Sample size precludes analyses that might provide more depth of relationships between childhood trauma, delinquency and gang m/ship -Limits generalisability -differences in age of gang and non-gang group - Self-report of trauma in current population – risk of underreporting experiences -CTQ measure not sensitive to cultural needs of current sample e.g. "*machismo*" (strong sense of masculinity) may contribute to underreporting on specific items
9.	Kerig, Chaplo, Bennett, Modrowski "Harm as Harm" Gang Membership, Perpetration Trauma, and	Examined Perpetration Trauma, trauma exposure, posttraumatic stress symptoms and gang membership in a sample of	**Sample** 660 youth from a short-term juvenile detention in Western United States. Male = 484 Female = 176 Ages 11 to 18 years	Non-gang members n = 440	**Quantitative** **Cross-sectional** **Mental health symptoms:** UCLA Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index-Adolescent Version (PTSD-RI; Pynoos,	Some overall differences in youths' reports of exposure to trauma: girls more likely than boys to report experiences of emotional abuse ($\chi^2 = 57.41$, $p<.001$), and sexual abuse ($\chi^2 = 116.56$, $p<.001$). Boys more likely than girls to report being victim of	**Strengths** -Reported non-significant findings -First study to examine perpetration trauma in gang member youth, adding to gang theory and practice

	Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in the Youth Justice System US 2016 **76%**	youth from a detention centre.	Mean age = 16.11 years (*SD* = 1.31 years) White/Caucasian = 56.6% Hispanic/Latino = 23.2% Biracial/multiracial = 5.5% Black/African American 4.6% Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian = 4.6% Native American/Alaskan Native = 3.2% Asian/American = 1.1% (current or previous gang membership) = 36.2% (*n* = 240)		Rodriguez, Steinberg, Stuber & Frederick, 1998). <u>Perpetration Trauma</u> – asked whether ever in lifetime experienced traumatic event that involved "doing or being forced to do something very scary, dangerous or violent to another person". <u>Dissociation</u> – Adolescent Dissociative Experiences Scale (A-DES-II; Armstrong, Putnam, Carlson, Libero & Smith, 1990). <u>Emotional Numbing</u> - Emotional Numbing and Reactivity Scale (ENRS; Orsillo, Theodore-Oklota, Luterek & Ploumb, 2007). **Gang membership:** Three Likert-type questions asked to assess current & past g m/ship: a) currently or recently identified as being a member of a street gang	community violence (χ^2 = 12.21, p<.001) and having experienced physical abuse (χ^2 = 35.57, p<.01) <u>Trauma exposure:</u> Gang member youth significantly more likely than non-gang members to report experiencing community violence (χ^2 = 60.9, p<.001) and witnessing community violence (χ^2 = 47.54, p<.001). Gang members reported significantly living in a "war zone" (χ^2 = 31.03, p<.001) and seeing a dead body (χ^2 = 13.87, p<.001) than their peers. <u>Perpetration Trauma:</u> 24.6% total sample reported exp. of PT. No sig. diff between boys and girls (24.8% vs 24.1%) Gang members significantly more likely to report experience of PT than non gang peers, 43.3% vs 15.4% (χ^2 = 46.14, p<.001) PTSD symptoms - gang members not significantly more likely than their peers to meet criteria for full or partial PTSD 42.30% vs 35.30% (χ^2	-Study included female gang members – a poorly researched area -Reported good level of reliability of measures in present sample for all except one (PT) measures of trauma **Weaknesses** Sampling bias – youth detained in short term centre - underrepresents youth who are more heavily involved in offending/gangs -Cross-sectional – limited scope to infer causality -Measurement bias - self-report measures – where multiple reporters over time can reduce bias effects -Overall variance modest – other important factors to be considered in future research -Depth of gang embeddedness not explored which may impact on reported symptoms

					b) how many gang fights participated in during lifetime c)how active they had been in gang activities recently	= 2.51, p<.10). Sig. interaction effect for gender as girls in gang more likely to meet full criteria for PTSD than non-gang girl members (χ^2 = 5.24, p<.02). Diff in PTSD symptoms related to gender, gang m/ship and PT, with Total PTSS, dissociation and emotional numbing as dependent variables. Main effect for girls for total PTSS, showing higher rates of total symptoms than boys. Main effect for gang m/ship – higher rates of posttraumatic symptoms of dissociation and emotional numbing than non gang peers. Main effect for PT – youth reporting PT having highest levels of PTSS and emotional numbing. PT accounted significantly to the amount of variance explained in posttraumatic stress symptoms, dissociation and emotional numbing. Tests for mediation of PT showed significant pathway for gang m/ship (*B* = 0.14, *SE* = 0.02, *p*<.001) PT and PTSD	

						symptoms (*B* = 0.71, *SE* = 0.29, *p* =.01). Pathway between gang involvement and posttraumatic stress symptoms did not reach significance (*B* = 0.06, *SE* = 0.07, *p* = .36).	
10	Watkins, Melde The Relationship Between Gang Membership, Depression, Self-Esteem, and Suicidal Behavior US 2016 **73%**	Explored whether youth who later become gang-involved report levels of self-esteem, depression, suicidal thoughts, and attempted suicide differently to general population. Explored how gang membership affected these reported symptoms.	**Sample** Data taken from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. Two stage sampling: 1)pts completed questionnaires at school between 1994-5 (Wave 1)(Age M = 15.31, *SD* = 1.62) 2)students selected to be interviewed in their homes (Wave 2) Then second round of interviews conducted 11 months after with 14, 738 adolescents (Wave 3). Current analyses undertaken with pts who completed 1st and 2nd round of interviews at home (*n* = 13, 108). Inconsistent reporters (n = 1,628) excluded from sample	Non-gang members = 12, 328	**Quantitative Prospective Longitudinal** **Mental health symptoms:** <u>Depression</u> **Centre for Epidemiological Studies – Depression (CED-D) scale.** <u>Self-esteem</u> Rosenberg Self Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1965) <u>Thoughts about suicide</u> One item asking whether they had "seriously thought about committing suicide in past 12 months". <u>Attempted suicide</u> Those who answered yes to above were asked on how many occasions they attempted suicide in past 12 months.	Youth who later become gang members reported elevated levels of mental health problems compared with non-gang youth. Gang members reported greater levels of depressive symptoms, 2x as likely to report thoughts of suicide and 3 times more likely to have reported attempted suicide. Gang m/ship exacerbates depression. Gang m/ship associated with increases in suicide and suicide attempts with a 67% increase upon joining a gang for suicidal thoughts, and 104% for attempted suicide. Gang youth showed significant differences compared with non-gang youth on 38 covariates, with 20 significant differences, in the direction of increased risk	**Strengths** -Study utilised a large national sample of youth -Showed presence of mental health problems prior to gang membership -Attempts to minimise measurement bias by eliminating inconsistent responders -Attempted to control for confounding variables **Weaknesses -** -Sampling bias - adolescents not enrolled in schools absent from study -Underrepresentation of adolescents joining gangs at later age as high school seniors not interviewed at Wave 2

			Missing data *n* = 76 Male 49% (n=6, 378) Female 50% (n=6,730) Pts asked at Wave 2 if initiated into a named gang and then asked "ever" at Wave 3 5% (*n* = 704) Non-Hispanic white = 53% Non-Hispanic Black = 20% Hispanic Latino = 17% Non-Hispanic Other = 11%		**Gang membership:** Wave 2 = Self-reported measure of gang m/ship in last 12 months – not reported what specifically asked Wave 3 = "ever" prevalence measure of gang membership used	associated with antisocial outcomes.	-Social position of gang members not explored -Reliability and validity of measures not reported

2.4.1 Descriptive overview of the results

2.4.1.1 Participants.

Nine of the ten studies described in detail how participants were recruited, which is considered a relative strength of the studies included in the review. Madan et al. (2011) referred to a parent study which clearly reports participant recruitment for their study. In terms of sampling methods, a number of methods were used, such as cluster probability sampling (Dupere et al., 2007; Madan et al., 2011; Merrin et al., 2015; Watkins & Melde, 2016), population sampling (Corcoran et al., 2005; Craig et al., 2002; Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Kerig et al., 2016; Thornton et al., 2015) and one study used a stratified proportional sampling technique assisted by social mapping processes (Cepeda et al., 2016). The review consisted of eight studies from the US and two studies from Canada.

Five studies included solely male participants and five included both male and female participants. Studies varied in sample size considerably, ranging from 75 participants (Thornton, Frick, Shulman, Ray, Steinberg, & Kauffman, 2015) to 17,366 (Merrin, Hong, & Espelage, 2015). It has not been possible to report the number of male and female participants, studied given that three studies with male and female participants, reported their sample as a percentage, and not specifically numbers (Dupere et al., 2007; Madan et al., 2011; Merrin et al., 2015), and one study expressed males only as a percentage (Dmitrieva et al., 2014).

Participants ranged in age from 10 to 24 years old. Of the total sample, 2,519 were identified as having gang membership (past or present), although this is an estimate given that Dupere et al. (2007) expressed the number of participants who reported gang membership as 6%. All studies included a comparison group, with participants self-identifying as gang or non-gang members in nine of the studies. Only one study identified the comparison group by

asking participants who identified as gang members to identify and nominate non-gang-involved youth (Cepeda et al., 2016). Selected non-gang nominees were then screened by the authors to assess participant self-identification as non-gang members. Five of the studies (Craig et al., 2002; Dupere et al., 2007; Madan et al., 2011; Merrin et al., 2015; Watkins & Melde, 2016) relied on comparison groups that were comprised of non-delinquent general adolescent populations, although three studies provided comparison groups who were incarcerated (e.g., delinquent) youths who were not gang-involved (Corcoran et al., 2005; Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Kerig et al., 2016), with one study using a community-based justice-involved sample (Thornton et al., 2015). The inclusion of studies with juvenile comparison groups was a strength, as confounding factors associated with antisocial offending behaviours and imprisonment could be controlled to identify factors associated with gang offending. All studies reported on participant demographics, most commonly reporting on age and ethnicity. Two studies did not report participant ethnicity (Craig et al., 2002; Corcoran et al., 2005) which makes it difficult for comparisons to be drawn. In four of the studies, white Caucasian participants constituted the highest percentages of the sample (Dupere et al., 2007; Merrin et al., 2015; Kerig et al., 2016; Watkins & Melde, 2016), and in one study a significant percentage consisted of participants who were African American (Madan et al., 2011), and in another, the majority were White-Latino (Thornton et al., 2015). However, Merrin et al. (2015) noted in their study that there was a likelihood of Latino youth self-reporting as white which increased the likelihood of measurement bias and the ability to generalise the findings broadly to other gang populations. Cepeda et al.'s (2016) participants were all identified as Mexican-American. However, some studies did not fully report participant ethnicities (e.g., Dupere et al., 2007; Madan et al., 2011), as Dupere et al. (2007) in their study only reported participants as either Caucasian or in a group that consisted of participants that were from

either Asian or African descent. Four studies used data from large-scale longitudinal studies. Most of the studies identified participants from community samples of which two included schools, and two studies examined populations of young offenders detained in prison. Only one study considered participants' cognitive functioning (Thornton et al., 2015) which provided a baseline measure of participants' understanding of the purpose of the study and what was required of them.

2.4.1.2 Measures.

The assessment of gang membership through self-report is a widely used and admissible way to determine gang membership status in official studies (Decker, Pyrooz, Sweeten, & Moule, 2014; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001). This is despite the lack of agreement generally among researchers on what the definition of a gang member is. Studies assessed gang membership at different ages, varying from 13.2 years to 19.7 years. Nine of the ten studies used the self-nomination method, and questions varied from "in the last 12 months did you belong to a group (gang) who did illegal things?" to "I belong to a gang (true for me/not true for me)" to asking about having ever been in a gang. The variations of questions asked to determine gang membership across the studies makes it challenging to make comparisons between studies, as there are subtle but important differences between studies regarding the measurement of gang membership status. Only one study asked about different levels of gang membership, such as whether the participant was classified as a follower or a leader member (Dmitrieva et al., 2014). One study asked participants, parents and teachers to identify youth who were gang members (Craig et al., 2002). Conversely, one study ascertained gang membership through social mapping processes (e.g., using detailed field observations and notes), with fieldworkers progressing to having an increased presence within the area in order to develop trust with gang members and identify gangs and then gang

members (Cepeda et al., 2016). This led to the identification of gang rosters (i.e., their specific roles and activity at given times in the gang) which were verified by: individuals who provided information about the gang's movements and activities; associates of gang members; and observations conducted by researchers involved in the study.

In terms of the assessment of mental health problems, nine of the studies were considered to apply measurements uniformly to both sets of gang member and non-gang-involved (comparison group) participants. In one study (Dmitrieva et al., 2014), there were differences in how the measures were administered (i.e., whether participants responded orally or via a keypad), according to their location (e.g., in the home, an agreed location or in prison). Studies used different measures in the measurement of mental health problems, for the same illness (e.g., anxiety). For example, Craig et al. (2002) used the Social Behaviour Questionnaire (SBQ) (Tremblay, Vitaro, Gagnon, Piche, & Royer, 1991) which assessed anxiety as one symptom as part of an overall behavioural problem, whereas Madan et al. (2011) utilised a more specific measure of anxiety in the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (Reynolds & Richmond, 1997). The use of different measures makes comparisons between studies about the relationship between gang membership and mental health problems.

A number of studies were limited by the reliability and validity of their mental health outcome measures. Few studies reported good reliability and internal consistency of all the measures assessing mental health problems (e.g., Corcoran et al., 2005; Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Thornton et al., 2016), whereas other studies were limited by sub-optimal levels of internal consistency (e.g., Merrin et al., 2015) or there was some questionability over the validity of measures of mental health problems depending on the characteristics of the population (Cepeda et al., 2016). For example, Cepeda et al.'s (2016) study demonstrated a

particular problem with reporting bias given participants were deemed to be influenced by the interplay of individual and sociocultural factors to maintain their sense of hypermasculinity, and therefore potentially underreported their trauma experiences, in addition to underreporting as a result of overall recall bias associated with childhood trauma (Widom & Morris, 1997).

The reliance upon self-report of participant experiences of gang membership and mental health problems without additional evaluation methods may lead to an increase in measurement errors. Younger youth assessed for mental health problems (such as psychopathy) in previous studies have reported unreliably (Jones, Cauffman, Miller, & Mulvey, 2006). In Dmitrieva et al.'s (2014) study, the identified link between gang leadership and grandiosity may have occurred because individuals with grandiose traits are likely to inflate their responses about the position held in a gang, which risks providing an inaccurate picture of their role in the gang. Two studies asked participants regarding their gang membership status at two different time periods to ensure their sample was representative of gang and non-gang members (Craig et al., 2002; Melde & Watkins, 2016). Whilst there are some strengths in Craig et al.'s (2002) seeking reports from both parents and participants, it is noted that the ages from when participants and parents reported gang membership differed with boys asked to report their membership status from the age of 11 years, and parents asked to report membership for their children at ages 13 and 14 years only. This may have risked biasing the assessment of age of gang joining.

2.4.1.3 Quality of studies.

All the studies included in the review were assessed as above 60%, with studies by Corcoran et al. (2005) and Madan et al. (2011) assessed as the lowest quality (63%). There were variations in the obtained quality assessment scores of the ten included studies. The two main weaknesses of the studies related to study design, and the sampling of participants

which risked under-representation of gang-involved youth or were limited to specific places, which limits the applicability of the findings to gang-involved youth globally.

In relation to study design, six of the included studies were cross-sectional and were therefore limited to reporting an association between mental health problems and gang membership instead of determining whether certain mental health variables led to gang involvement or whether gang involvement increased those symptoms. It is noted however that four studies adopted a longitudinal prospective design, and were therefore able to examine the level of symptoms prior to and upon gang joining (Craig at al., 2002; Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Dupere et al., 2007; Watkins & Melde, 2016), thereby adding new research to enhance knowledge of the relationships and interactions between the two. With regards to sample selection biases, five of the included studies (Craig et al., 2002; Dupere et al., 2007; Madan et al., 2011; Merrin et al., 2015; Watkins & Melde, 2016) were intended to include nationally or regionally representative youths and therefore represented normative samples. However, this approach tends to exclude youth who are not enrolled at school at the time of assessment. The population of youth absent from school are likely to include those excluded from school or in institutions, both groups that are at a higher risk for involvement in gangs (Howell, 2012), which means that the findings may not be as applicable to gang-involved youth universally. Furthermore, the smaller number of adolescents reporting being involved in gangs compared with non-gang-involved limited the ability to perform tests of specificity.

The study by Corcoran et al. (2005) was rated the lowest because no information regarding how participants were recruited was given and a relatively small study sample was used. Furthermore, there was no information provided about the institution's level of security or the participants' offending, and therefore it was difficult to ascertain how "embedded" or seriously involved they might be in gangs and criminality, as there are important distinctions

to be made between members who have less or more involvement in a gang (Dmitrieva et al., 2014). A similar selection bias was identified in the study by Kerig et al. (2016), as the study sample was held in a short-term prison and were unrepresentative of youth who are more involved in gangs and are serving longer terms of imprisonment.

A number of studies were found to be weak in design, as confounding variables were not (Corcoran et al., 2005) or only partially addressed (Merrin et al., 2015). There were some strengths within the studies, however, with four studies accounting for confounding variables within their study design and analysis of results (Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Dupere et al., 2007; Thornton et al., 2016; Watkins & Melde, 2016). Given that all the other studies did not, or only partially, addressed confounding variables, it is possible that such variables may have impacted on the validity of the findings and conclusions.

2.4.1.4 Overview of the findings.

All ten studies included in this review demonstrated there was a clear link between mental health problems and gang membership compared with non-gang membership. The analytic methods undertaken within each study were considered suitable for the aims and design of each study.

The differing aims, methods and analyses of the studies renders the aggregation of findings difficult. However, this is the first review to bring together studies reporting the presence of mental health problems in gang-involved youth from the overall gang literature. The mental health problems examined by each study are included in Table 4. The symptoms identified within the studies are discussed as narrative 'themes' and are reported below.

Table 3

Mental health problems in gang-involved youth identified from the literature

	Anxi-ety	Depres sion	Hyper-activity	Inatten-tion	Suicidal behav. / thoughts	Aggress. behav / C-U traits/Psy ch. Tend	Trauma*	Halluc./ Delus.
Craig et al. (2002)	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Corcoran et al. (2005)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Dmitrieva et al. (2014)						✓		
Dupere et al. (2007)			✓			✓		
Madan et al. (2011)	✓	✓			✓			
Merrin et al. (2015)		✓			✓			
Thornton et al. (2015)						✓		
Cepeda et al. (2016)							✓	
Kerig et al. (2016)							✓	
Watkins &Melde (2016)		✓+self -esteem			✓			

2.5 Results and Discussion

2.5.1 Themes within the literature

Table 3 shows the various mental health problems positively identified in gang-involved youth who took part in the ten studies included in the current review. A detailed consideration of these findings is reported below through consideration of each mental health symptom.

2.5.1.1 Anxiety.

Three studies included in the review explored the relationship between anxiety and gang membership. Craig et al.'s (2002) study categorised their participants according to their gang membership status: stable gang members (belonging to a gang at the ages of 13 and 14), unstable gang members (belonging to a gang at either age 13 or 14), and non-gang members (no membership at all in lifetime). Non-gang members were rated as more anxious than stable and unstable gang members, as rated by parents and teachers. However, there was low agreement between teachers and parents on which youth were gang members which suggests they identified different boys belonging to gangs. With a similarly-aged participant sample (*M* = 13.2 years, *SD* = 0.9), Madan et al. (2011) explored whether the relationship between gang membership and anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviour was impacted by witnessing violence and delinquency. They also found that gang membership was not associated with anxiety, although it was positively linked with suicidal behaviour, delinquency and witnessing violence. This finding may suggest that gang membership was strongly related to violent internalising behaviours, such as suicidal or self-harm behaviours, as a result of increased involvement in gang-related acts and exposure to violence, lending some support to the wider literature in that youth who experience exposure to community violence develop more problems with externalising behaviour problems (e.g., delinquency and aggression) than internalising behaviour problems, such as anxiety (Allwood & Bell, 2008).

Corcoran et al. (2005) found that gang members reported more mental health problems than non-gang members, which included anxiety. One explanation may be that this study included a wider age range of gang members (up to the age of 19 years), who may have had a greater level of exposure to violence over time, leading to increasing amounts of anxiety. Furthermore, the participants were incarcerated and it is unclear whether this sample may

have therefore been affected negatively by the experience of imprisonment given that involvement with the criminal justice system has been found to be anxiety-provoking for youth (Leon, 2002). The contrasting results may also be explained by individual differences within participants, such as the presence of psychopathic personality traits versus an anxious individual, both of which may be drawn to joining gangs (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Dupere et al., 2007). However, without knowledge of the individual participant's length and extent of gang involvement and their impact, it is difficult to confidently explain the results.

2.5.1.2 Depression.

With an early adolescent participant sample with a mean age of 13.2 years, Madan et al. (2011) found that gang membership was not associated with depression. This finding contrasts with the wider literature which has reported that younger youth report more symptoms of depression following exposure to community violence (Buckner, Beardslee, & Bassuk, 2004), although the relationships between depression, young age and community violence exposure have not consistently been supported (Schwab-Stone et al., 1995). Yet, other studies in this review found gang membership to be positively associated with depression (Corcoran et al., 2005, Merrin et al., 2015; Watkins & Melde, 2016). However, Merrin et al. (2015) utilised a one-item measure to assess depression which limits a more in-depth understanding of the construct, and Corcoran et al. (2005) did not provide a breakdown of age and symptoms experienced in their study. Watkins and Melde (2016) provided a clearer understanding of the relationship, as gang-joining participants reported significantly higher levels of depression than youth who did not join gangs. They also reported that, for these youth, the effect of joining a gang worsened their symptoms, including depression.

These findings support earlier findings that experiences of depression increase the likelihood of youth becoming gang-involved (Yoder, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2003). That gang

membership worsens symptoms of depression does provide some support for findings which suggest that the consequences of gang membership, such as exposure to violence, may have adverse effects on adolescent mental health (Kelly et al., 2012).

2.5.1.3 Inattention/hyperactivity.

Three studies examined inattention and/or hyperactivity in their youth samples. Craig et al. (2002) reported that stable gang members (youth who belonged to a gang at ages 13 and 14) were more hyperactive than non-gang members and engaged in more fighting behaviour. Unstable gang members (youth who belonged to a gang at either age 13 or 14) were more oppositional and inattentive than non-gang members. These findings are supported by Corcoran et al.'s (2005) study that found gang members reported more problems with attention, as measured by a subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991). Dupere et al. (2007) found a significant positive link between gang membership and hyperactivity as one of three symptoms in youth which, if elevated, were markers of psychopathic tendencies. Dupere et al. (2007) found that participants scoring higher on psychopathic tendencies living in residentially unstable neighbourhoods were more likely to have gang membership. This finding may suggest that youth with high levels of hyperactivity, and low levels of anxiety and prosociality, might be more drawn to gangs, or may be encouraged to join the gang by existing gang members. These findings are consistent with earlier findings that gang-involved youth may display individual characteristics such as impulsivity, inattention and aggression (Loeber & Farrington, 2001a). There is also support for Thornberry et al.'s (2003) interactional theory given there is an interaction between individual characteristics and the social environment. A facilitating effect for gang joining may occur due to youth exhibiting challenging behavioural tendencies at school that lead to

further ostracization from learning opportunities, and thus affiliation with a like-minded peer group becomes an attractive option.

2.5.1.4 Callous-unemotional traits/Psychopathic tendencies.

Three studies examined symptoms typically associated with psychopathic traits (Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Dupere et al., 2007; Thornton et al., 2015). Dupere et al. (2007) examined low-anxiety as one of three measures to determine psychopathic tendencies in youth who later became involved in a gang. Their findings revealed that youth with a profile consistent with psychopathic tendencies (which included low anxiety, hyperactivity and low pro-sociality) were 1.6 times more likely to become involved in a gang during mid-adolescence (aged 14-15 years old) than their peers, if they lived in neighbourhoods which were residentially unstable. However, the small sample size meant that the authors were unable to explore whether these outcomes were based on cultural background and or gender. In a study which spanned seven years, Dmitrieva et al. (2014) found that the grandiose-manipulative dimension of psychopathy predicted being a gang leader. The study also found that younger youth with low self-esteem (aged 17 years and below) joined a gang as either a follower or a leader, however, older youth with high levels of self-esteem were more likely to assume gang leader positions. These findings may suggest that younger individuals may join a gang because they are less certain of themselves and thus seek support from antisocial peers, during early adolescence when the peer group is influential to a young person (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Being older in age and a gang leader is consistent with research which finds that gangs do follow a structure whereby older youth assume a higher position (Keiser, 1969). For consequences of gang membership, being a gang leader predicted an increase in grandiose-manipulative and impulsive-irresponsible traits. Furthermore, gang leaders showed no change or improvement in their temperance. These findings are consistent with research

that shows gang leaders demonstrate more aggressive behaviours, poor temperance (Franzese, Covey, & Menard, 2005), and show little care for others.

Thornton et al. (2015) examined the relationship between callous-unemotional traits and group offending, which included gang membership. They reported that callous-unemotional traits were positively linked with gang membership, and that this association was independent of past offending. This contrasted with the association between callous-unemotional traits and group offending which was dependent on past offending. This finding would highlight how there is something about gang membership over and above group offending which may enhance callous-unemotional traits or attract such individuals. Callous-unemotional traits were significantly linked to gang membership irrespective of age and race or ethnicity, and they were also significantly associated with assuming a leadership role in offences. The authors noted that callous-unemotional traits only accounted for a small proportion of variance, and consideration of additional factors (e.g., rejection by peers within a group and individual variables such as manipulativeness) may have a bearing on group offending and gang activities. Furthermore, there is some overlap in the identification of symptoms in that hyperactivity can be symptomatic of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and a measure of psychopathic tendencies. In summary, low anxiety, hyperactivity, low pro-sociality and callous-unemotional traits were all positively linked to gang membership. These findings provide support for earlier findings that features of ADHD and conduct disorder are associated with antisocial behaviours that persist in the life span, and are precursory to psychopathy (Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick, & Lilienfeld, 2011).

Youth with psychopathic tendencies may also be less accepting of parental supervision and spend increasing amounts of time on their own in their neighbourhoods that may increase their level of contact and opportunity to join gangs (Dupere et al., 2007).

Neighbourhoods with a high turnover of residents may reduce the connections and sense of trust individuals share overall within their communities, which in turn leads to a reduction in maintaining safety on the streets. The link between antisocial behaviours, such as delinquency, aggression and gang membership, was supported in a further two studies (Corcoran et al., 2005; Craig et al., 2002). Stability of gang membership appeared to lead to an increase in the types of antisocial behaviours perpetrated over time (Craig et al., 2002).

2.5.1.5 Trauma symptoms.

Two studies examined the association between trauma symptoms and gang membership. Cepeda et al. (2016) reported a significant difference in the total scores on the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein et al., 2003) between gang members and matched non-gang members. Gang members scored lower than the non-gang delinquent group, with significantly lower scores for the emotional abuse and emotional neglect scales. Gang members' childhood trauma experiences closely aligned with those reported by a normal undergraduate population. However, both delinquent non-gang members and gang members were similar in their reported experiences of physical neglect. Gang members' overall experiences of relatively low levels of childhood trauma may be somewhat surprising, considering that the parent study showed families of gang members often experienced intergenerational transmission of drug use and involvement in criminal activity (Valdez, 2005). However, the CTQ measure was limited in that it does not capture trauma in the form of witnessing community and family violence. Furthermore, the way some of the items of the CTQ were interpreted and responded to are likely to have been influenced by the gang's hypermasculinity (Cepeda et al., 2016), whereby the disclosure of sexual abuse may undermine their masculine identities and therefore result in increased levels of denial and/or minimisation of abuse experiences and their impact.

Kerig et al. (2016) examined whether gang members were exposed to heightened levels of trauma, post-traumatic stress symptoms and perpetration-induced trauma (PT) than non-gang members. Overall, girl gang members reported an increased exposure to emotional and sexual abuse, whereas boys were more likely than girls to report having been victimised by community violence and experiencing physical abuse. Gang members were more likely than their non-gang peers to have experienced community violence. Girl gang members experienced having an unwanted sexual experience more than their non-gang counterparts. Gang members reported having experienced significantly more perpetration-induced trauma (PT) compared with non-gang members. Gang members were more likely to meet the criteria for full or partial diagnosis, with higher levels of PTSD symptoms of dissociation and emotional numbing than their non-gang counterparts.

The disparity in reported trauma symptoms is interesting and tentative explanations based on the study and participant profile is provided. For example, Cepeda et al.'s (2016) findings seem somewhat at odds with research, which establishes the likelihood of gang-involved youth to have experienced adverse childhood events (Howell & Egley, 2005), such as childhood victimisation, neglect and abuse. An alternative explanation is that the absence of childhood trauma symptoms would suggest that trauma-related symptoms may stem predominately from involvement in gangs.

In contrast, Kerig et al.'s (2016) girl gang members reported an increased exposure to emotional and sexual abuse, as well as having an unwanted sexual experience compared with non-gang-involved girls. This is an unsurprising finding considering research which reports females who are gang-involved are at an increased risk of sexual victimisation (Berelowitz, Clifton, Firimin, Gulyurtlu, & Edwards, 2013). However, the cross-sectional design prevents an understanding of whether sexual abuse experiences occurred prior to gang membership.

The findings in relation to perpetration trauma in gang members are a relatively new phenomenon, and the symptoms were not measured by a valid and reliable measure. Nevertheless, their experiences were consistent with the wider literature (Bennett & Kerig, 2014), and highlight the need for practitioners involved with youth to be aware of the types of treatment needs they have.

2.5.1.6 Suicidal behaviours.

Four studies examined having suicidal thoughts and attempts (Corcoran et al., 2005; Madan et al., 2011; Merrin et al., 2015; Watkins & Melde, 2016). Corcoran et al. (2005) reported that gang members were more likely to report suicide attempts than non-gang members, consistent with Merrin et al.'s (2015) finding that suicidal attempts were significantly associated with gang membership. Similarly, Madan et al. (2011) found that, whilst gang membership was not associated with depression or anxiety, it was linked with suicidal behaviour. The association between suicidal behaviour and gang membership was reported to be as a result of witnessing community violence and having higher levels of delinquency. The role of potential unmeasured confounders on suicidal behaviour is noted, including the possibility of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms resulting from community violence exposure, including personal victimisation resulting in injury to themselves or the ending of friendships, or the death of a friend. Watkins and Melde (2016) reported that, before joining gangs, youth already experienced higher levels of suicidal thoughts and attempts compared with the general population. These vulnerabilities were exacerbated after joining a gang to significant levels, suggesting gang membership does not reduce mental health problems and instead makes them worse.

There is an established link between exposure to community violence and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Foster, Kuperminc, & Price, 2004), and, as shown within this

review, between gang membership and trauma symptoms (Kerig et al., 2016). Risk factors, such as exposure to violence and fear-inducing events, may lead to desensitisation to fear of dying and pain (DeWall, Anderson, & Bushman, 2011), and therefore have an instrumental role in suicidal tendencies in gang members. Whilst three of the studies were cross-sectional in design, and thus limited in terms of making inferences as to whether suicidal youth were more vulnerable to joining gangs in the first place, Watkins and Melde (2016) were able to demonstrate in their longitudinal study that youth already experienced higher levels of suicidal thoughts and attempts compared with the general population, with these vulnerabilities worsening after joining a gang. These findings provide support for studies which purport that there are various risk factors that increase youth's vulnerability for symptoms of illness (Howell & Egley, 2005), and factors associated with gang membership, including violent victimisation, (Curry, Decker, & Egley, 2002; Gover, Jennings, & Tewkesbury, 2009) serve to worsen suicidal behaviours.

2.5.2 Strengths and limitations

2.5.2.1 Bias.

The current review is the first review exploring mental health problems in adolescent gang members, and thereby addresses a gap in the literature within the study of street gang members. The review has synthesised current research in the area of gangs and mental health leading to the identification of implications for practice and suggestions for future research. In light of the dearth of literature that has explored mental health problems in gang-involved youth, the search terms used were broad in order to be as inclusive as possible, and to capture all relevant studies. The studies were extracted by only one researcher, meaning it was not possible to test inter-rater reliability which may have led to unintentional selection bias.

Nevertheless, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the data extraction form, were designed to provide sufficient detail with the intention to minimise the introduction of bias.

Exploring the mental health needs of gang members is a relatively new area of focus within the gang literature, and therefore including studies of a high methodological quality may lead to the omission of key findings as a result of excluding papers considered to be lower quality. However, adopting a systematic approach has provided a clear rationale as to why studies have been included or omitted (i.e., utilising methods and tools to minimise bias).

One limitation is that only peer-review articles were included in the review, which could be considered a selection bias. It is possible that potentially useful information could have been provided had unpublished articles been included. Nevertheless, the decision to exclude unpublished articles was made to ensure the most robustly designed studies were considered. In addition, only papers that were published in the English language were included in the review.

2.5.2.2 Methodological issues.

All of the studies in the review underwent a quality assessment to ascertain how robust the studies were. Sampling and selection bias and study design were considered to be the main limitations across the studies. A number of the included studies used comparison samples which consisted of non-delinquent general population youth drawn from large scale national studies (Craig et al., 2002; Dupere et al., 2007; Madan et al., 2011; Watkins & Melde, 2016), including specifically school-based samples (Merrin et al., 2015). Positively, three studies utilised samples of delinquent youth, in which direct comparisons could be made between gang and non-gang offending youth (Corcoran et al., 2007; Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Kerig et al., 2016; Thornton et al., 2015). Making comparisons between gang members and non-offending participants means that they are not necessarily representative of gang

members, in addition to the risk of omitting populations of gang members who are either school drop-outs or in institutions, such as prison or forensic mental health settings. Only one sample was considered to be representative of a community-based street-based gang population (Cepeda et al., 2016), however, the population was Mexican American which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other communities, and indeed, other Mexican American populations as a result of the small sample size. Three studies (Cepeda et al., 2016; Corcoran et al., 2005; Craig et al., 2002) had smaller sample sizes compared with the other included studies (e.g., $n = 73$, $n = 75$, $n = 142$), which may have reduced the rigour of the studies. In addition, all studies except one (Cepeda et al., 2016) reported overall smaller gang membership samples compared with non-gang members.

Most of the studies in the review relied upon self-nomination as a way of determining gang membership, which, whilst reported to be reliable strategy in gang research (Decker, Pyrooz, Sweeten, & Moule, 2014), does lead to difficulties in making comparisons across studies when they have all used variants of definitions of gang membership. The majority of the studies used self-report measures to assess mental health problems. The use of self-report can be problematic in itself as it relies entirely on a participant's self-perception which can result in both under or over-reporting of symptoms. This is of particular note in studies conducted by Cepeda et al. (2016), Dmitrieva et al. (2014) and Thornton et al. (2015), whereby participants with callous-unemotional and grandiose traits linked to psychopathy may have elevated self-ratings of their gang involvement. Adolescents have been found to report their experiences of mental health problems in an inconsistent manner, giving strong emotive qualitative descriptions of their experiences of exposure to violence compared with responses to self-report measures that showed a lack of symptoms (Foster et al., 2004).

2.6 Conclusions

The aim of the current review was to explore and synthesise the findings of studies which look at the association between gang membership and mental health problems in adolescent gang members. A second aim was to identify the types of mental health problems experienced by gang members. It is noted that the studies included in the review varied in quality. This requires the need to exercise caution in drawing robust conclusions from the findings. Significantly, this review has shown that there is a dearth of studies researching mental health problems in gang-involved youth and adolescents in the UK. However, undertaking the review has enabled studies within gang research to be brought together to provide a fuller understanding of the different types of mental health problems that are reported by young gang members.

Overall, the findings of the review point to a significant link between various mental health problems and gang membership. There does not appear to be a straight forward means of explaining the presence and absence of various symptoms that have been studied. However, the complexities of how symptoms have arisen is apparent in some studies which have considered the interactional effect on the individual's symptoms, such as exposure to violence and neighbourhood-related factors. As already stated, a key limitation has been that the majority of studies used a design which prevents understanding whether mental health problems existed prior to gang joining, or upon gang joining. The exception to this would be the inclusion of four longitudinal studies (i.e., Craig et al., 2002; Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Dupere et al., 2007; Watkins & Melde, 2016) which showed that mental health symptoms existed prior to gang membership but were exacerbated once in the gang. There are a multitude of risk factors youth experience, which increase their vulnerability to mental health problems prior to and upon joining gangs. However, the associations have been significant

enough to demonstrate the need for gang-involved youth's mental health needs to be considered fully, particularly symptoms related to depression, trauma and suicidal tendencies. Furthermore, the presence of symptoms indicative of inattention and psychopathic traits provide support for Alleyne and Wood's (2010) 'Unified Theory of Gang Involvement' that individual-based characteristics may be experienced as problematic in a number of legitimate social settings, such as school and home, and thereby lead to seeking affiliation with a group that is accepting of them, and may shape antisocial values and beliefs further.

2.6.1 Implications of findings for practice

Consideration is given to this review's limitations when recommending implications of the findings on practice. However, the review can be seen to have highlighted the importance of identifying and assessing mental health problems in gang-involved youth. Taking these findings forward, it is important that practitioners working with gang-involved youth are aware of mental health assessments and interventions. In addition, and bearing in mind that risk factors for mental health problems may be present prior to gang involvement, it is suggested that practitioners working with non-gang-involved youth also receive training regarding the mental health needs of adolescents.

Two studies have identified factors specific to the gang itself, such as exposure to violence and victimisation, that are likely to have a negative impact on youth. Gang members experiencing certain mental health problems, such as depression, may display their problems through hostility as opposed to internalising thought processes (Manasse & Ganem, 2009), hence practitioners might need to look beyond the presenting behaviours to avoid formulating their difficulties as simply antisocial. It would be particularly relevant for staff who work in youth and young adult prison settings to increase awareness of mental health problems and how they might manifest, given that both mental health problems and being a gang member

may be linked to disruptive behaviour (Wood & Dennard, 2017). Given the consistent findings in the included studies that gang members experienced suicidal tendencies, it is important that there is a wider recognition of screening for this particular presentation so that youth can access the right level of support. The identification of mental health problems is made harder, as youth can report inconsistently and disclosures of mental health problems can be perceived as signs of weakness. However, assessments should be carried out at frequent intervals to increase the likelihood of detecting mental health problems.

2.6.2 Suggestions for future research

As noted, studies originated either in the United States of America or Canada, with no studies identified from the UK. This highlights a clear need for more research to be undertaken with the adolescent gang population in the UK. It would also be helpful for studies to explore mental health issues across developmental stages of adolescence to ascertain whether there are particular stages at which symptoms are prevalent dependent on the type of role held within the gang. Alongside quantitative longitudinal research, it would also be beneficial to qualitatively explore the role of the group processes and the impact of relationships within the gang, including the quality of ties and bonds, and the impact of death and injury of friends and associates within the gang.

A way to improve the reliability of studies in this area would be to obtain samples from both rural and urban areas. More attention should be paid to sampling techniques, including over-sampling of areas with high prevalence of gangs in addition to random sampling of areas (Coid et al., 2013). In addition to the need to conduct more robust research, it is important that researchers achieve greater consistency in the way in which gang membership is measured. A globally agreed-upon definition and the development of a reliable and valid measure of gang membership would ensure that the variation in how gang

membership is assessed and understood is reduced. A further suggestion would be for researchers and practitioners to evaluate the reliability and comprehensiveness of mental health assessment tools as this is considered to be key to identifying the mental health needs of non-gang and gang members alike.

Chapter 3

Exploring the life journeys of gang-involved youth and their experiences of social support with gang-involved peers

3.1 Abstract

Research has established risk factors for gang membership within the family, individual, peer group, school and community domains (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Smith, & Porter, 2003). This chapter will focus on the role of the peer group. Research has also established the significance of social support and a need to belong as reasons for youth to join a gang (Gibbs, 2000; Harris, 1994; Vigil, 1988). Furthermore, gang-involved youth are at an increased risk of violence by witnessing, perpetrating or being victimised through gang-related activity - experiences which may also lead to the need to seek social support. To date, there is a dearth of literature providing insight into the early life experiences of gang members, how young gang members experience social support in gangs, as well as their lived experiences of being in a gang. The aim of the research was therefore to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of gang-involved youth with a focus on peer relationships and social support within the gang. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five young males who were identified as having past or present gang involvement in the London area (UK). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the qualitative data analysis approach used and three superordinate themes were identified: *"For me, it's just how life was"*; "*The gang and I: A sense of belonging"*; and "*Finding a new path"*. Young people's experiences of being involved with a gang and receiving peer support whilst in a gang are considered, and the complex and individual nature of experiences of gang involvement are highlighted. In addition, reference is made to the potentially significant emotional and behavioural consequences of gang membership, clinical implications are considered, and suggestions for future research are made.

3.2 Introduction

A number of explanations for youth involvement in gangs are provided in the academic literature, most of which are underpinned by criminological, sociological and policy-driven theoretical frameworks (McGloin & Decker, 2010). Furthermore, there have been attempts to identify particularly pertinent risk factors; with growing recognition by researchers and academics that numerous factors interact to account for gang membership (Alleyne & Wood, 2010). Whilst gang membership is associated with increased involvement in criminal activities (Chu, Daffern, Thomas, & Lim, 2012) and increased victimisation (Katz, Webb, Fox, & Shaffer, 2011), joining a gang may be no different to joining a group that provides an individual with many positive attributes and experiences, such as support and loyalty (Wood, 2014). As considered in Alleyne and Wood's (2010) 'Unified Theory of Gang Membership' (see Chapter 1), the gang provides an individual with more than delinquent friends; it offers an individual protection, social support, status, excitement, and the opportunity for power.

3.2.1 Social Support

The focus of the research presented within this chapter is on the concepts of social support and the need to belong within the gang. If joining a gang is perceived to be the same as joining a group, it is likely that the gang offers members a sense of community, and relatedly support (Goldstein, 1991). One definition of social support is as follows: "information from others that one is loved and cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a network of communication" (Cobb, 1976, p. 300). In sum, it is a multidimensional concept related to individuals deriving support from others, which enhances their overall wellbeing (Cohen & Syme, 1985b).

Social support can alleviate the negative consequences of perceived stress, reduce an adolescent's experience of pressure, and enhance their ability to cope with the experienced stress (Beehr, Bowling, & Bennett, 2010; Park et al., 2013). Social support can affect coping in two ways (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Firstly, providing adolescents with consistent positive experiences and enabling them to have socially stable roles in the community (irrespective of how much stress they experience) reinforces that they are liked and cared for. Secondly, social support can influence coping indirectly by buffering the experience of perceived stress, which serves to reduce the adverse effects (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Park et al., 2013).

Typically, social support for adolescents may come from a range of people such as family, friends and others (Bal, Crombez, Van Oost, & Deboureaudhuij, 2003; Zimet, Powell, Farley, Werkman, & Berkoff, 1990). This range is necessary given that adolescents will require different forms of social support depending on their particular need at any given time, such as material, emotional, relational and psychological (e.g., a need to increase self-esteem) (Levitt et al., 2005). Social support can also be protective against involvement in crime, and subsequently gang membership. Cullen (1994) purported that the concepts which underpin social support, such as acceptance during times of difficulty, the sense of being important to another, and reciprocal relationships, acted to increase affiliation with legitimate institutions. Social support can also work simultaneously with social control (i.e., sanctions for criminal behaviours), as the approach taken (i.e., supportive as opposed to punitive) can increase compliance with prosocial norms (Wright & Cullen, 2001). These concepts are particularly important when considering interventions for gang-involved youth, who as a result of feeling misunderstood, and therefore rebelling against wider society (as discussed in Chapter 1), may benefit from the supportive approach.

As discussed in Chapter 1, several factors may increase an individual's susceptibility to joining a gang. Factors such as exposure to violence (which will be further discussed in Chapter 3), and daily stressors, combined with the negative impact of life stressors (Eitle, Gunkel, & Gundy, 2004), may lead adolescents to seek out support from others as a way of coping with the experience of stress and its impact on their mental well-being (Foster, Kuperminc, & Price, 2004; Richters & Martinez, 1993). The absence of perceived positive support from their families or schools, such as the presence of poor attachments to parents and caregivers (Thornberry et al., 2003), and negative experiences with teachers (Esbensen, Huizinga, & Weiher,1993), is associated with an increased risk of joining a gang as opposed to affiliating with prosocial peers (Sharkey, Stifel, & Mayworm, 2015; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). As adolescence is a key stage for identity formation (Erikson, 1968), youth who perceive rejection from familiar places are likely to experience uncertainty about their beliefs and values, be less certain about themselves and what their future might hold (Hogg, Kruglanski, & van den Bos, 2013). Such uncertainty may lead to an individual choosing to join a group which offers emotional bonding and acceptance, and which provides them with positive feelings and an elevated sense of self-worth from group membership (Cialdini et al., 1976; Dukes, Martinez, & Stein, 1997; Howell & Egley, 2005).

Some studies suggest that the age at which youth become gang-involved is indicative of attempts to fulfil different support needs. For example, younger adolescents may join because they have been influenced to do so by an older member of the family or a friend, compared with older adolescents who may join because they are seeking social status or protection (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008). Youth who become involved at a younger age may hold a temporary affiliation to the gangs and may be more susceptible to efforts of re-establishing positive and prosocial connections through providing appropriate support. In

contrast, older adolescents joining a gang who show greater commitment to the gangs and are more invested in their peers and their activities, are likely to require a greater level of support, in order to outweigh the perceived positive effects of being with the gang (Decker & Curry, 2000).

3.2.2 Need to belong

The need to belong is considered an innate human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is understood that this need has an evolutionary basis, as forming social bonds would have fulfilled reproductive and survival needs (Ainsworth, 1989; Hogan, Jones, & Cheek, 1985; Moreland, 1987), and ensured that survival tasks such as hunting were performed in groups. It is defined as the need for frequent, stable and positive interactions with others (Williams & Sommer, 1997), met through being accepted from those that one affiliates with (Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2000). Baumeister and Leary (1995) note that individuals attempt to not only meet this need through the stated processes to ensure that they are accepted but also organise their beliefs about themselves and others to be liked and accepted by others (Williams & Sommer, 1997).

There is a likelihood that should an individual no longer have a feeling of belonging to a gang then a gang member may leave to join pro-social groups in society (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Wood & Alleyne, 2010). However, the gang desistance research notes that upon leaving a gang, the temptation to return to ex-gang friends for emotional or practical support is experienced (Moloney, MacKenzie, Hunt, & Joe-Laidler, 2009), which implies that leaving the gang is not a simple process.

3.2.3 Gangs, violence and victimisation

The two principal reasons cited by youth as to why they join gangs are social reasons (Goldman, Giles, & Hogg, 2014) and the belief that they will be protected from victimisation

by others outside of the group (Mede, Taylor, & Esbsenson, 2009). However, in reality, the contrary is true with gang members experiencing more violent victimisation than non-gang youth (Peterson, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2004; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993). Risk of violent victimisation when within a gang may increase as gang members may be targeted by rival gangs, may be at risk from others who are committing offences (i.e., involvement in drugs supply; Jacobs, 2000), or even at risk of violence from members of their own gang as part of rituals to enter or leave the gang (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Katz, Webb, Fox, & Shaffer, 2011), or as part of a punishment for breaking gang rules (Rees,1996). Additionally, witnessing violence against others or the use of deadly force in the gang (Li et al., 2002) increases the risk of posttraumatic stress in gang members.

3.2.4 Previous findings and rationale for current research

There are a small number of quantitative and qualitative studies exploring the role of social support and belongingness for gang members, both published (e.g., Gibbs, 2000; Harris, 1994) and unpublished (e.g., Mozova, 2017). Harris (1994) provided an in-depth analysis of the internal worlds of 21 past and current female gang members of Mexican-American origin, living in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. Many participants identified the need to belong as a reason to join a gang, an issue which may have been borne out of not only the weak bonds experienced in both family and school life, but also that they (or immediate family members) had experienced violence and victimisation during their childhood and adolescent years. The study highlighted the importance of considering the way in which early life experiences (i.e., those prior to joining the gang) of gang-involved youth need to be understood, as the evidence suggests that such experiences will impact on the likelihood that an individual will seek support through joining a gang. Limitations of the

study included the lack of specific methodological approach used and difficulty generalising the findings due to the very particular population studied.

Gibbs (2000) applied content and thematic analyses to explore the social, financial and psychological functions gangs provide for their members, using samples of youth from Los Angeles (US) and African-Caribbean youth in London (UK). The results showed gang membership provided youth with support through engagement in social activities, and structure that was absent within their families, communities, and social institutions, and described the gang as a substitute family.

Perceptions of belongingness can change depending on the period of time spent with others. In a study exploring the group processes as experienced by young gang members in the UK (Mozova, 2017), participants' experiences of wanting friendships within the gang changed from the beginning stages of gang joining to later stages. Having lots of friendships became less important to participants at the remaining stages, and instead it was more important for them to have ties with close friends, highlighting participants placed greater importance on their experiences of developing close bonds with selective group members.

Whilst studies have established the significance of social support and a need to belong as reasons for youth to join a gang, exploration of the mechanisms in which youth in the UK experience this phenomenon within gangs is lacking. Furthermore, there is increasing recognition that gang members experience violent victimisation in gangs and have often experienced adverse life experiences prior to joining a gang. However, there is a paucity of research into whether the gang functions to provide support against the negative impact of such experiences. It is noted that, even upon leaving the gang, individuals can experience attachment to the gang (Pyrooz, Decker, & Webb, 2010). This suggests that understanding the ways in which support and friendship-related bonds are experienced in the gang is necessary

when developing interventions to support gang members to lead a prosocial life. The present research study therefore used the qualitative data analysis approach of IPA to elicit rich, in-depth personal accounts from participants about their lived experiences of being gang-involved and social support within this context.

3.2.5 Research Aims

The present research study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of youths' lived experiences of gang involvement in the UK. More specifically, it will explore two questions:

1) How do youth make sense of positive and negative life experiences leading up to their involvement with a gang?
2) How did participants experience relationships and social support during gang involvement and in what way did this impact upon their day-to-day functioning?

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Design

A qualitative design was used for this study, as the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of and capture participants' lived experiences of being part of a gang (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Given that the focus of the study was to explore how gang members make personal sense of the experiences of social support from gang-involved peers, Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999) was considered the most suitable approach to use. IPA requires the researcher to interpret and engage with the data during the analysis, and, as stated, the researcher is actively engaged in the 'double hermeneutic' (Smith, 2011) (i.e., making sense of the participant trying to understand themselves and their experiences).

IPA is a qualitative data analysis approach that is "committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.

1), and, as such, was consistent with the research aims. By recognising that every methodological stance can create reality as well as explain it, this approach positions participants as the experts of their own experiences, focusing on ensuring that people's experiences are expressed in their own terms (i.e., from participants' frame of reference). Therefore, IPA endeavours to give voice to the participant and make sense of experiences, utilising a bottom-up approach that avoids creating theories (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). IPA also recognises the role of the researcher when collecting information, by adopting the term 'double hermeneutic'. Essentially, this is the process of the participants trying to make sense of their world, and the researcher making sense of the participant making sense of their world (Smith et al., 2009) (see Appendix K).

3.3.2.1 Participants.

Sample size within IPA research is often contextual. In line with guidance developed by Smith et al. (2009), and to reduce the risk of oversaturation of the data, a small sample of participants was selected. To ensure homogeneity of the sample, the project enlisted a range of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Young males aged between 16-21 years were eligible to participate within this project, with youth falling outside this age range being excluded. To ensure a recent account of personal experience, past (lifetime) or current (within last 12 months) street gang members were included. Some gang-involved youth are considered to have transitory associations with gangs (Esbensen, Huizinga, & Weiher, 1993), and, as such, may not be as central to the gang (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Curry, Decker, & Egley, 2002). Such individuals may deny gang membership yet continue to be involved in gang-related acts (Yablonsky, 1959). As such, participants could be selected for inclusion based on being classed as being in a gang by staff rather than self-disclosure.

Research shows that females in gangs may be subjected to high levels of sexual assault and degradation, and primarily viewed by males in gangs as sexual objects (Beckett, Brodie, & Factor, 2013). Therefore, based on the identification of different needs and potential experiences for female gang members, they were excluded from the current study. Table 4 provides a summary of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 4

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Age	16 - 21 years	<16 years > 21 years
Gender	Male	Female
Language	English	Non-English
Stage	Past or present street gang member/affiliate	Past or present street gang membership not identified

Five males aged between 16-21 years participated in the study. Table 5 provides demographic information for the participants; pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity. All participants were identified as past street gang members or gang-involved, when recruited.

Table 5

Participant Characteristics

Participant (pseudonym)	Age	Gang involvement
Tom	20	Past
Paul	19	Past
David	17	Past

Jesse	20	Past
John	18	Past

This sample size allowed analyses to be undertaken and supported the use of an idiographic approach whilst enabling the identification of differences and similarities across participants. Smith et al. (2009) suggest between four and ten participants as an adequate sample size for a student IPA project at a professional doctoral level, and between six and eight participants for the purposes of research generally. The aim of the current study was to recruit seven participants; however, significant challenges were experienced in achieving this number. For example, one participant did not attend the interview following their initial agreement, and two other potentially suitable participants were arrested and remanded into custody at the time of data collection. The final group of participants was considered a homogenous sample, in as much as they originated from a particular area and had past gang involvement, either through gang membership or through involvement in acts with gangs.

3.3.2.2 Data collection and procedure.

As the young people were subject to Community Orders or supervision following their discharge from prison, permission was first sought from the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and Offender Managers who were responsible for supervising the young people. Participants were recruited from a service in London, which supports youth who have experienced emotional difficulties because of past traumatic experience. The service provides counselling support, mentorship and opportunities for engagement in social activities, to encourage confidence and develop resilience. Coaching mentors were asked to identify past and present gang membership for youth in their service, with the use of specific criteria which were consistent with the definition of gang membership adopted by Eurogang network (a nationally

representative forum of gang researchers): “a street gang is any durable, street-orientated youth group whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity” (Weerman et al., 2009, p. 20). Gang membership was also assessed through self-report with the prospective participants during the interview, using the same definition for gang membership. Three of the participants self-reported past membership, and two participants (David and John) reported that they were not gang members, but had friends or family who were gang members. Through discussion with coaching mentors, it was considered that both individuals had past involvement in gang-related offending. Furthermore, during interview, both participants described experiences of their readiness to engage in gang-related acts of violence with peers. Therefore, in the current study, all five participants were considered to have past gang membership or involvement.

Prospective participants were recruited via the coaching mentors who were given a presentation outlining the aims and objectives of the study by the researcher during a team meeting, which was followed up with information via email (Appendix G). Coaching mentors were given information sheets for prospective participants, which provided the researcher’s email address so that contact could be made in the event of further questions, or to clarify questions. Both the participant information sheet (Appendix F) and consent form (Appendix H) were provided via the coaching mentors to young people who showed an interest in taking part. Once participants had decided to take part, interviews with the researcher were arranged. Arrangements were made with coaching mentors via email and telephone for the researcher to meet the participants at youth offending team offices at a time that was convenient for them. On the day of the interview, following introductions, the researcher reminded participants they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the interview, and afterwards up to one month after completion without the need to give a reason. Verbal and signed consent was obtained.

The latter consent also provided information regarding how the data gathered be stored and written up in the researcher's thesis and other reports published.

The method deemed most suitable to gather information of the quality and depth required to give rich accounts of participant experience (Smith et al., 2009) was semi-structured interviews. The format used meant that a flexible approach to questioning could be used dependent upon participants' responses to initial questions and what experiences they placed most importance upon. This led the researcher to take on more of a facilitating role that created an interview that could be experienced as more of an informal conversation (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The interview schedule (Appendix J) was developed through: a review of relevant literature; discussions with the research supervisor regarding the research aims; and through consulting literature and guidance related to IPA methodology (e.g., Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to focus on what was important to them and allow free expression. For example, participants were asked initially to "tell me a bit about your neighbourhood – what is it like to live around here?", followed by questions related to their thoughts on the area in which they lived, going on to explore their personal experiences and the impact these have had, followed by the meaning and role of their peers before moving to explore peer and street-gang links and the impact these have had upon them. The interview schedule formed a guide to explore different aspects of the participant's responses. This approach to the interview gave participants the opportunity to express themselves as freely as possible with little interruption, and without being overly led by the questions asked by the researcher.

All participants were given the opportunity to identify a pseudonym to replace their names. The duration of interviews was approximately one hour and were ended when they

appeared to have arrived to a natural close. All participants had the option of having their coaching mentor in attendance at the interview, only one participant opted for this. All interviews were recorded on an encrypted Dictaphone. At the end of the interview, participants were given a debrief sheet (Appendix I) and had the opportunity to make any comments related to how they experienced the interview. Following the interviews, a handover was provided to the participant's coaching mentor regarding researcher observations pertaining to the mental health and wellbeing of the participant (e.g., whether the participant appeared distressed at any time during the interview). Following the interview, the researcher made notes to record initial thoughts, feelings and considerations that had arisen during or following the interview. The notes formed part of the later stages of data analysis. The researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim and information by which a participant could be identified was removed.

3.3.2.3 Strategy for Analysis.

The analysis followed the guidance and principles of IPA (Smith et al., 2009), by reviewing IPA literature relating to quality (Yardley, 2000) and via supervision with the research supervisor who has experience of conducting and supervising qualitative research projects. The process began by reading each transcript in its entirety several times to achieve familiarity with the data. This was followed by a step of initial coding of aspects of the text that appeared interesting or of significance. This involved noting three different processes that were categorised into descriptive comments (what the participants said), paying particular attention to what was meant by their comments, and conceptual comments (with an interpretative focus). An annotated example of a passage of is provided in Appendix M.

The next step involved the development of the notes into themes or emergent concepts. The process involves forming statements related to what was important in the

comments made on different parts of the transcript. This step was followed by mapping how the themes fit together (Smith et al., 2009) through a process of identifying commonalities of concepts within themes. This led to identifying clusters to highlight what the importance and conceptual message was. Grouping them together then led to the identification of main themes and sub-themes. Where relevant and applicable, to capture the main 'objects of concern' for participants, 'in vivo codes' were used to name themes to capture participants' own phrases and their experiences. This procedure was applied to all of the transcripts to form a table of final superordinate and subordinate themes (see Table 7). Recurrent themes were identified across the interviews in addition to divergence and convergence across the five transcripts. Participants' transcripts were analysed closely and checked to ensure the identified themes were relevantly connected to the participants' words and sense making. The analytic process was iterative, and required the researcher to interpret the participants' experiences whilst ensuring that the interpretations were reflective of the participants' sense making. A narrative account to summarise the themes and participants' 'voices' through quotes illustrating their experiences is provided below.

3.3.2.4 Ethical Considerations.

The study was reviewed and approved by the University of Birmingham Ethics panel (Ethics reference number: ERN_14-0491A) and met the standards of The British Psychological Society Code of Research Ethics (BPS, 2010). The study was additionally reviewed by the London-based service which supported youth with their emotional problems (see Appendix K). The key issues of informed consent, anonymity and potential for distress were all considered by the researcher (see Appendix K).

3.4 Results

Following completion of the data analysis, three superordinate themes emerged: *"For me, it's just how life was"; "The gang and I: A sense of belonging"*; and *"Finding a new path".* Within each superordinate theme lay several subordinate themes (see Table 6). Convergence and divergence amongst the narratives are considered throughout the results.

Table 6

Superordinate and subordinate themes

Superordinate theme	**Subordinate theme**
"For me, it's just how life was"	"Growing up was rough"
	Not having my needs met
The gang and I: A sense of belonging	Being there
	Feeling a part of something
Finding a new path	Letting go
	Hope and new connections
	The ongoing struggle

3.4.1 "For me, it's just how life was"

The first superordinate theme captured distal (e.g., the area, the place) and proximal (e.g., how I felt) factors discussed by all participants. These factors stemmed from their formative years and were relevant to their later involvement with peers in gangs. The theme

consists of two subordinate themes: *"Growing up was rough"* and "*Not having my needs met".*

3.4.1.1 "Growing up was rough".

Four participants identified the experience of growing up as being *"rough"* [e.g., Jesse: line 89] and saw crime and poverty as defining features of the area they lived in. Relatedly, they reflected on how it affected the way they saw themselves and how they perceived others saw them. Jesse, Paul, Tom and John reflect on the way in which the areas they grew up in placed certain limitations on not only their lives, but on the lives of those around them. Jesse considers his personal experiences of financial hardship within his family, leading to him not having his basic needs met in childhood:

> but it was fun [quiet voice] I mean I didn't have er, it wasn't rough, it wasn't rough it wasn't always rough it was rough but it wasn't always rough growing up …like [pause] I didn't have it as good, I mean there was sometimes there wasn't no food there as sometimes there was no electric an stuff like that. It wasn't as bad as it seemed [Jesse: line 272-276].

Jesse starts off describing the experiences of growing up as fun; however, he quietens as he appears to reflect that this does not accurately capture what it was like, whilst he considers that it *"wasn't rough"* [Jesse: line 272] either. His repetition reflects his attempts to make sense of how difficult things were, as he tries to positively reframe his experiences as though he is embarrassed by him having experienced poverty growing up, but equally he does not want to blame his home life for his choices. His narrative is powerful and elicits empathy as one pictures a young Jesse forced in to a position of committing crime to survive. John also focusses on crime as a defining feature of the area when he explains what young people around him are involved in: *"everyfing, really everyfing. Like…crime, like petty crime, selling drugs little things like that"* [John: line 22]. His narrative suggests that he perceives selling drugs as a relatively minor crime, although his later explanations of his family being involved

in gangs provides some understanding for why selling drugs might be considered a minor offence. John explains that because of his family's involvement in crime and their being gang-involved, it became quite easy for him to follow the same path himself. John appears to take responsibility for his involvement as he recognises: *"I got myself mixed up in dis…I could have stayed away but I, I ended up choosing the wrong route"* [John, line 38] and considers that: *"when I had a little time on my hands like I jus ended up getting myself into foolishness"* [John: line 46]. John's reflections on allowing himself to become involved in *"foolishness"* suggest an increase in his perception of the seriousness of what he has gone on to do. Nonetheless, the main point here is the sense that the area, the people around him, and the sociocultural context, almost allowed him to succumb to doing the things he was trying to resist.

Paul goes a step further to explain that there is a backstory to the way the area has come to be:

> I fink I fink because of everything that happened, that people view people that live in …… or grew up in …… to be [pauses] not not, not animals but like [pauses] but not the best of people? Coz when I tell people I'm from …., when I when I was a lot younger when I used to tell people I was from ….. they'd say really? You're from ……? Like you're not how I imagined you to be like? [Paul: line 18-21].

In the above excerpt, Paul alludes to the place having a history, which gives it its identification of a *"bad place"* [Paul: line 16]. In his efforts to not compare people from the place he is from to animals, he does just that; providing a sense of people behaving in a way which might be considered wild, or out of control. There is almost a sense of pride in his not being identified with the place by strangers, which perhaps provides Paul with a sense of being better than others and gives him some hope. However, there is sadness in his narrative, as he is aware of how others might form judgements about him based on where he is from,

and how limiting this can feel. He extends the idea of having little choice in how others around him behave, noticing that:

> People round here are really good people but they're just put in a position where sometimes they think the wrong choices or sometimes they feel like their only choice, is to do something wrong. Mainly for motives just to get something money really…really good people in the wrong place at the wrong time half the time. [Paul: line 36-43].

Paul does not judge others' negative choices and behaviours; he reflects on how an individual can be put into a *"position"* of having little control over one's decision-making. By defending the poor choices that others make he is perhaps providing justification for his own decisions. The idea of having little control is extended to how seemingly powerless parents and caregivers were to protect their children and keep them safe from the *"area"* which seems to be all-encompassing:

> Coz you know, all of us were raised right, like, all my friendship we were raised well, like. We weren't you know left at home till one o' clock in the morning, every other night. You know our parents looked after us, our parents were a good support system for us like. All my friends' parents I never thought they were weird I never thought they were bad parents, they've all been good parents, it's, it's jus you know, there's only so much a parent can do, you know. An the area does, does that'll shape you, like as much people may say yeah I'm from here it doesn't matter but it does, like. Say if I grew up, like, say some of the people I went to school wiv, primary school, they lived you know……., just up the road. Then me and them have completely different lifestyles, I hang out wiv a couple of them now, coz we were friends when we was kids an it's like I be talking bout the stories of mine jus normal stories that I tell anyone "I was at a party an this happened" say "what? Nah that doesn't happen at parties" yeah it does like that what happens at normal parties. We, we like completely different ends of the spectrum" [Paul: line 277-284].

Paul's narrative tone is defensive as he describes how his own and his friends' parents did not do the things he thinks are typical in those whose children go onto be involved in gangs. This shows some concern on Paul's behalf of how he is perceived by others that adds

to his need to be understood. In his view, his parents did the best that they could which conveys a sense of passivity, as he describes that the *"area"* has more power and influence over which way his life course will go. Paul emphasises his perception that the area in which he grew up had a significant bearing on the types of experiences he had. He felt that these experiences were *"normal",* but recognised that such experiences may not be perceived as normal by those in different neighbourhoods. His focus on the differences in experiences (due to living in different areas) invites a sense of him polarising himself from this group; they have different experiences and, therefore, do not have a connection.

Jesse also refers to what he experienced as *"normality"* in relation to the infrastructure around him, as instrumental to his decision to begin to sell drugs *"and anything he could get his hand on"* [Jesse: line 105] to survive the financial problems he experienced growing up:

> I was kind of caught up in the middle of it so seeing these weapons an drivers was jus kinda like a normal thing. I know that it's not normal life if you grow up round it then you're gonna you know adapt to it become used to it [Jesse: line 107-110].

In the excerpt above, Jesse's ambivalence about his decision helps him to morally disengage and not take on responsibility for his behaviour. Exposure to *"weapons"* and *"drivers"* suggests that he is more deeply involved, without even necessarily trying to be. Jesse is explicit, however, in noting that this has become his norm, whilst recognising it is not normal behaviour. He implies that others in his situation, and living his life, would also turn to crime; he creates distance when he refers to himself in the second person to explain this *["you're"].* His belief that he has little control of his position appears to be a way of him justifying his actions. Jesse goes on to explain how growing up around criminal activity in his neighbourhood very much normalises its existence in his life.

Tom reports the experience of not having enough money for things he wanted, as opposed to not having enough money to live, as Jesse and Paul did. He acknowledges the

difference between his own experiences growing up and potentially those of some of his gang-related peers. He describes how he notices that they are already familiar with the path he then decides to follow. His narrative implies that he saw how others had benefited from crime and was perhaps envious of the things they were able to buy and, as such, envy of his peers played a part in him turning to crime. There is also a sense of wanting to "fit in" with those around him:

> They were just basically they were born, no they were born in crime no I can't say that [laughs]… no they were a bit they were already involved in crime, already so, they already knew how to make money, in crime so I was, they had the new stuff an I'm thinking how you getting that?... [Tom: line 53-57].

Growing up with being exposed to guns in the areas they lived in may have been a part of the *"rough"* upbringing, and was described by Paul and Jesse as having had an impact on them:

> at the time I fought it was fireworks it wasn't until afterwards when I was about thirteen I was like mum, was there always fireworks and my mum was honest wiv me because my mum's always been honest like that, its jus jus the area. Little fings like that [pause] it was like I was scared of the area even though, I wasn't? Because I knew the stigma the area had. Y'know I knew [redacted] was meant to be this big bad place where everyone does this an everyone sells drugs an everyone has a knife or somefing like that. I knew the stigma around it. I jus know I don't wanna be involved [Paul: line 199-203].

In the extract above, Paul recounts the realisation that the noises he heard were not fireworks. He is accepting of his mum's explanation for telling him differently when he was younger, showing understanding that she wanted to protect him from the realities and dangers of the area. *"Little fings"* serves to highlight the difficulty Paul has in coming to terms with the fear and sense of threat he lived with. This may reflect an internal battle of telling himself he is not scared, that he should be used to it, but when faced with reality it is frightening. Paul refers to the *"stigma"* and how the area is seen by others. His deliberation as to whether it is a dangerous place to live may serve a protective function for Paul because he appears to be

preparing himself by thinking the worst, which helps him feel less fearful. The definitive way in which he reports *"I jus know I don't"* reflects his certainty however of not wanting to be defined by the activity in the area.

Jesse also experienced *"fireworks"* whilst growing up. He reports being shot at, which he presumes happened because he was mistaken for someone else:

> Um confused? Coz I was finking, whoa, I fought that was a firework first of all….so it's kind of like went past you kind of fing like imagine if that did hit me, kind of fing you know so there was a bunch of emotions… [Jesse: line 420-423].

Jesse experiencing confusion (i.e., thinking it was a firework) reflects that the situation was unexpected. Later, as he processes what had happened, there is shock as he imagines what could have happened, which serves to emphasise how life endangering the experience was. His difficulty of identifying the emotions he experienced is reflected in his struggle to articulate how it made him feel.

3.4.1.2 Not having my needs met.

Four out of five participants described situations in which, as young adolescents, they did not feel others understood that their needs were not met, which led to disconnect from those around them. This theme appears to follow the subordinate theme of *"Growing up was rough"* as their experiences of growing up in an unsafe neighbourhood, with limited opportunities and hope, appeared to reinforce participants' experiences of not having what they needed at the time.

Paul reported feeling inadequate when trying to *"fit in"* [Paul: line 190], risking being rejected by his peers and felt this was due to his mother not being able to afford things he wanted:

> ...the thing that affects me the most was, not having [pause] what I felt [emphasised] like I needed at the time. Coz obviously I didn't need nice shoes I didn't need nice clothes…but at the time I feel like I

> needed to fit in…which I obviously didn't now that I look back but at the time I was a dumb little kid, but as a kid that's what you need to be like everyone else to have what everyone else has to do what everyone else can do [Paul: line 187-191].

Paul's narrative tone is one that invites empathy as, through his retrospective reflection, he makes sense of what his needs were at the time. To some extent, he invalidates his own experience as he remarks he was a *"dumb little kid"* as though his needs should not, and did not, matter. However, this serves to highlight his naivety as a child; he perhaps had expectations of having the things he wanted to fit in with others provided to him and did not understand why it was not possible. It is noted that he reverts to the present tense, suggesting the experience was pronounced, and may be relevant to him currently. The repetition throughout highlights Paul's experience of invalidation at not having what he *"felt [he] needed"* what was important to him, and therefore not being understood, and in turn, risking being rejected by his peers. Paul's frustration appears to grow as he explicitly links having nice clothes with acceptance from his peers; without the right type of clothes he felt further removed from his peer group. Paul recognises that his mother tried her best to provide him with what he needed at the time:

> I'm grateful for everything ma mum does coz I know my mum, my mum wasn't brought up – yeah – no she wasn't brought up with a silver spoon. I know she hasn't walked down the right path, but she's always tried her best, and that's all I could ever ask for. She's always tried to do her best. [Paul: line 410-414].

His narrative is one, which again, invites sympathy, but also some admiration for Paul's ability to acknowledge his mother's struggle, during which she was still able to provide him with a felt sense of unconditional support. The mix of emotions reflected in his experiences highlights how difficult that time was for Paul, when he was unable to achieve the desired acceptance and connection when it mattered.

Not too dissimilar were Jesse's experiences that the help and guidance offered by adults was not enough as he did not feel it met his needs at the time: "...*a lot of people really wanna help you but they're not helping in the right way."* [Jesse: line 94]. He goes on to voice his frustration of how he was treated when at school:

> Um, well let's start with school wise, I'm [inaudible] now so instead of naggin on and telling me what to do, you have to kind of demonstrate to me? So, that was one thing that used to really really tick like I'm tryin to explain and no it's not getting through so or they gave me help that was jus not useful not at all. And after a while it did change, but it took a bit too long. [Jesse: lines 98-100].

Jesse provides the example of his failure to be understood which began at school; evoking sympathy as his narrative creates anticipation that he will be let down in other areas of his life. Jesse communicates the felt sense of frustration at not being understood. He highlights that in spite of explaining what he needed, his voice was still not heard, which he experienced as being invalidating. Jesse considers that help and understanding happened too late for him, which serves to reinforce his position of hopelessness for change. These unmet needs combined with frequent change of adult support made the period of adolescence even more challenging as he found himself *"in and out of plenty of schools and centres and stuff"* [line 89], without getting *"certain help"* [line 90].

Similarly, Paul described conversations he has heard in school between teachers which, whilst not directed at him, led him to reflect that others thought his future lacked positive prospects*:"...you're just made to feel like – you're not made to feel but like subconsciously you're probably made to feel like that's all you're good at"* [Paul: line 447]. There is a sense of hopelessness in being *"made to feel"* a certain way and Paul's narrative tone is one that invites empathy. By saying *"that's all you're good at"*, he internalises the way he perceives others have placed limitations on what he can hope to achieve, which affects his view of himself.

John described his family member who he admired and saw as his *"role model"* ending up in prison because of his gang involvement:

> …before he got mixed up with gangs…I looked up to him coz he was doin, doin his music, he was doin like electric engineering all that thing, and, he was smart. He was smart, very, very, very smart…So I really looked up to him. Then, when he went inside I was so, so upset coz, I, in the beginning I never spoke to him really [John: line 174-180].

John's admiration of family members' abilities gave him a sense of hope at what he himself could achieve. The use of the past tense when ascribing positive qualities to him suggests that his family member is no longer the intelligent person he perceived him to be, and that he had let John down. John's upset following his family member's imprisonment reflects this, suggesting a loss of connectedness after he becomes aware that his family member wasn't who he thought him to be.

Tom seemed to be concerned with not having the freedom at first to freely associate with his peers, as there was a sense that his parents were strict about letting him out:

> It was funny coz ma parents they never let me out, understand? They never used to let me go out, and then, they started letting me go out a little but and I started to go out to play football an that and then yeah from there, had friends that knew, other friends but other friends were already ahead of everything so yeah [Tom: line 47-51].

There is a sense that Tom felt restricted by his parents, and when they gave him a little freedom, he made as much of the opportunity as he could. His narrative also suggests that his involvement with his gang-related peers happened quickly. Tom also seems to positively appraise the group as being *"ahead of everything"*. This seems to have, in part, resulted in him wanting to be part of the group and, subsequently, to identify with the group.

3.4.2 The gang and I: A sense of belonging

The second superordinate theme entitled "*The gang and I: A sense of belonging*" captures the participants' experiences of the relational support they received within their

friendship groups, and the way they experienced the relationships as having had a positive impact for them, allowing them to feel there was someone there for them which increased their perceptions of belongingness.

3.4.2.1 Being there.

Continuing from the theme of "*Not having my needs met"*, "*Being there*" captures the felt experiences of four of the participants that their peers were there for them at a time when they perceived no one else in their lives was available to offer them the support they needed. The types of support they experienced at the time ranged from spending time with them, having fun together, to being given practical support with difficulties they experienced at the time.

David, Paul and John reflected on their experiences of their friendship group being no different to any other, in terms of taking part in everyday, routine activities:

> It's doing the same thing like I said all the time. Obviously you do other stuff but we do mostly…like mostly, you eat like, go out like go cinema, take people out, or friends jus take people out like do something or go parties do something like, we never, never be like, we never be jus sitting there, just looking at each other in the eyes like not saying much. Like we at least do something. Not like all of us there's jus five of use at least one of us got something to do [David: lines 377-380].

David appears to find some comfort from being with a group who does the same thing each day, as though the predictability of them being there and engaging in the same activities offers him a sense of safety. His narrative also suggests he found comfort in being occupied, which to him was a form of support. Whilst echoing similar experiences of support through engaging in activities, Paul consciously notices, in retrospect, how his group supported one another, which leads him to label it as such:

> It's only when I look back on it I think we did actually support each other. I never really saw it as a kid. It's just like aw you're pissed off like let's go to McDonald's lets play Fifa at mine. I guess that's the way we supported each other we didn't talk about it we just forgot about it. [Paul: lines 148-150].

Paul reflects on his lack of awareness at the time that his group was a source of support. However, he is still being wise enough to know how to recognise when another person was upset and to provide them with support by engaging in an activity with them. There is a suggestion that group members had an intuitive understanding of each other's feelings and made themselves available to offer the distraction they needed. Paul reflected more explicitly on his experience of the group's availability to provide him with the emotional support he needed at the time:

> When my …. passed away I never really say this – I got really upset and I got really angry coz I used to have like, er a lot of anger problems. And I remember just hanging out with them and I'd be pissed off an they'd be like come on let's ride a bike let's play football an play football just ride a bike [clicks fingers] I'd calm down instantly. Just chilling with them calmed me down…I fink it was just the fact that I was chilling with people, just not being on ma own I fink that's what I'm like now like when I'm angry or upset I just call someone do you wanna go chill coz I know if I'm just sitting on ma own I'm gonna stew…I don't fink it was jus them I fink its jus how I am. If I'm wiv someone I manage to calm down. [Paul: lines 100-107].

Paul considers the importance of his friends being there for him to turn to when he needed support. His narrative serves to emphasise the powerful effect his friends had in bringing about a radical change in his mood state from angry to calm. He appeared almost reliant on them to regulate his emotions, and there is a conveyed sense of him being held psychologically and emotionally, like a child. He recognises he still needs others to contain him, which suggests that he perceives himself as someone who is fragile, placing a significant level of importance of mattering to those around him and spending time with them.

John also emphasises the apparent ordinariness of his friendship group, although he makes a distinction between friends who are non-gang-involved and those that are:

> Um…a lot of friends are sensible like everyday like lads like fing like dat but I got like other friends that mixed up with gangs, and them like I can't say they like trouble all the time we friends and fings

> like that we just get up to normal fings like play football, going out, talking to girls fings like dat just normal fings…like Like, dey dey inspire you to do fings like, like one of my friends he before he got mixed up yeah before before he got mixed up with foolishness (spoken quietly and quickly) he was a footballer an like he got real far. He got he got into…I fink [football team] or something like that. [John: lines 70-79].

John's narrative is almost defending of his peers, as he attempts to explain how, despite their gang involvement which is automatically seen as the 'other' or the 'bad' side of them, they are very much *"everyday"* individuals who have the same interests and aspirations as anyone else their age. John experienced them as inspiring individuals, which appeared to instil a sense of hope about his own future, and in turn may have maintained his friendship with them; the relationships seemed to offer him something more than a place to become involved in crime and gang-related activity.

Continuing with the notion of gangs being like any other group, John and David spoke of their experiences of having fun with their peers:

> Everyfing does when someone does something silly like, even to someone joking falling over like. There's a lot of laughter like people making jokes an stuff like dat. Dat's why I like being around friends an that. Coz there's nothing but jokes an fings like dat. That's how I like it. [John: lines 310-311].

In the excerpt above, John explains how the aspect of the interactions within his peer group he valued the most was how much they all enjoyed being together and laughing together. There is some suggestion that this was the place, perhaps the only place, where John felt carefree, able to express himself, and have fun, at that stage in his life. Sharing jokes together seemed to help distract from difficulties in his life, such as the imprisonment of a member of his family. John goes on to explain that he felt his friends intuitively recognised when he needed them:

> Nah, coz, like there's been times when, none of the times ergh, I've had to ask for help. Like people just help you out coz I gotta, I gotta good set of friends so…yeah, I don't, I don't fink I have to ask them [pauses] if I'm not smiling, coz I'm always smiling, no matter what I'm always smiling. Like dey'll know coz I'm always smiling. If I'm not smiling they'll know something's up. Yeah fings like dat. If I'm not cracking jokes, things like dat, they'll know [John: lines 330-336].

It appears important for John to portray himself as a positive, upbeat person, who in the face of any adversity is *"always smiling"*. It could be inferred that even at times when he might not want to be smiling, he may put on a 'brave face'. However, his friends are sensitive to what he might truly be feeling, at such times.

Not only did all participants experience support from peers, they all described giving support in return. Three of the participants reported supporting their peers with emotional needs during stressful times. In the extract below, Paul describes how he takes on the role of the *"funny friend"* with his friends:

> Whenever my friends told me "I'm scared" I, I, I'm the kind of person - I'm the funny friend who makes you laugh and says there's nuffing in a situation to be worried about…like I'll make people laugh till they're like blue in the face, forgetting about what they are crying about five minutes ago [Paul: line 352-358].

Paul reports confidently that he can reassure his friends, leading to a drastic change in their emotional experiences, potentially allowing him to feel connected and needed by them.

Tom and John describe having similar roles of negotiating and talking to the gang during conflict:

> There's some skills I learned with the, I still use it now. Um, speaking to people, um, um, breaking fings up like making sure everyone has a fair amount. Um, jus convers, like bringing people together you know what I mean. Um, talking to someone to bring them [Tom lines: 190-191].

Tom reflects on the skill set he acquired whilst in the gang. He believes that he was quite skilled in his role of reconciling his peers following disputes within the gang. He places

importance on bringing people together, reflecting that, whilst in the gang, he saw other gang members provide support for each other and felt supported by them himself; such experiences led to him, in turn, showing concern for others and providing support where necessary. Similarly, John considers the importance of his role in de-escalating situations where his friends have had intentions to use violence:

> Like [pauses] you know when you have a fight and then you lose a fight? And they wanna go through an get a knife and try to, like you have to talk them down, like "nah it's not worth it re, re, re ", "it's not that serious" basically. You, you just have to…calming someone down yeah [John: lines 300-303].

By posing the scenario as a question, John almost normalises *"fighting"* as an example behaviour between groups, as though it is an everyday occurrence most people would be familiar with. This perhaps serves to highlight how integral the need to use violence, if deemed necessary, is in the gang. John assumes the role of 'mediator' and the voice of reason, as he takes on the task of de-escalating the situation to calm his friends down, showing how important he becomes to the group to apprehend them from going further, with a course of action that would have negative consequences for them.

In contrast, Jesse seemed uncertain whether he perceived the groups of individuals he was introduced to, to be supportive in the sense of being there for him. His response highlighted that what Jesse took from his interactions and advice from the gangs was that he could not be sure of what to expect:

> Um there was a couple of them that were [pause] you know they used to take me to places to see things myself to know that, is this is if this is what you want, kind of fing, or is this what you wanna be part of an then there was the ovver one that was like 'yeah join us come come it's fun', 'we get money', 'we do things you know', live in luxury an all this other stuff, but then, they don't really show the consequences of outcomes, they show you the bright side not the dark side of fings. [Jesse: lines 493-497].

In Jesse's response to a question exploring his perception of support, he immediately mentioned that the consequences or the *"dark side"* of gang life was not mentioned when gang members were trying to get him to join the gang. However, he reflects that he learnt about the negatives during his time in the gang. Jesse's narrative suggests he found it difficult to be fully trusting of his gang, and whilst there were positives to joining, he was aware that the negative consequences were potentially quite severe, and he did not feel that the level of support he received in the gang was able to compensate for the risks involved. The felt experience of the negative effects of the gang Jesse alludes to here, becomes prominent in the later themes "Finding a new path", and specifically within "Letting go".

3.4.2.2 Feeling a part of something.

The second subordinate theme, "*Feeling a part of something",* captures the participants' experiences of an increased level of belongingness as a result of close bonds and experiences of acceptance with peers in the gang. Participants also reflect on adopting group values as their own.

Paul, John, David and Tom all reported experiences of closeness with their peers in gangs. Paul emphasises this through a sense of oneness, when he reports having similar interests, intelligence level, and being brought up in single parent families like his peers:

> An we all obsessed with riding bikes. An, we all similar like intelligence level? To a sense like, we knew how life went and we knew how everything worked and we weren't stupid little kids being all ignorant and stuff. I mean we probably were but we liked to think we were a lot more intelligent than everyone else. An we all like the same set in school an we getting similar grades, like we were literally like the same person but just put in different houses [Paul: line 91-91].

Paul conveys how tightly knit the group were, and his emphasis on their similarities reinforces their cohesiveness. In retrospect, he notes that the gang thought of themselves as

being better than others, which may have served as a motivating factor for them to stay connected and engage in activities that defined them as a group.

As mentioned in the earlier theme of "*Being there",* Paul reflected on the gang's function to help him calm down. In the excerpt below, Paul not only evidences feeling close enough to his peers to be able to talk with them about his difficulties, he also goes further to explain that he felt able to open up to them as he knew they had similar experiences so were better able to understand him:

> I fink we just so close we could chat about most things like say my mum was pissing me off or something like that I'd just say oh my mum's jarring me an yeah my mum too like da da da da yeah like that's how it is so dry just like that chat about everything. I fink I fink I probably used to chat them more about my problems than anyone else because we all went through the same things, pretty much**.** [Paul: line 96-98].

Paul gives quite a personal example of sharing his discontent with his mother with his peers in order to illustrate how close they are with one another. There is a sense that Paul feels safe enough to share his vulnerabilities with them, without fear of judgement. The sense of 'oneness' is furthered in the excerpt by his comment that it was likely that his peers experienced very similar situations. However, his comments also suggest an element of naivety; possibly overlooking how others might have experienced things differently from Paul. Nevertheless, in doing this, Paul's narrative conveys his certainty of their closeness.

John and Tom convey closeness with their peers; speaking of them as if they were family. This appears to go beyond support, to truly mattering to one another:

> Just, friends like. All of am friends are close. I fink of them as bruvvers. Like, if I don't have somefink, they have stuff they'll give it to me. If dey don't have it, I'll give it to dem. I seen seen the bruvvers here. [John: lines 221-222].

John provides a sense of the same rules applying for friends as for family to convey how far they are prepared to go for one another. There seems to be an expectation that his

friends would also view him as family, and be prepared to do the same for him as he would for them. A slightly defensive stance is noted when John reflects on what he gets from his friends as he states: *"Nah, a lot. A lot. Friendship. I feel like family. I feel like they're family to me. Um, like, they help me out with fings. Like everyfink I don't know. Everyfink really"* [John: lines 224-225]. John identifies the importance of the closeness and connection he has with his friends. It might be inferred that, as a result of feeling that he has been deprived materially and not been provided with adequate support from his biological family, John places greater importance on the relationships he has within the gang.

Tom explains his journey with his peer group; going from looking up to peers to being accepted as part of the *"family":*

> Like me when I was younger or like coz it's it's happened differently coz I was lookin up to the people that was older than me, an then, as the years went by, then those, ovver people that were ma age not like a year younger, they were jus like they wanted like, I was tryna obviously, we was we became part of the family as well, so then it was a fing where we had to learn I had to do fings an I was a bit more in it, an I knew over obviously I bin there taught about ovver fings that were jus more like tryna show them, sort of thing [Tom lines: 201-204].

Tom looks back on how his role and relationships within the gang changed over time. At first he admired and looked up to them, and he then became their equal. This perhaps conveys a sense of having the aspiration of where he wanted to be, being fulfilled. Once he reached a stage of acceptance as part of the *"family",* there was an expectation for him to have a greater role in the gang.

In the excerpt below, Tom describes the way the gang introduced him to engaging in acts that defined them as a group, which increased his experiences of feeling important and mattering to his friends:

> Um they jus they just showed me they had ma back, they showed that um, they teach my how to make a lot more money? You be making more money than you all makin an what else. An, showed me a lot of

> love, they like to me, they showed me how to do um, how to protect maself if anything a come across that's not jus fighting wise like using hands if I could of so, they were showin me how to protect maself, at the time [Tom: line 95-97].

He interprets being shown how to defend himself from others during a fight as a sign of not only acceptance, but being loved and cared for by his friends, which strengthens his loyalty to them. His repetitive use of *"showed"* takes on a deeper meaning here than simply being shown how to do something, as it seems reflective of the gang's fuller acceptance of Tom, in that the skills he is being taught are key to the identity of the gang.

David felt being around his friends gave him the confidence to talk to others who he would not necessarily have talked to before: *"made me like, not not made me anything but jus, made me feel like, more comfortable around people certain people in the area*" [David: line 302-303]. David reflected on the fact that he was quite a shy a person, and that being with his friends helped him overcome some of the barriers he had in approaching others. He seems unsure of whether they *"made"* him do anything, perhaps because this sounds as though he is under pressure to behave in a particular way. Nonetheless, he accepts that in many ways, their influence did mobilise him to do something he would not have done of his own accord.

Tom captures his experiences of also wanting to do what his peers did, as his admiration for them grew:

> Um, I fink I was jus because of um, I made believe it coz the people that that I was lookin up to like, they had fings under control as well? Even if they was in an out of a job they had fings under control like they jus knew what they had to do they knew what um they wanted to do, so it was jus it was they jus tellin us like you can do it but you jus have to be intelligent to do it…I think it was boosting me sort of thing. Boosting me [Tom: lines 182-186].

In the excerpt above, Tom explained how his perception of his peers increased his commitment to spend more time with them, despite discouragement from his parents. It is noted how Tom was almost in awe of the way his peers had *"things under control",* allowing

him to believe that it was possible for him too, to operate like this; that is, to be able to keep on top of competing demands from both his parents and his desire to be with his friends and involvement in gang activities. There is a sense that Tom wants to rise to the challenge and almost prove to his peers that he is capable of spending time engaging in gang activities. Reassurance from his peers reinforced his connection to them, and, as his confidence grew, there was an increase in his self-esteem and the sense of feeling invincible due to being part of the gang.

David outlines how he would express his loyalty to his friends through actions rather than words, and presents a scenario whereby he is compelled to use a knife if needed to defend them:

> There's bin times that I had to help my friends out when they get into problems yeah…but apart from that everything's been cool. But only fing is, it's not even anything I did like, like say if there was someone fighting my friend and then his friends got involved for his friend to be at my friend I'm gonna get involved. I'm not gonna see two people hit my friend so I'm help him out. So there's that kinda stuff like I can help out it's not like we think in our heads it's time to go out brought out a knife gotta be trouble. You just come to deal with whatever happens hmmm. [David: line 430-434].

David appears defensive and stresses how he does not consciously engage in a decision-making process to use a knife. The object of importance to him is his loyalty to his friends and ultimately showing them that he can be relied upon, because this is the group's agreed upon way to act. He also conveys the potential level of threat that is perceived by the group, as in his narrative there is a sense that they always have to be prepared. The experienced loyalty and unwavering sense of commitment to the gang reported within this theme contrasts with the participants' experiences captured by the superordinate theme *"Finding a new path"*.

3.4.3 Finding a new path

The third superordinate consists of three subthemes, in which the participants' narratives reflected a shift in how they perceive themselves compared with the gang and, alongside this, how they no longer shared the same goals. The participants' narratives are of uncertainty in treading a new path whilst struggling to come to terms with letting go of their former relationships and reflecting on what meaning the experiences had for them and continue to have.

3.4.3.1 Letting go.

The first subordinate theme captures the participants' experiences of a shift within the dynamics in their relationships, and within themselves, leading to the relationships being perceived as being less supportive. The changes experienced seem to have, in part, provided the impetus for most of the participants to let go of their relationships within the gang, and to begin to separate themselves from the gang and their peers.

Jesse, Paul and David consider the way in which their activity with friends in the gang led to police involvement, and relatedly, coming to terms with what accepting responsibility for their actions means to them, emotionally and psychologically. David reflects:

> If I was hanging around with the same circle as I used to..I would probably be in jail by now. Like eh some people get me in trouble. But not me in trouble really, it's jus that looking out for people most of the time so it's jus like I dropped them lot off – but, an people not being there when I needed them. [David: lines 542-543].

There is a sense that David's sense of responsibility or loyalty for his friends had negative consequences for him. It seems that he felt the risks of being in the gang were too high, which led to his decision to *"drop them off".* There is a feel of the friendships being curtailed quickly, to avoid causing further negative consequences for himself. However, he

adds that a further reason for cutting ties was the realisation that his friends may not have reciprocated the 'being there' aspect of the relationship (i.e., they were not offering the same level of support that he was providing for them).

Similarly, Paul appears to experience regret when he considers his arrest for assaulting someone with his friends in the group, and described the experience of attending the police station the first time as *"horrible"* [line 324]:

> if I wasn't friends with them, and if I wasn't loyal wiv them as I was, I don't think I would have got into trouble for… I wouldn't have got put into them situations having to sit in a police station, God knows how long twenty hours at a time an stuff like that [quietens] [Paul: line 320-322].

Paul considers how many of the consequences hinged on his association with his friends in the group and the narrative tone is one of passivity in terms of how much responsibility he takes for the assault. He extends the idea of displacing responsibility when he expresses anger at ending up at a police station, with the suggestion that he only realised that it was unacceptable when it had happened on more than one occasion. In the excerpt below, Jesse reflects on his experience of almost being taken advantage of because he had difficulties managing his aggression. He recounts the unpleasantness of feeling as though he is being controlled by some of his friends:

> I kind of realised that some people were kind of like I, I don't know if not jealous but jus I don't know, they always tried to drag me down or stuff like or make me get into silly fings…after a while I learned to control it [his aggression] an, you know jus tried to stay focussed there were certain people that did want to drag me down, you know 'ah why you changing', 'you never used to be like this', 'what's happenin wiv you, you won't talk to us', like these type of things, like nah it's time for you can't always stay doin the same fing [Jesse: lines 152-159].

There are indications that not all the relationships within the gang are experienced as positive or close. Jesse suggests that he has already distanced himself from *"certain people"*. Importantly, once he learnt to manage his aggression, the gap between what he wanted and

what the gang wanted became apparent. He reflects on the changes they noticed in him, which appears to increase his awareness that he was no longer the same person.

Tom and David also consider the way they struggled with expressing their thoughts and feelings freely within the gang as time went on. Their difficulties trusting others contrasts with how they experienced the gang when they first joined when there was a sense that they could be more open, as the gang offered them support and they felt close enough to other gang members to speak freely around them. For example, David reflects that as a group, they don't *"trust each other enough to share everyone's business to each other"* [David: line 349-350]. This shows David lacks confidence in trusting his own judgement related to who he can be openly trusting of within the gang. Tom considered that the effects of not talking about their feelings openly led to a continuation of negative emotions. In the excerpt below, he hypothesises about what might have stopped both him and his friends from talking:

> It might be they jus they don't wanna share it or they might think ah wow people might fink different of them or fink what's this guy spillin out them emotions for you know what I mean? Because we speak about stuff but we don't go deep in, but sometimes we have to think about it deep so you can get it off your chest [Tom: line 276-278].

Tom captures the need to be seen as strong within the gang, and to break the mould to talk about certain feelings being considered a weakness. There is also a sense that feelings could risk "spilling out" should they be discussed openly, so controlling them tightly was a better way of coping. Tom described not being able to talk through his feelings as increasing his propensity for violence, as he felt as though *"[he] had nothing to lose"* [line 282]. Tom acknowledged how there was an escalation in the seriousness of the activities he was becoming involved in, *"but it was getting dangerous everytime like, everytime it was getting more dangerous"* [Tom, line 411]. He conveys a sense of not being in control because he notes that the risk appears to increase each time, but, in some ways, it appears to be

unstoppable. Nevertheless, leaving the gang is not an easy decision, as Tom and Jesse express uncertainty underpinned by guilt for leaving, and worry how they will break the news to the gang:

> like you have to kind of recognise what you want? As a person? And then, just go for it. But there are consequences and the consequences are mainly dropping people out. Like you have to realise who's good for you and who's not and it does take a while to drop people out coz it's not like you can say "no, I don't want to talk to you" an jus never talk to them again. It does take a while and you have to, know try to, try to make it permanent that I'm not talking to that person or we're no longer friends. But that comes with consequences. [Jesse: line 138-141].

There is a sense that Jesse anticipates his decision to leave the gang will be a challenge, as he attempts to distance himself from how he feels about leaving the gang. He plans to slowly draw away from gang members, perhaps feeling that this strategy will minimise the impact of leaving and implies that he will be able to maintain the permanency of his decision. However, his laughter may conceal his anxieties in relation to how he will be 'punished' for leaving, because he has broken the rules he and his peers have lived by in the gang: *"…they used to help me you know kinda like I'm being disrespectful or they saying I'm violating them"* [laughs] [Jesse: line 198-199]. The excerpt demonstrates Jesse's ongoing loyalty to the gang due to their help and support at a time when he needed it, and there is a sense that they would interpret his leaving as a rejection. Tom experiences similar difficulties separating from the gang because he is indebted to them for being there for him when he became homeless and had no one else to turn to: *"I still have that love for them coz at that time, the support them being around me outside with me was it was was good"* [Tom: line 232-234].

However, Tom, Jesse and John reflect on managing the temptation to return to the gang. In the excerpt below, it is evident that the gang provided Tom with a space to relax and to cope with negative emotions:

> It was hard. Coz everytime I jus wanted to go I jus chill an jus cool off but like if, if anyfink happens, I can jeopardise what I'm tryna build up so I need to I was just tryna find a balance…ma mind was playin with me so everytime ma mind was playin with me but thank god I kept strong jus tryn [Tom: line 146-150].

Tom considers the risk of what he stands to lose, and he weighs up the pros and cons of what returning to *"chill"* means, and the anticipation of getting into various sorts of trouble if he were to return. He emphasises the intensity of the urge to give into returning, and there is a sense that he cannot quite comprehend how he himself managed to stay strong. There is also a sense that he is in a transitory stage, whereby he is trying to walk a new path, but has not yet found ways to replace the closeness and familiarity that he had with the gang.

John's reflections suggest a similar dilemma related to leaving his gang-involved peers behind. On the one hand, he emphasises the importance of sticking to his values of not associating with people involved in *"bad"* activities, whilst on the other hand, he instantly recognising the contradiction: *"ahh when I say dat, doin bad coz dey are doin bad, but, I know dey smart people. When the time comes, they'll change I know they'll change. Yeah"* [John: line 359-361]. John is hopeful that they can change, and appears confident in their abilities because they are *"smart".* However, it also demonstrates how connected he feels to them. Upon making the commitment to leave, Tom and Jesse described experiencing threats and violence:

> because of what I was part of there, some people that was tryna um, get to me an try an try um yeah try an get to at me an saying yeah um still gonna get you what not what not so [Tom: line 141-142].

Tom acknowledges being part of the gang as a way of explaining the severity of the threat and danger he faced at that particular time. There is a sense that the gang would not let go of him easily, and his repetition conveys the difficulty he has in accepting the radical shift in his relationships, which signals the end of the bond he has with them.

Tom and Jesse reflect on managing anger and sadness through efforts to accept endings of relationships, as they recognise that they no longer share the same values as their peers. Jesse reports feeling *"pissed off"* [Jesse, line 319] because his old friends still talk about him: *"I hate it when people talk about things that either don't concern them or just not needed to be talked about"* [Jesse: line 321-322]. Jesse's narrative tone suggests that he is angry with his peers because he continues to be aware of their presence and what they might be saying about him, even though he is no longer part of the group. This reflects a degree of powerlessness in his position because there is a sense that they will continue to speak of him regardless. Tom expresses anger through his frustration that his gang-related peers fail to recognise how their activities and mind-set within the group is not helping to provide hope to young people who might look up to them:

> Yeah. I went to I went to see um, some of ma mates the ovver day. Actually. They were jus tellin me nothing really changes still the same [laughs] that's how it works…Just I dunno, I dunno, they just a bunch of haters, it burns me an that. Um it's crazy. It hurts me. It's not even, like they it's not even, you know what I mean it is some people they jus they ain't got the family to push them or they ain't certain fings to push them, but it hurts me more of the younger generation, that are coming through that have to go through, that eighty percent of them have to go through that stage if not at least forty percent of them will lose their life. [Tom: lines 318-327].

Whilst there is a sense of anger conveyed within the above excerpt, it seems that Tom is trying to understand what it is about them that causes him to have negative feelings towards them. Tom appears to be trying to console himself by telling himself that they hate everyone, and that it is less hurtful to think that they hate him specifically. Whilst there is an initial

sense of Tom resigning to accepting that his peers are not going to change, this realisation equally causes him upset. The changing perception of his friends as uncaring individuals appears to have happened as a result of the process of change Tom has undergone, and relatedly, his widened perspective that it is not only the individuals in the gang who are affected, but also future generations (i.e., the negative cycle will continue).

3.4.3.2 Hope and new connections.

This subordinate theme reflects how all five participants experience a process of learning to trust the decision they have made to leave the gang, and importantly, the relationships they developed, behind them. All five participants note the importance of staying focussed on their goals; placing hope and trust in new support networks appeared to be as important to them as letting go of their old networks. Jesse, David and Tom capture the fear of being kept back had they stayed with the gang as a sense of being: *"stuck"* [Jesse, line 526],*"not the way forward"* [David, line 179], and *"in that loop"* [Tom, line 133]. There is a sense that a return to the gang life would enmesh them, and not allow them to escape. The distance that they have between themselves and the gang now allows them to see the severity of the consequences of remaining in a gang in terms of the path their life would follow. Jesse reflects on what he believes has helped him along his journey:

> Um, there's people, like family members, friends an then there's also like ovver people and they've shared their experiences with me you know, jus showed me things that are possible. Coz when you're grow up in like these kind of, the hood or the streets or whatever you wanna call it, you don't really get shown that these fings are possible. [Jesse: lines 225-227].

In the above excerpt, there is a sense of Jesse having widened his support networks beyond the gang. He appears to value people having reached out to him too, noting that with his changed outlook towards the gang, he is receptive to the advice of family and friends. Jesse's narrative suggests that he is extending empathy towards himself, as he realises that

had he been shown a different way forward to begin with, that things could have been different.

The message of hope continues, as Jesse, Paul and Tom considered their roles as mentors for youth at risk or involved in crime. Jesse's role as a peer mentor helps him to reflect on what he wants out of his interpersonal relationships:

> So for instance this job, that I'm going through, the boys I work with, I can consider them as my friends coz not only so we work in the same place and we work aiming for the same fing, also on the outside it we're not going back onto what we're doin or we're not fallin back to old habits… So it's jus knowing what a person wants in themselves to see if they're your friend, kind of fing [Jesse: line 507-512].

Jesse emphasises the importance of having and working towards a shared goal to stay focussed. He appears to seek assurances that those in the same role as him are as committed as he is to making changes, both in the workplace and outside, where there are more temptations. There is a message of hope in Jesse's perception of his new friendships. The idea of being on a journey together with a shared goal creates a sense of hope for a different and positive future; a hope which he did not have in the past. Their commitment is also a measure of whether they are friends. Paul's view converges with Jesse's:

> I just know for a fact that the people you surround yourself with makes a difference…an even while I'm here doin this mentoring thing, two years ago I would have been like nah, that's not me that's not me I don't do them fings. But now, bang, I gotta do this, you gotta take every opportunity as it comes [Paul: line 504-506].

In the excerpt above, Paul highlights the extent to which those around him influence him. Paul knows what he needs to do to achieve his end goal but is more overtly coming to terms with the changes he has committed to making to get there. For example, his comment referring to his new role as the *"mentoring thing"*, suggests it is a role that he has not fully integrated and is still getting used to as being associated with him. There is a sense that mentoring feels alien to him, and he has therefore not fully embraced it as something that

defines him. However, his desire for his life to be different means that he accepts it as a part of the plan to help him move forward. Paul is open about the fact that mentoring was something he would not have considered before; the very fact that he has considered mentoring is suggestive of his commitment and determination to do things differently. Paul goes on to reflect on his tendency to see things in a certain way, and is open that he made judgements about others:

> D'you know what yeah? It's not even about me its about all the people there. People that come here are not like that coz I admit I stereotype people from here. I fink people for here are exactly the way I am pretty much just angry kids but no no completely different to what I expected. Coz I never really chilled with anyone from here. You know I was never really friends with anyone from here. I was the only one from my friendship groups that's ever come here. But it's like the people that come here are completely different to what I expected. That's what I mean by don't judge a book by its cover. [Paul: line 510-514].

Paul reflects on how inaccurate his assumptions were of others attending mentoring, and he appears to have judged both himself and others quite negatively. There is a felt sense of Paul being surprised at what he experienced with his new peer group, suggesting the most profound part of the experience for Paul is seeing others for who and what they are for the first time. Paul's acknowledgement that he was the only one from his old friendship group to attend the centre suggests he expected to feel out of place and different. However, because this does not happen, it perhaps gives him comfort that he can find common ground with, and acceptance by, new people.

Jesse and to a lesser degree, Tom, report re-kindling positive attachments with their families following their leaving the gang. Jesse appears curious about what other people have to say and reflects on advice from his mother, which supports him in his journey:

> An literally, everyone I meet, that has something different that I haven't asked or could ask. How do you do that? So like I always fink like, from, ma mum always told me that have your mind set on

> something but always have a back-up plan but don't think of of the back-up plan until you know hundred per cent your original plan has failed. Like you cannot get back into it, like you can't, if you fall off your horse, and you know you can't pick yourself back up, go the back-up plan. If you can, pick yourself up, then definitely pick yourself up. That's what my mum has told me that not to y'know second finking about ah I'm na go to this coz you're gonna be going back and forth, back and forth so, it doesn't work…it's helped me a lot. You know. I mean me mum's kinda like, showed me a lot of fings. So yeah, I usually listen to her. Sometimes though I don't act like I listen to ma mum I listen to [laughs]. [Jesse: lines 251-263].

Jesse reflects on what it is like to ask others (e.g., his peers at the mentoring scheme and/or youth support schemes) about how they gained skills, and what their experiences were beforehand, almost to gauge where he might fit in. His mother's advice seems to have had an impact on how he approaches new and old challenges. There is a sense that Jesse may have a plan in mind, to help him leave the gang, and to start a new future. Neither staying in the gang nor leaving it appears to be a particularly easy option, and the analogy of falling off a horse powerfully conveys the challenge of leaving the gang, whilst acknowledging that being resilient is hard at times. Central to the message Jesse is conveying is his determination to move forward by being committed to the decision he has made to change.

Alongside focus and strength, Tom and David capture the way in which they are able to cognitively process what is going on around them now in the absence of the gang, which, in turn, leads to their emotional experiences changing. David identifies the *"stress"* he experienced in the gang to prompt his decision to leave. Tom reflects that being away from it means he can *"think",* [line 179], suggesting that he did not necessarily attend to his own thoughts at the time:

> Like two different worlds. Unbelievable. Like even thinking about it now it's crazy like, it's actually two different worlds but obviously being around professionals, meeting professionals speaking wiv professionals um, jus yeah, an ma mind state jus changed. The things that I desired the things I want an

> I've started a bit more planning, a bit more organisation, obviously I did still have organisation, but not for the right stuff. I jus became a bit more, become more um, what's the word? Positive?
>
> [Tom: line 294-298]

In the above excerpt, Tom describes his role as a mentor and is almost in disbelief that he was part of one world and now another, with *"professionals",* as though this is not a reality he had ever considered possible. His changing mind state reflects his evolving self-identity, whereby he re-evaluates what is important to him by putting his skills to good use that allows his confidence to grow. He considers the personal impact his sense of achievement has on him, and his tentative expression of his feelings is as though he is seeking permission to feel this way.

3.4.3.3 The ongoing struggle.

This final subordinate theme captures the way in which some of the experiences participants had in the gang continue to affect their day-to-day functioning and habits. Three of the five participants identified with experiences reflective of post-traumatic stress, which include hypervigilance, anxiety and flashbacks, irritability and difficulty regulating emotions. In addition, both Jesse and Tom identified they experienced the gang and their related experiences within it as *"trauma"* or *"traumatic",* however they were noted to struggle to verbally explain or articulate their experiences further. Jesse noted that above all, the feelings he associated with distressing experiences within the gang had the most profound effect upon him, and strengthened his intention to leave and not return to gang-related life:

> I fink it was my experiences that made me leave. But, the main fing was the emotions the feelings you know the trauma all these fings that make you wanna fink no you know I can't go through them [Jesse: line 547-548].

His narrative conveyed his struggle to explain how he experienced trauma as he reported: *"I can't explain it its hard"* [Jesse: line 550], suggesting the experience was beyond

words, and potentially, is still distressing. This led Jesse to go on to offer a more tangible explanation of suffering, related to being physically hurt and the way in which this experience (similar to the experiences of Tom, John and Paul) significantly affected him in a negative way. Jesse describes the *"multiple injuries"* and the *"multiple conflicts"* he experienced [line 568] as changing his mindset from his life being exciting to being unbearable:

> I mean I bin to multiple injuries I bin bricked, beaten up real bad a couple of times, you know hospitalised a couple of time, a hospital record that's probably amazing [laughs] so you know, it's, it's jus these small fings you know? An, again that will bring into it if I get injured really bad then I won't be able to do something. Like my last injury was I got stabbed in the back, and the blade, they said if it was a couple more inches' to the left it would have hit ma spine and I would have been paralysed. Which I wasn't paralysed but for a while I had to still for a while and you know they said I wouldn't be able to do anyfink an and that really got to me you know? Its just and even the recovery process, I couldn't wipe ma arse, you know, I couldn't move ma arms I got up to six stabs in ma back and two in ma leg. So I mean, I couldn't, I couldn't do much. You know, I wanna go outside and go for a run I couldn't' do that, all these fings I couldn't even ride a bike, I couldn't go corner shop [Jesse: line 571-578].

The excerpt above shows how much value Jesse places on maintaining his self-respect through being able to function well physically. Jesse's narrative tone is one of fear, whilst still attempting to maintain his self-respect through his minimisation of experiences of the victimisation and violence he survived. However, the severity of the last injury inflicted upon him appears to have had a profound effect upon him, prompting him to re-evaluate his priorities and giving him an increased recognition of the value of his life. The gang life was a threat to him; the progressive increase in severity of injuries meant there was psychological distress experienced because of worry about being incapacitated in some way. The experience of humiliation and loss of control at not being able to care for himself, or do any of the things

he wanted to do, is indicative of this. Jesse reflects on the felt experience of unrest he still experiences:

> there are, there are like you do kind of flashbacks an recaps so you know a situation's comin or you feel the vibe an it's like this is gonna be something different or you know you kinda learn or pick up on certain fings. [Jesse: line 312-315].

Jesse captures the idea that his experiences have helped him to become aware of danger in new situations. There is some indication, however, that he may ruminate on past events and situations he encountered. He does attempt, however, to firmly place experiences in the past, as a way of creating distance between himself and his thoughts. However, he later reflects on how some of his experiences when he was younger have influenced his current thoughts and responses to situations, such as having his *"guard up"* [Jesse: line 369]:

> … when I was younger there was those couple of times where you know I see someone standing outside someone's house an walking in like it's nothing an then they followed me in an we got into a fight so people that have enemies an stuff things have got [pauses] really out of hand [pauses] [Jesse: line 363-369].

The excerpt above powerfully captures the way in which Jesse continues to be haunted by the fear of his past experience and of re-experiencing it. It is noted that he has not only observed others being watched before they are attacked in their home, but has experienced it first-hand. Further, there is also a sense of real threat to him currently because of his decision to leave, and thus the risk of being a target when he considers the threat of harm can escalate with enemies.

Tom also reported experiencing *"traumatisin things"* [line 238] and *"seen a lot of stuff"* [line 242]. He describes it as a time in his life that was: *"a bit dark…a bit like hard"* [line 238]. Tom appears to be at a loss to describe how he made sense of his feelings and suggests that the experiences are not processed and therefore cannot be understood; concealed in a dark place to be avoided.

As noted in the subordinate theme "*Letting go",* Tom reflected on avoiding negative emotions as a way of coping. Upon exiting the gang, this continues to be a strategy he draws on: *"but I try to escape it its mind gaming it's in your mind know what I mean. It's the mind battle"* [Tom, line 472]. Tom appears to go to extreme lengths to avoid the experience of the negative emotion because it appears to have such a powerful overwhelming effect. He notes times when the emotion can overwhelm him such as when he is faced with a challenge, leading to an outburst: *"when things are not going my way so yeah…anger a bit, short fuse* [Tom: line 451].

Paul considers that the experiences of growing up around gang activity, violence and a sense of unrest in his neighbourhood has led to a lack of trust in others and "normalised" the experience of "being on edge". Paul describes the impact of losing friends in a short space of time to gang violence: *"It's something I got used to but I shouldn't be used to, like I lose friends and it's like…I knew him from nursery"* [Paul: line 264-265]. He expresses upset and anger at the loss of his friends. Seeing others grieve for their losses is also experienced as difficult, and Paul struggles with understanding his own loss:

> There was people sitting in the counsel room like crying their eyes out I'm never gonna be able to live normal again, you know they're the people that having a laugh about getting stabbed up an just make jokes about it now like if that's really affected you, you know, you wouldn't be joking about stuff. But that's only coz everyone's desensitised, been affected, really badly…An also you just need to get on with it [Paul: line 331-334].

Paul's anger towards others appears to stem from his difficulty of identifying whether they are sincere or not because he has seen instances, where people have shown extreme opposite responses following a death. However, there appears to be a part of him that can identify with the contrasting response because of the way in which he himself, alongside

others, is almost immune to the reality of living in fear of their lives, and the lives of those around them who they care about.

3.5 Discussion

The superordinate and subordinate themes demonstrate a progressive trajectory of how participants experienced their lives before, during and after their gang involvement. It is therefore helpful to consider the two research questions in turn.

3.5.1 How do youth make sense of positive and negative life experiences leading up to their involvement with a gang?

In the first superordinate theme "*For me, it's just how life was*", participants expressed the difficulties of living a normal life because of the places (i.e., the communities) they grew up in. Most of the participants appeared to experience their communities as unsafe and unpredictable, with gang and illegal activity being the norm. Their later involvement in the gang, as reflected within the subordinate theme "*Not having my needs met"*, was not only shaped by the area itself but also by the way in which they believe they were perceived by key figures around them (i.e., parents and teachers); they felt like such individuals misunderstood them and that they did not fully understand their needs. Participants reported not feeling understood, and for each of them there appeared to be a unique reason for their discontent during the early adolescent stages of their lives. For example, Paul experienced a lack of acceptance into legitimate ways of gaining success through overhearing what his teachers thought of him at school. He described growing up with a fear of the area and the expectation of being confronted with crime. In addition to this, there were experiences of inadequacy through not having his need for belonging and thus acceptance met because he was unable to afford to look/dress like his peers. Jesse believed that his educational needs were not met in school and that he was not given the right level of support. In addition, from a young age he

learnt that committing crime was a means of survival. John experiences the loss of his role model, a member of his family, following their imprisonment, which appeared to have taken away the experience of hope for a crime-free future. Tom experienced a difficult relationship with his parents who he believed to be controlling of his friendships, which subsequently became gang affiliations.

Collectively, the experiences of John, Jesse, Paul and Tom showed how the social support networks they had at the time from family and school were ineffective in reducing the stress they experienced. That is not to say that they did not have familial or adult support at the time they were growing up, however, their experiences and perceptions of not being understood would suggest that they were vulnerable to the influence of delinquent peers within their areas; believing that these peers offered them some sort of support and understanding which they were lacking in their lives.

The inability to secure support from resources including home, community and school is provided as a key reason for gang involvement (Sharkey et al., 2015). As such, the responses of the young people in this study offer support to the literature.Youth most likely to join gangs are those who feel cut off from systems such as family, education and legitimate community networks (Marshall, Webb, & Tilley, 2005), who then identify with a group that offers companionship and identity (Blakemore & Blakemore, 1988; Wood & Alleyne, 2010), albeit a group who engage in criminal acts. Consistent with uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2000), it is likely that participants experienced a level of uncertainty about who they were and what their personal identity was at this stage. Therefore, the participants sought out positive interactions and relationship opportunities with a group, given feelings of hopelessness and lack of connectedness within their existing relationships. However, it is noted that Paul initially rejected the idea of joining a gang and warned his own friends not to sell drugs. He

appeared to have developed a friendship group that later became a gang. This finding demonstrates that not all youth perceive that they are joining gangs, but rather they form friendships and become part of a group that meets their need to belong. Similarly, Mozova (2017) found that participants developed a friendship group that later became a gang. Participants spoke of their experiences in relation to their later gang affiliation and provided accounts of how their experiences led them to seek out people who would accept them. They focused more on negative as opposed to positive life events. This may have been a reflection of what they had experienced, but this focus may also have served to enable them to justify their actions (i.e., to take blame away from themselves and place it on their life experiences).

3.5.2 How did participants experience relationships and social support during gang involvement and in what way did this impact upon their day-to-day functioning?

The superordinate theme, "*The gang and I: A sense of belonging",* together with the two subordinate themes within it: "*Being there"* and "*Feeling a part of something",* were considered to best capture participants' experiences of perceived social support during their time in the gang. As they transition out of the gang, participants reflect on their experiences of change, noticing that support and being accepted by others remained important to their sense of selves, as reflected within the subordinate theme "*Hope and new connections"*.

In the theme "*Being there"*, participants appeared to value the presence of gang-involved peers who showed them support. All the participants felt that the gang were there for them when others in their lives were not. Many of the indications of support were derived from taking part in activities together and being offered support and guidance (e.g., emotional and practical support); support was felt through the continued presence and friendship of gang members. Participants took on the role of listening and acting as a sounding board for their peers. Within the gang, they were provided with a space to 'hang out' and engage in activities

together. Whilst these examples show variation in the type of support or advice given by peers, they all demonstrate that participants felt their presence and opinions were valued by the gang members, which led to closer bonds within the group (reflected in the theme *"Feeling a part of something"*). These experiences are reflective of esteem-building support, where expressing concern and care for one another leads an individual to internalise a positive view of themselves in relation to others (Cutrona, 2000).

The theme of "*Being there"* also provides support for how joining a gang served to meet the needs of participants in a way in which any group does; by fulfilling the need for experiencing a sense of community, having a good time, and feeling valued (Goldstein, 1991). Despite the violence and delinquent behaviour occurring within the gang, the relationships developed with gang-related peers were perceived as no different to non-gang relationships. This was encapsulated by David and Paul who reflected on their involvement in social activities, whilst in the gang, such as sports, going out and talking to girls; such activities are considered to feature in non-gang adolescent life.

The role of the gang was influential in the experience of acceptance that they had not experienced previously in other peer groups or at school. Rejection from legitimate means of gaining status and respect, such as from parents and teachers, would appear to have led participants to connect with a group that was accepting of them, rather than labelling or stigmatising them, as expressed by Paul and Jesse. As a result of this connection, participants were inclined to accept advice from their peers when addressing difficulties they experienced.

This type of support was prevalent when they faced stress and adversities, for example, John reported that he grew up and socialised with gang-involved peers who he perceived to act protectively towards him. This was notable when his family member was imprisoned because of gang-related offences, which led the gang to assume a role akin to that

of family, by advising and encouraging John to have a prosocial lifestyle. John therefore perceived the gang as a having a protective role against gang involvement and provided him with a sense of hope for the future. However, in spite of not being pressured to commit crime, through observing their behaviour and his association with them, he chose to become involved in gang-related crime. Similarly, Tom sought comfort and received emotional and practical support from his gang-involved peers when he was rejected by his family for his involvement with them and became homeless.

However, not all participants perceived the offer of involvement in crime to be a positive or hopeful prospect to them. Paul strongly resisted being involved in selling drugs and appeared to have positively evaluated the parental support he and some of his peers received. He appeared to have benefitted from positive experiences growing up with his mother who gave him a sense of stability, showing him that he was liked and cared for, which appeared to resonate with him even during periods when he may have been tempted by his peers. However, he was still susceptible to pressures later on when he engaged in repeated conflict with a rival group with his peers. This suggests that an individual's perception of social support is mediated by what they are experiencing at the time (Vaux, 1990). For example, Paul felt he required the support of his peers rather than his mother for the particular situation he was in. Equally, Jesse appeared to place less importance on the emotional support his peers could offer him when he first joined, but appeared appreciative that they offered him options to address his financial problems and ways to increase his ability to contribute to his family's upkeep.

As participants became embedded within the gang, as captured by the theme "*Feeling a part of something",* they reported a sense of oneness with their fellow gang members. They described feeling closer to their peers, and as a result of their perceptions of being supported,

they adopted ways of thinking and behaving shared by the group. The gang membership literature is consistent with the participants' experiences of the gang being a source of support (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Vigil, 1988; Wood & Alleyne, 2010); the support is perceived as nurturing and validating of one's self-worth (Cullen, 1994). Within the context of a group or gang, there is a noticeable shift from self-esteem to group esteem. Acting together as a united group, especially in conflict situations with another group, serves to reinforce how the group identity is defined, increasing cohesion and dependence (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Within some of the participants' narrative, examples of increasing cohesiveness in the gang are evident. For example, Tom articulated experiencing strong emotional ties as *"love"* (e.g., Tom: line 90). It was signalled through participants having increased involvement and being shown how to defend oneself in fights. This definition of love can be considered unique to the participants, and points to the importance they placed upon achieving a certain position that signified acceptance within the gang. Some participants reported increased experiences for criminal learning and violence within the gang as time went on. In addition, there appeared to be a progression from prioritising their own needs to prioritising the needs of the gang. Not only did the participants' experiences suggest the development of offence-related cognitions that normalised violence, but also over time, the participants' view of their identity became more in line with the identity of the group. This is consistent with research related to social identity theory formation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which demonstrates how gang members assume a collective identity with the group (Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012; Wood, 2014), which, in turn, shape the individual's perception of what their needs are in relation to those of the group and how it operates (Vigil, 1988). Furthermore, an individual's confidence increases the more agreement there is within the group, leading to processes of deindividuation, whereby the group needs replace individual needs, and the gang becomes

stronger as a collective and susceptible to influence by immediate situational demands (Zimbardo, 2007), such as the need to act with increasing levels of violence each time for Tom.

There was support for the way in which the gang's acceptance of antisocial norms served to facilitate individual-based characteristics, such as the propensity for acting violently for Jesse and Tom. Their accounts provide support for the MPSO framework (Harkins & Dixon, 2010) from a situational perspective; 'Social Comparison' theory (Schultz, 1967) considers that looking to the group for validation and agreement in one's beliefs reinforces one's sense of belonging and acceptance into a group. Furthermore, Tom noted how acting violently elevated his status within the gang, and led him to feel powerful and in control, providing some support for 'Social Dominance' theory (Schultz, 1967). The gang provided the support for them both to fulfil their objectives.

Social support theory posits that for networks to be sustained, the network resources should be formed and maintained (Vaux, 1990), otherwise they risk deteriorating if neglected or become untenable. In gang terms, this suggests that attention should be paid to how relationships between gang members are experienced over time. The subordinate theme *"Letting go"* captures the shift in perceived support participants experienced; they begin to experience a dissonance in wanting to be in the gang, whilst not wanting to experience the many negative consequences of this life. For example, participants experienced the realisation that involvement with the gang led to arrests, imprisonment, and victimisation which, aside from tangible repercussions, also resulted in negative emotions and changing perceptions of their friendships. Participants noticed their peers were not as accepting of their shifting views, and there was a sense of them having little influence in changing the group's views and behaviours, as they were inherently part of their identity.

For example, it is notable that Tom's perception of support, belongingness and willingness to readily engage in gang violence, changed significantly over time, whilst the expectation from the gang for him to engage in violent acts did not. As Tom's responsibility and status in the gang grew, the expectation for him to engage in violence increased his experience of stress. This is consistent with research whereby gang members feel pressured to act violently so that their gang identity remains intact and they maintain respect from peers (Anderson, 1990; Hughes & Short, 2005; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965). Consistent with the MPSO theory (Harkins & Dixon, 2013), a fear of rejection from the gang for voicing disagreement with their norms and expectations is considered to have occurred for Tom, which led him to continue to perpetrate violence.

Within the theme *"The ongoing struggle",* for example, the physical injuries Jesse sustained led to the realisation that he, as an individual, had to face consequences of his life choices, and that the gang was not always able to provide protection and was, in fact, having a negative impact on his life. Jesse also feared being attacked on his own. These experiences led him to question the reality of facing danger and threat in the gang life, and furthered his perceptions that there was a lack of connectedness and concern for his best interests from his peers. Research supports these findings as the excitement and highs experienced when joining a gang that change following continuous exposure to violence (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002). The more time an individual has spent with a gang, the more negative attitudes towards violence are noted.

However, it is clear from the participants' narratives that their decisions to leave the gang were not easily made. Participants reflected on their experiences of the loss of relationships, and connectedness with the gang. With their personal identities merged into the gang identity, letting go of these friendships meant having to reaffirm their self-identity,

which was experienced as challenging, especially whilst adjusting to unfamiliar people and environments. Some of the participants recognised that they would need to make a gradual shift from the gang, and this appeared to be borne out of acknowledging the emotional and social ties they had. These findings add to the literature which identifies that leaving the gang is not a straightforward process because of the numerous pulls and pushes to leave (such as personal victimisation), but also to return to the gang (Bjorgo, 2002; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Vigil, 1988). Some participants struggled to adjust to their new paths and the unfamiliarity they experienced, and described urges to return to their old gang associates for friendship, protection and comfort. This powerfully demonstrates the key role the gang played in providing not only emotional support but also a mechanism for coping with negative emotions. The research also notes how the temptation to return to old lifestyles involving gangs surface when individuals desire emotional or material support (Moloney, MacKenzie, Hunt, & Joe-Laidler, 2009; Pyrooz et al., 2010). The participants' experiences of leaving also highlighted that they were not able to cut ties completely with the gang until perhaps they were comfortable and felt a connection with another network of support, demonstrating the importance of a suitable alternative for the gang in order to leave it completely (Dong & Krohn, 2016).

However, as participants transitioned out of the gang, they reported the experiences of growing hope regarding their futures. All participants were involved with youth support schemes of a type via their contact with the youth offending services. For some of the participants, the conditions of their contact with services required them to attend the centre and engage with other youth via sessions which supported them to improve and develop skills it was felt they lacked (based on assessment by staff), linked to their educational and vocational needs. In addition, staff recognised the potential impact of the loss of support an

individual would experience upon leaving the gang; contact with this service was designed to address this loss. Each young person was assigned a key worker, and a caring, supportive stance was used in the delivery of sessions, enabling youth to feel that they were working alongside others, rather than feeling as though they were being stigmatised or being forced to engage. The wider literature supports the idea that the concepts of control and support are rehabilitative ideals that can work hand in hand, rather than be considered opposing ways of working with individuals (Colvin, Cullen, & Vander Van, 2002).

Some of the participants who were involved in a peer-led mentoring scheme (where they provide advice and guidance to younger gang-involved youth) appeared to have found hope through connecting with young people who had experienced similar things as them, or had re-connected with family as a consequence of leaving the gang. Their growing experiences of providing support to younger gang-involved youth are likely to positively influence the participants' identities further; they may become individuals who have a greater sense of moral purpose and durable connections which are considered pro-social rather than pro-criminal (Cullen, 1994). With respect to support from caregivers and families, the wider literature supports the idea that an increase or continuation of family contacts, including the perception of consistent support from a parental figure, are important to disengaging from gang membership (Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule, 2014b) which can be protective against future gang affiliation (Dong & Krohn, 2016). For those involved in the peer-led mentoring scheme, there is a good possibility of forming relationships that are perceived as natural and socially supportive in terms of offering not only practical support but also companionship and a shared understanding of their experiences (Brady, Dolan, & Canavan, 2015). It was also evident from participants' narratives (e.g., Paul) that they were able to re-connect and find new connections with other peers because they were open to establishing new contacts and felt as though they

were being accepted by being themselves. The literature supports the idea that reciprocity within supportive networks can increase a sense of moral commitment to legitimate social settings and institutions (Dong & Krohn, 2016), as well as increasing the feeling of hope by envisioning positive things for the future (Anderson, 1999; Maruna, 2001).

For some participants, maintaining ties with the gang was also considered a way of managing or reducing the risk of victimisation for leaving, particularly those individuals (Jesse and Tom) who appeared to be quite heavily involved in gang activity. Whilst this study did not specifically explore the level of gang membership, or the adolescent developmental stage participants were at when they joined, it is noted that gang members who are more embedded in a gang will leave the gang at a slower rate (Pyrooz, Sweeten, & Piquero, 2013) than those who are not as strongly embedded. However, a powerful motivating factor to leave the gang was also identified as being the difficulty in tolerating emotions, such as fear and anxiety following exposure to excessive violence in the gang. Participants' experiences (once they were in the gang) were very different to their perceptions of what it would be like when they joined it. Once they left the gang, they experienced a continuation of living with the fear of threat and danger, in addition to the memories and activation of sensations linked to past incidents. They provided accounts of how they made sense of their lived experiences of the trauma they experienced and subsequent coping mechanisms. For example, Jesse articulated his experiences and his reliance on performing safety behaviours. In contrast, Tom appeared to perceive his experiences as overwhelming to the point where they were better left unexplored and adopted an avoidant approach. It is likely that breaking away from the gang allowed participants to begin to come to terms with what they have been experiencing internally, which gave rise to the expression of anxiety and fear-related experiences. There is emerging research to support this finding given that gang members are more likely to

experience fear of victimisation and anxiety than non-gang members (Coid et al., 2013). Participants' experiences were strongly indicative of post-traumatic stress and anxiety symptoms, and, once again, this finding is unsurprising in light of research which purports that gang members are increasingly likely to experience higher levels of PTSD symptoms of dissociation and emotional numbing (Kerig et al., 2016) (see Chapter 2).

3.5.3 Methodological strengths and limitations

3.5.3.1 Sample size.

Five young males participated in this study. Whilst the sample size fell within the four to ten participant sample size recommended for professional doctorate projects (Smith et al., 2009), it would have been beneficial to have additional participants. As stated above, the aim was to recruit seven participants, however this became challenging due to potential participants becoming unavailable at the time of the study, imprisonment or changing their minds, resulting in a final sample of five participants. It is noted that the purpose of qualitative research is to enhance understanding and knowledge through undertaking detailed analyses of personal narratives (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The sample was based in London (UK), and thus may be representative of contextual factors related to that area and not necessarily reflective of gangs elsewhere in the UK.

3.5.3.2 Homogeneity.

In keeping with IPA principles, whilst efforts were made to identify a homogenous, purposive sample (Smith et al., 2009), there is undoubtedly variation in how each individual had experienced their lives up to the present day, depending on their individual characteristics, formative experiences and cultural beliefs they have grown up with. The findings of the study would suggest that participants were not quite as homogenous as anticipated. For example, the three participants who self-reported past gang membership did

not disclose how long they had been part of a gang, or whether they identified themselves as core or fringe gang members, depending on their level of involvement with gang activities (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Thrasher, 1927; Vigil, 1988). However, it is noted that two of the five participants reported that they had friends and family who were gang-involved but did not self-report to be a gang member. These individuals, in addition to Paul, throughout their interviews, perceived themselves as belonging to a friendship group as opposed to a gang. This is an interesting observation, as it also challenges the way in which youth perceive their relationships with peers by experiencing them as friendships rather than gangs (Mozova, 2017). However, information provided by coaching mentors in their assessments, and the participants' responses during the interviews, suggested that participants met the criteria for gang membership (Alleyne & Wood, 2010). In addition, whilst a number of the participants no longer perceived themselves to be gang-involved, it is likely that, by virtue of their past gang involvement and the bonds they still appeared to have with them, this may have impacted on how much they still felt a part of the group, having some bearing on their reported experiences. The current study did not identify different levels of gang membership held by participants (e.g., core and fringe members) (Thrasher, 1927), which may have a bearing on how much violence gang members are exposed to, and subsequently how they are affected psychologically. Core gang members are considered to have greater involvement in violence against rival gangs (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996), and have increased involvement in their gang through spontaneous acts and decision-making for the gang (Klein, 1971).

It was noted that participants showed interest for and were recruited via their coaching mentors, strongly suggesting that they were motivated to engage in the interview process and were at a stage where they were able to talk about their experiences openly. This would contrast with gang-involved youth who are not considered to be at a stage of readiness to

engage in the process. Despite their apparent willingness to discuss their lived experiences involving the gang, the participants may have had previous negative experiences of being questioned by those in authority (i.e., within the criminal justice system).

A further limitation could be related to the language used and articulated by participants in terms of the researcher not interpreting its meaning in the way in which the participants intended it to be. However, attempts were made by the researcher to apply IPA principles of making interpretations for the individual and their particular experiences placed in their particular culture and their perspective of meaning making of it.

Using an IPA approach required researcher reflexivity (see Appendix K for a reflective statement) to be considered throughout the process. Efforts were made to do this through the completion of reflective logs at each stage, starting from post-interview to analysis and interpretation of the data. In addition, summaries were completed following the transcription of each interview so that any preconceptions of the researcher were identified to reduce the likelihood that these may influence the analysis and interpretation. Guidance was followed using resources on conducting IPA studies (e.g., Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2007) and through the attendance of IPA training and supervision. It is noted that the account provided here reflects the researcher's interpretations of the analysed data.

3.5.4 Implications for clinical practice and suggestions for further research

The findings of the current research exploring experiences of social support in gang-involved youth identify it to be experienced both positively and negatively. Based on the analyses of participants' positive and negative experiences, a number of suggestions for practice and future research have been identified:

- Interventions, which focus on understanding and enhancing youths' individual needs, relevant to the experiences of belongingness and feeling a part of a

group, are important. All the participants in the current study reported a sense of disconnect and not having their needs met by significant others around them when growing up. It is important that the needs of youth are understood at an individual level, and that efforts are made to enhance their experiences of feeling as though they truly matter, and are connected to the networks they live in. As such, providing supportive structures within schools and communities is important, particularly where support is not provided within the home (Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule, 2014; Pyrooz, 2014).

- It is important that youth who are transitioning out of gangs are able to access interventions that provide both practical and companion-based social support to allow youth to develop confidence and new peer relationships that are supportive and prosocial (Brady, Dolan, & Canavan, 2015). As such, youth may benefit from services that focus on enhancing experiences of self-determination by considering an individual's strengths and resources (Maruna & LeBel, 2003); giving them a sense of working with them as opposed to on them. The scheme some of the participants were part of in the present study is a particularly relevant example. Participants experienced engagement and meaningful relationship-development with coaching mentors, who not only assisted the identification of relevant services for each participant, but also encouraged participants to co-produce their own therapeutic plan to engage with different activities and learn new skills to help them meet their individual goal. Not only did participants try out new activities they also took on new roles as peer mentors, which involved enabling other marginalised youth to access vocational courses and opportunities. The participants in the current study were part of a unique

project, and it is recommended that such opportunities are more widely available to young people who have been gang-involved in the criminal justice system.

- The findings suggest that participants' experiences have continued to have a lasting impact on them. This points to the need for individualised support to address issues relating specifically to mental health and emotional well-being. It is important that service providers recognise that engaging gang-involved youth in interventions addressing mental health and emotion regulation difficulties may present with challenges, due to the view that they should present as tough and resilient, and where admitting a mental health problem is seen as a weakness. However, adopting unique approaches to engaging gang-involved youth, such as psychologically-informed practices (i.e., engaging them in their own environments and using evidence-led psychological models in practice) (Durcan, Zlotowitz, & Stubbs, 2017), or providing holistic interventions that support them with the mental health difficulties in conjunction with other relevant vocational activities offering therapeutic value, can aid recovery.

3.6 Conclusion

The findings highlighted the relevance of experiences of growing up in a particular place as contributory to their later gang involvement, as did the psychological experiences of isolation and disconnect from important others around them. The gang offered a sense of hope and solidarity through social support mechanisms, which were experienced by participants whilst actively engaging with them. However, consistent with gang research (e.g., Decker & Lauritsen, 2002) was the finding that after facing negative consequences of gang involvement (e.g., being arrested for a gang-related crime, experiencing victimisation, difficulty managing negative emotional experiences), participants reflected on their behaviour and came to the

realisation that being in a gang may have a negative impact on their lives. Establishing new, supportive networks appeared to be an important factor in enhancing their motivations and confidence to move forward without their gang-involved peers. Despite these realisations and efforts, it is noted that the decision to leave the gang appeared to be a challenging one because of the emotional bonds and connections formed. Finally, the experiences of the participants demonstrate the importance of paying greater attention to the mental health needs of gang-involved youth.

Chapter 4

Critique of The Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence Scales

(CREV & CREV-R)

4.1 Introduction

Over the last 20 years, there has been an increasing level of interest in the study of exposure to community violence (ECV). There is a lack of consensus as to how ECV is defined, however, one definition offered is that ECV includes "instances of interpersonal harm or threats of harm within one's neighbourhood or community, and excludes related constructs such as domestic violence, physical maltreatment, sexual abuse, peer bullying, and media and video game violence" (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014, p. 69). Children and adolescents who experience ECV are adversely affected in terms of their wellbeing (Richters, 1993). A number of individual factors are considered to increase the adverse consequences of ECV, such as gang involvement (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014). Gang-involved youth are more likely to have increased levels of not only exposure to violence, but also of involvement in committing acts of violence (Taylor, Paterson, Esbensen, & Freng, 2007).

Studies have demonstrated that ECV in youth is linked to psychological problems (e.g., reviews conducted by Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Fowler, Tompsett, Braciszewski, Jacques-Tiura, & Baltes, 2009), such as anxiety (Cooley-Quille, Boyd, Frantz, & Walsh, 2001) and depression (Kennedy, Bybee, Sullivan, & Greeson, 2010; Lambert, Nylund-Gibson, Copeland-Linder, & Ialongo, 2010). The relationship between ECV and PTSD appears to be the most strongly linked, however, and in their meta-analysis of 114 studies comprised of adolescent samples, Fowler et al. (2009) showed that the association between post-traumatic stress symptoms and ECV had a stronger effect size than it did for internalising symptoms (e.g., anxiety and withdrawal) or externalising symptoms (e.g., aggression and delinquency). However, studies have found the association between ECV and externalising problems to be more prominent than for internalising symptoms (e.g., Kliewer, Lepore, Oskin, & Johnson, 1998).

There have been mixed findings reported as to whether boys experience ECV more than girls, with some studies finding support for greater ECV for boys (Menard & Huizinga, 2001; Selner-O'Hagan, Kindlon, Buka, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1998), and others reporting that there is no difference in rates of ECV for boys and girls when violence, such as threats and sexual assaults, have been included (Aisenberg, Ayon, & Orozco-Figueroa, 2008; Lambert et al., 2010; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2006).

In spite of the growing study of ECV, there remains a lack of agreement regarding the definition, operationalisation and measurement of the construct (Guterman, Cameron, & Staller, 2000). Researchers have overlooked the importance of distinguishing specific outcomes among youth by amalgamating all types of violence exposure as one type of general stressor to give a composite score (Agnew, 1985; Trickett, Duran, & Horn, 2003). This has led researchers to adopt a position of measuring mental health problems and psychopathology in youth with the use of a single, summed measure of ECV. The current approach to measurement means that contextual factors linked to ECV are overlooked, such as the severity and type of violence, and the stability of violence over time (Feerick & Prinz, 2003; Shahinfar, Fox, & Leavitt, 2000). A further difficulty to making comparisons between samples to determine ECV has been the variation of the types of violence incidents included in measures. Although there are similarities in terms of what ECV consists of across measures, only certain ECV measures assess the threat of violence. Measures often omit sexual assaults as a type of violence despite females identified as being at a higher risk of this type of violence than males, which, in turn, may underrepresent the current levels of violence reported, and the reported gender differences in ECV (Turner et al., 2006).

Given the negative impact of exposure to community violence, assessing extent of violence exposure is an important task in identifying those most at risk and to be able to

determine the level of risk that is experienced. The assessment of exposure to violence can provide the basis for understanding the impact of violence to inform the development of preventive interventions for victims of violence, acknowledging that gang members too, are likely affected and also require treatment for psychological symptoms indicative of trauma. Addressing the negative consequences of exposure to violence can serve as a valuable addition to existing assessments which place a focus on treatment and interventions for perpetrators of violence. However, the utility of ECV measures has been limited due to the lack of information known about their psychometric qualities (Martin, Revington, & Seedat, 2013). As such, this chapter provides a critique of the Children's Report of to Community Violence (CREV, Cooley, Beidel, & Turner, 1995) and the Children's Exposure to Community Violence-Revised (CREV-R, Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009) with a focus on reliability and validity. The utility of these measures is discussed with reference to their strengths and limitations.

4.2 Overview of the tools

4.2.1 The Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence (CREV)

The Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence (CREV) was introduced in the published paper *"Assessing Community Violence: The Children's Report of Exposure to Violence"* by Cooley, Beidel, and Turner (1995). The CREV does not have a manual provided, and therefore practitioners and researchers using the measure must rely on the published paper itself. The authors define community violence as "deliberate acts intended to cause physical harm against a person or persons in the community" (Cooley et al., 1995, p. 202). Developed in the United States (US), the CREV is a 32-item self-report screening questionnaire for assessing lifetime exposure to community violence in children aged between 9 and 15 years. Twenty-nine of these items ask participants to rate the frequency of exposure

over the lifetime to different types of community violence. The remaining three items are not scored but, instead, ask participants to report other experiences related to ECV which were not specifically asked in the other questions. A 5-point Likert scale is used by participants to record the frequency of "ever" having been exposed to different types of violence. The scale consists of five categories: "no/never"; "one time"; "few times"; "many times"; or "every day". Each category is given a score of 0,1,2,3 and 4. The final score is obtained by summing the 29 items of all four content areas. It is reported that the measure takes 20 minutes to complete with groups of participants, and 10 minutes individually. The items can be read aloud to participants.

The rationale for the development of the CREV was to provide a self-report measure of ECV which demonstrated robust psychometric properties. However, alongside the CREV-R mentioned below, it has not been as widely used as hoped.

The authors of the CREV generated items that they believed were consistent with the above definition, and undertook a review of available instruments assessing children's exposure to community violence. The CREV measure assesses the following violent situations: being chased; threatened with bodily harm; mugged or robbed; beaten up; stabbed and killed or shot. The measure assesses the victim of ECV as stranger, someone familiar or self. In contrast to other measures, it excludes drug activity, possession of weapons and forced entry (Richters & Martinez, 1990).

The CREV assesses the frequency of ECV as taking place in four different ways (i.e., the way in which the participant was exposed to violence): i) viewed in film or television, called the *media exposure* content area; ii) reported by others, called the *reported* content area; iii) directly witnessed violence, called the *witnessed* content area; and iv) directly experienced, called the *victim* content area. For example, within the witnessed area, the

participant is asked “Have you ever seen…?”, and for the victim area the participant responds to “Have you ever been…?”.

The measure assesses the victim of ECV as stranger, someone familiar or self. The four areas of media, reported, witnessed or victim each have a different number of items given that the type of act and victim may vary (e.g., the media area only concerns strangers and not those who are familiar). The CREV is split into four sections which specify who the victim of violence is, for example, whether the victim is a stranger, someone familiar or self.

4.2.2 The Children’s Report of Exposure to Community Violence-Revised (CREV-R)

In 2009, the authors added a further module entitled *“world violence”* to the CREV, and re-named the measure the CREV-R. The CREV-R was introduced in the published paper *“Community Violence and Youth: Affect, Behavior, Substance Use, and Academics*” by Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009). Much like its predecessor, the CREV-R does not have a manual provided, and the paper refers to the measure having been established and administered to a sample of participants in an earlier project, without providing a reference. The world violence module assesses the impact of exposure to terrorism and war on youth. The authors’ rationale for the additional module appears to have been prompted by the terrorist attacks in the US during September 2001, and the onset of the then war with Iraq. They reported that they wanted to assess the frequency of perceived exposure to terrorism and war globally. It consists of the original 29 items with an additional 16 world-violence items. World-violence exposure is again assessed through the four areas of media, reported, witnessed and victimised. The total score is obtained by totalling the responses (0-4) on the 45 scored items, with a higher score reflecting increased exposure. The CREV-R has the additional option of assessing exposure in the past year in addition to lifetime exposure.

4.2.2.1 Administration.

The authors noted that previous measures of ECV were unsuitable for administering to groups of school-attending children because these measures included questions enquiring about violence occurring within a family setting and sexual abuse. Thus, based on their intentions to administer the measure in a school-based group setting, with a population who would require parental consent to participate (leading to reluctance from parents to consent), the authors excluded items assessing child abuse from the CREV.

The CREV was administered by the primary author and two research assistants to respondents during school hours in small groups. They reported the instructions and times were read aloud, and respondents were given the option of moving at their own pace or following along. The respondents were asked to provide definitions of violence and examples of community violence to check they understood the construct being explored. To ensure respondents understood the Likert scale, they were given a practice question to answer. Respondents marked the response most fitting to their experience themselves on the paper. Each respondent was given a movie or fast food voucher following their participation. Respondents from the first three participating schools were selected for the second testing and were posted a further CREV questionnaire to fill out two weeks after the original date of testing on their own. Respondents were asked to return the completed measure via mail in a preaddressed envelope.

In the paper which introduced the CREV-R (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009), it was one of several measures administered in a large-scale longitudinal study investigating the effect of ECV on children's behavioural, emotional, substance use and school performance. Respondents were only assessed with the CREV-R if they were full-time students, aged between 8- 12 years of age, spoke English fluently and lived with an English-speaking parent

or guardian, and were excluded based on the presence of a medical or neurological illness and did not live with either one parent or guardian. The authors reported they did not stipulate race or ethnicity as a selection criterion in order to minimise section bias. However there was no rationale provided for why an English-speaking parent was required, nor acknowledgement that this criterion in itself risked introducing bias, as non-English-speaking youths' experiences were not therefore, examined. Given the literature establishes that minority youth are disproportionately affected by ECV (Selner-O'Hagan et al., 1998), it is likely that youth at an increased risk of violence exposure may have been automatically excluded from the study and importantly, in the process of robustly examining the validity of the CREV-R. As such, there is a difference in how the population for the CREV and CREV-R were tested, and significantly the CREV-R conditions appeared to have considered the participant's cognitive functioning in a more robust manner by ensuring no medical conditions precluded understanding of the questions. Interviewers read the items from laptops, and responses were entered by the interviewers as opposed to completion by the respondents as for the CREV. The CREV-R was administered as part of a battery of measures, and therefore it is unclear how long it took specifically to administer.

4.3 Properties of a good psychometric measure

A psychometric measure is considered a good measure of a particular construct if the measure has certain properties, including reliability, validity discriminatory power and appropriate norms (Kline, 1986). The CREV and CREV-R are not strictly psychometric tests, as they do not measure a cognitive, emotional functioning or behavioural aspect of an individual and instead are concerned with the measurement of ECV which is arguably external to an individual. Nevertheless, understanding the properties of the CREV and CREV-R scales are important for the accurate measurement of ECV.

4.3.1 Level of Measurement

A ratio scale is considered the ideal form of measurement given it has a fixed zero point, and the differences between each rating on the scale provide a meaningful difference and can be analysed using parametric tests. Most psychometrics do not meet this standard and, as such, interval scales are considered appropriate for psychometric measures (Kline, 1986). There is also some debate as to whether data from psychometric scales are classified as ordinal or interval. According to Kline (1986,) providing the scores demonstrate a good level of distribution parametric tests can be used on data from ordinal scales.

The CREV codes 29 of the items on a 0 to 4 ordinal scale to give a possible total score ranging from 0 to 116, and CREV-R codes 45 of the items to give a possible total score between 0-180. It is of note that this scale is not sensitive to identifying the varying levels of exposure to violence that an individual may have experienced (i.e., a respondent who has experienced exposure 30 times would receive the same coding as a respondent who has experienced violence 10 times). Summing the scores across items means respondents who appear to have the same profile or score have actually experienced different amounts of ECV. In addition, it is proposed that it cannot be considered to be a true Likert scale as the distance between each response option (e.g., the difference between “few times” and “many times” may vary widely and is not specified) cannot be considered equal (Likert, 1932). Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the extent to which scores reflecting exposure can be considered normally distributed as exposure is highly situational and will therefore differ depending on a number of factors, such as the type of community setting, the age of the respondent and their personal characteristics, such as social-cognitive biases towards the acceptance and normalisation of violence.

4.3.2 Self-Report

Participants complete the measures themselves which is considered to simplify administration. The measures are intended to be used as screening instruments to assess the frequency of ECV and compared with other measures in existence. At the time the CREV was first developed (Cooley et al., 1995), it was considered suitable to be completed by children without adult assistance, in various settings. The simplicity of the measure means many individuals can be screened at one time.

One disadvantage of both the CREV and the CREV-R measures is that participants provide estimates of ECV retrospectively. Recalling events retrospectively is subject to recall bias which can impact reliability, particularly for younger participants who may have difficulties recalling and estimating past events (Schwarz, 2007), especially considering their experiences may have had a traumatic effect. In communities where ECV is chronic, the significance of each event is at risk of being lost and may lead to underreporting of experiences and difficulty in remembering the experiences accurately or in detail (Wolfer, 1999). Arguably, events may lessen in their traumatic impact over time, which makes it difficult to explore the short-term effects of ECV with measures of well-being or trauma. Retrospective accounts can also make it challenging to identify when certain behaviours or symptoms, such as PTSD, began and how they have changed over time.

Alongside the child version of the CREV and CREV-R, parents or caregivers can be given the CREV-P to provide estimates of their child's ECV. However, parents or caregivers are still reliant on retrospective recall. Furthermore, parent-child agreement on reporting community violence exposure has been poor (Richters & Martinez, 1993).

4.3.3 Reliability

Reliability forms the basis of psychological measurement and is concerned with how consistently over time and under different conditions the tool measures a construct (Kline, 1986). A number of types of reliability are discussed below:

4.3.3.1. Internal reliability.

Internal consistency is concerned with whether each item within the tool addresses the domain in question and measures it consistently (Kline, 1993). The items should correlate with one another and there is an assumption that the different items contribute equally to the overall score. One method of measuring a tool's internal consistency, based on the average inter-item correlation, is Cronbach's alpha. An alpha coefficient of .70 or higher is deemed to show good internal reliability, and reliability coefficients of .60 are also deemed acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

In the development of the CREV measure, Cooley et al. (1995) administered the measure to a sample of 228 children who attended primary and secondary school, aged between 9 and 15 years from urban and rural communities in South Carolina, United States. Among the respondents, 112 were male and 116 were female, with 74% of the children identified as African-American, 19.7% Caucasian, 1.8% Hispanic, 1.3% Native American, 1.3% Asian and 1.8% were described as bi-racial. They identified that the measure consisted of two factors: Direct exposure and Media exposure. The Direct Exposure factors included items assessing actual instances of violence through directly witnessing them or being told of them by another. This finding may suggest that there is a difficulty to separate out the two types of exposure, and therefore the CREV does not distinguish between reported and witnessed violence. Items from the media area only loaded onto the Media exposure factor. None of the Victim items loaded onto either the Direct or Media Exposure factor. The authors

explained the lack of identification of a Victim factor on the basis that the participants reported having experienced a small amount of personal victimisation which may have reduced the effects of the overall responses for this victimisation category. This is despite the authors having constructed items which fell into different forms of exposure, such as media, reported, witnessed and victim. Hence, one might have expected to find the items loaded onto four than two factors, which will be discussed in the Validity section below.

Prior to conducting a Cronbach's alpha calculation to assess the internal consistency of the two CREV factors and Total score, an item to factor test was conducted with each of the items within the Direct Exposure and Media Exposure factors respectively. This was to ensure that the items are assessing the construct of the two factors consistently and therefore, whether any of the items should be discarded if they do not. The Direct exposure item to factor total correlations ranged from .15 to .66 and had an overall Cronbach's alpha of .93. A correlation value of less than 0.2 or 0.3 reflects that the item is poorly correlated with the scale overall and can be excluded (Everitt, 2002). Whilst a smaller item-factor correlation of .15 was observed, indicating that the item did not measure the same construct as the other items comprising the Direct exposure factor, the authors did not report that the item was omitted from their measure. The Media Exposure item to factor total correlations ranged from .48 to .53 with a reported overall Cronbach's alpha of .75. The factor to Total correlation score obtained an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.78. Overall, the alpha coefficients indicated a good level of internal consistency within the Direct exposure and Media exposure factors

In summary, the items within the CREV are considered to measure two broad types of exposure (i.e., Direct and Media) well, demonstrating good reliability. However, the measure has not been able to demonstrate that four content areas the CREV assesses to exist as

independent factors, which may suggest that the items need further testing and possibly revising as they are not assessing the areas they were intended to.

With a sample of 88 incarcerated males aged between 13 and 18 years, in a study investigating the relationship between callous unemotional traits and the mediating effect of violence exposure on offending patterns (Howard, Kimonis, Munoz, & Frick, 2012), the reliability scores were high. They reported alpha coefficients indicating excellent internal consistency for the total CREV (0.97), witnessed violence (0.91) and acceptable internal consistency for the violent victimisation (0.62) scale.

With regards to the CREV-R, which includes additional questions to the CREV to assess youth's exposure to terrorism and war (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009), the authors reported that they conducted a preliminary study with a sample of school children aged between 8 and 11 years of age, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78 was reported for the CREV-R total score and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 was reported for the past-year CREV-R total score (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). These findings indicate that the addition of the world violence in the CREV-R has perhaps increased the reliability of the measure.

However, it has been argued that as a result of the way in which ECV measures assess the construct itself (e.g., a cumulative total of exposure to violence events), the more exposure to a wider range of violent events experienced by a participant, the higher their internal consistency will be (e.g., Streiner, 2003). Therefore, this has led some researchers to not report the internal consistencies of ECV measures (e.g., Kennedy & Ceballo, 2016).

4.3.3.2 Test-Retest Reliability.

Test-retest reliability refers to the extent to which, upon replication, a test can show stability over time with the same participant. Correlational analysis is an effective way to

assess test-retest reliability (Kline, 1993), and a correlation between the two scores of at least 0.70 or above is considered an acceptable interpretation of test stability (Guildford, 1956).

There can be challenges to measuring this form of reliability. For example, youth may have been exposed to violence between first and second testing, as such, the measure is likely to achieve lower scores for test-retest reliability than measures with more stable items. Other challenges that may impact on test-retest reliability (but that do not necessarily imply the measure is invalid) is the potential that respondents may have a poor mental state or be in a state of distress due to recalling ECV events which may lead to inaccurate reporting. It is advisable that the time period between testing is not too long in order to minimise inaccuracies in item recall. A three-month period between testing is recommended by Kline (2000), although there is scope for flexibility depending on the participant.

Of the 228 schoolchildren that were assessed in their study, Cooley et al. (2005) re-tested a sample of 42 children, who, as described above, had completed the measure independently two weeks later than the first testing and mailed it to the authors. The authors did not report how many completed measures they received and whether the sub-sample for re-test was taken from a large group of respondents who had returned the measures. There were no statistically significant differences on age, ethnicity, gender, Direct Exposure factor, Media Exposure factor and CREV Total Score between those who took part in the second testing compared with those who did not, which indicated that they were a representative sample. Pearson correlation coefficients were obtained which showed reasonable test re-test reliability agreement rates for the Total score (0.75) and for the Direct Exposure score (0.78), though rated poor for the Media Exposure factor (0.52). Re-testing took place within a very short period, and with a relatively small sample size of 42 to perform correlational analyses.

In addition, a possible explanation for the low score on the Media Exposure item is that students had been exposed to violence via media sources during the two-week period.

With regards to the CREV-R, no data is provided related to test-retest reliability, which means it has not been possible to ascertain the stability of the measure with the addition of the new war/terrorism exposure module. Whilst an increase in terror-related attacks was noted across the Unites States and Europe since 2001, there was an increase in the number of terror-related fatalities in countries which experienced civil conflicts (Smith & Zeigler, 2017). These findings suggest that the CREV-R would be a useful measure to use internationally to ascertain the impact of exposure on youth's wellbeing.

It is difficult to evaluate how reliable a measure the CREV is, given the lack of normative data with different populations of youth, such as school children in different socio-economic areas and institutionally-based samples who are considered to have experienced higher exposure to violence (Howard et al., 2012). A further limitation is that both measures have predominantly been used in the United States, with few studies reporting its usage outside of the country. The majority of the research on the effects of community violence exposure has been undertaken with samples containing a significant proportion of African American children (Horn & Trickett, 1998). The research finds support for racial or ethnic minority youth to be more likely to experience ECV (Aisenberg et al., 2008), which highlights the importance of assessing factors such as socio-economic status, housing, poverty and family (Foster & Brooks-Gunn, 2009) to provide a more complete understanding of their interaction and relationship to ECV. However, this also demonstrates the need to conduct more studies using the measures with different populations and ethnicities so that reliability data can be developed and meaningful comparisons can be made.

4.3.4 Validity

If a measure is reliable, it does not necessarily mean that the test accurately measures the construct in question. It is therefore necessary to examine the validity of the CREV-R. The validity of a measure is the degree to which it measures what it is supposed to measure, and not something else (Kline, 1986).

4.3.4.1 Face Validity.

Taken at face value, a measure can be examined by looking at whether it *appears* to measure the construct in question (Kline, 1986). The CREV and CREV-R were designed to measure the frequency of exposure to violence occurring in different formats such as media, observation, hearsay and direct observation (and exposure to violence related to war and terrorism through the CREV-R) with different categories of victim. It also measures different types of violence one is exposed to. The CREV and CREV-R measures appear to ask questions relevant to what constitutes violent acts, and assesses the severity of exposure too (e.g., threatened, chase, robbed, stabbed), with various types of victim (Cooley et al., 1995), and can therefore be considered to have good face validity.

The measure defines "familiar people" as "friends, classmates, relatives, cousins, sisters, brothers, and parents". Factors, such as characteristics of the perpetrator, or where the incident took place can impact on ECV (Lynch, 2003; Ward, Flisher, Zissis, Muller, & Lombard, 2001). Violence witnessed by children against a member of the family as opposed to a stranger is reported to have a greater impact (Lynch, 2003) and increased anxiety symptoms, when the victim or perpetrator is known to youth (Patterson, 1995; Ward et al., 2001). Therefore, categorising a wide variation of relationships fails to give an accurate picture of the specific association between the type of relationship and psychological

outcomes. The definition may also lead to inflated frequencies, or inaccurate reporting as there are so many types of familiar persons to consider.

Furthermore, van Dulmen, Bellison, Flannery, and Singer (2008), conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of an ECV measure which showed that violence within the three domains of home, school and neighbourhood constituted different types of exposure. This suggests the need to consider the context in which ECV occurs in greater detail.

The measures omit exploration of what the respondent's role was, which would provide more context to understanding the impact and meaning of exposure to the respondent (Guterman et al., 2000). For example, there are no items to assess whether or not the respondent was the perpetrator of violence. Howard et al. (2012) in their study reported that they were unable to determine whether respondents in their study had included their own perpetration of violence within the witnessed violence items, thereby increasing the potential for the item to capture a different type of community violence. Furthermore, as reported in Chapter 2, perpetrating violence against others may also be considered a traumatic event (Kerig, Wainryb, Twali, & Chaplo, 2013; Wainryb, 2011). Kerig et al. (2016) reported young incarcerated gang members reported higher levels of trauma symptoms and PT than non-gang members. As a relatively new area to be explored within adolescent and specifically gang-involved youth, the assessment of PT as a type of ECV would be particularly relevant. Furthermore, the relationship or familiarity with either the victims or perpetrators of experienced violence in the context of a gang are considerations likely to impact on youth, in light of the group dynamics and experiences related to support derived from gang-involved peers discussed in Chapter 3.

In addition, the measures categorise different types of violent acts into one type which can be confusing especially for younger respondents. For example, "being beaten up"

includes “being slapped, kicked, bitten, hit or punched that you were badly hurt”. Furthermore, the measure omits sexual violence which is problematic as an individual may have witnessed or been a victim of violence but in the context of sexual abuse; as such, this may not be reported. Although the authors provide a broad definition of community violence (i.e., an occurrence within one’s community or neighbourhood), the assessment form asks participants to respond based on their experiences of ECV that took place in the home, in school or the community, which makes it harder for respondent’s to specify where exactly the ECV took place.

Therefore, whilst the measure appears to have good face validity, it is likely that it could benefit from providing scope for respondents to be more specific about their ECV experiences, which could allow comparisons to be made between individual ECV experiences. It is observed that across ECV measures, contextual details such as the proximity of the ECV to the victim or the victim’s role are often omitted, as observed in the CREV and CREV-R measures. The lack of information thus makes it challenging to ascertain which aspects of ECV are likely to have negatively impacted an individual.

4.3.4.2 Concurrent validity.

Concurrent validity refers to the extent to which the measure correlates with measures designed to test the same construct. Comparisons should therefore be made between a new measure and existing measures to compare how they measure the construct in question. One difficulty in determining concurrent validity, however, is if existing measures have questionable validity. At the time the CREV was developed, the authors reported other measures, such as the Exposure to Violence Questionnaire (Gladstein, Rusonis, & Heald, 1992) and the Survey of Children’s Exposure to Community Violence (Richters & Martinez, 1993), however, data related to their psychometric properties were not reported, making it

difficult to investigate how the CREV and later the CREV-R can be measured against them. Furthermore, different measures appear to measure different aspects of ECV. The Survey of Children's Exposure to Community Violence (Richters & Martinez, 1993) assesses possession of weapons and forced entry, whereas the CREV does not. It is noted, however, that since its formation, others measures of ECV in addition to the CREV have been established (e.g., Buka, Selner-O'Hagan, Kindlon, & Earls, 1997; Landis, Dempsey, & Overstreet, 2003), however, there have been no studies conducted to make comparisons between the measures, therefore it is not possible to calculate the concurrent validity of the CREV at this time.

4.3.4.3 Content validity.

Content validity refers to the degree to which the items within the measure represents all aspects relevant to the concept being measured (Kline, 1986), and therefore requires careful consideration that each item is relevant, and important aspects of the measure are tested within the items. Content validity is high if the construct is defined clearly, in a consistent way (Haynes, Richard, & Kubany, 1995).

Content validity when applied to the CREV, is the extent to which the measure assesses all aspects of community violence. When the CREV was developed, Cooley et al. (1995) identified items they believed were consistent with this definition and reviewed the available instruments assessing children's exposure to community violence. However, it is noted that, at the time the measure was constructed, there were few instruments available that measured ECV. In addition, there is no evidence that the authors spoke with youth to explore the types of experiences they have had in terms of violence exposure; first-hand information such as this may have increased the validity of the measure. Furthermore, it can be argued that the measure is biased based on what the authors consider constitutes ECV. An example of this

is their inclusion of the Media content areas as a mode of exposure, when other measures of ECV exclude this on the basis that media exposure does not constitute ECV. Although media exposure has been considered linked to negative psychological outcomes in youth, recent studies demonstrate the two variables are not as robustly related as previously thought to be, and it has been argued that, as a construct, media exposure is different to ECV (Ferguson, 2013).

With regards to the additional war/terrorism module developed within the CREV-R, Cooley-Strickland et al. (2009) report that they included further items related to the war/terrorism construct as a result of perceived increased exposure to war and terrorism post-September 2001 terror attacks in the US. They questioned what the emotional and behavioural impact might be upon on youth, in addition to the way such exposure might impact on their academic functioning which appeared to have led to the inclusion of the module. Whilst they reported having conducted a preliminary study which utilised the CREV-R, this study is not referenced, nor are details provided regarding the sample characteristics. Therefore, information related to examining the item content and reliability is not provided, which casts doubt upon how robust the CREV-R is in terms of its content validity.

4.3.4.4 Construct validity.

Construct validity assesses the degree to which the CREV has theoretical coherence, and the items can be linked to the conceptual and theoretical understanding of community violence. This can be explored through factor analysis, which, based on the underlying relationships between variables, reduces a larger number of correlated variables into fewer variables or factors. Factor analysis can identify how much of the scale outcome is explained by each scale, or whether other factors explain the outcome (Kline, 2000).

Cooley et al. (1995) conducted an exploratory factor analysis (principal-components analysis) with 29 items of the CREV items, and found a two-factor model: the Direct exposure factor (21 items loaded onto this) and the Media exposure factor (3 items loaded onto this). The two-factor model accounted for 42.9% of the total variance using 29 items of the CREV. To be identified as a factor, two items or greater needed to load onto the factor. Each item with a factor loading of .45 or more and an eigenvalue more than one were included into the factors. The Direct exposure factor is considered ambiguous as a construct, given that this factor included items that measure violence indirectly as being informed by others (e.g., "have you ever been told" and direct violence is classified as that which has been witnessed by an individual e.g., "have you ever seen"). As stated above, when reporting on the measures' internal validity, a separate Victim factor was not established, with possible explanations for this finding discussed. The authors concluded that the Victim content area would be appropriate to use with children in specific settings, such as with high ECV experiences, or to be used as a clinical assessment measure.

Researchers have attempted to classify ECV into distinct areas of witnessing violence and personal victimisation, as they are considered to represent distinct types of exposure, with victimisation experiences more strongly linked with psychological wellbeing outcomes and externalising behaviours (Fowler et al., 2009; Shahinfar et al., 2000), others have reported opposite findings (Flannery, Wester, & Singer, 2004), or have reported no differences (Aisenberg et al., 2008). There continue to be mixed findings in relation to this type of ECV and its relationship with outcomes. The authors do not give their reasons for the inclusion of distinct questions, assessing witnessed and victimised, although they may have been influenced by research supporting different categories of exposure. However, future research would need to ascertain whether each type of exposure has different effects in order to

consider their inclusion into measures. Some findings have suggested that there is no difference when assessing the type of exposure experienced (e.g., hearing, witnessing or victimised being victims of violence) and PTSD symptoms (Fowler et al., 2009). These findings reflect that youth may experience ECV as overlapping experiences rather than as separate entities (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). This would highlight the need for the CREV and CREV-R to consider how items might interact with one another rather than be taken as separate types of exposure.

The lack of construct validity for a Victim factor makes it difficult to directly compare male and female respondents' reported experiences, given that it has been identified that gender differences may be observed for the type of victimisation experienced (Cooley et al., 1995). An example of this is the omission of child abuse in the CREV. Females are reported to be at an increased risk of sexual assault than males, and the omission of this type of violence in the CREV and CREV-R will affect the reported effects of ECV on female respondents (Turner, Finkelhor, Hamby, Shattuck, & Ormrod, 2011). Furthermore, this omission assumes that child abuse, such as sexual assault behaviours, occurs in a specific (e.g., home) setting not measured by the CREV. However, violence can be thought to be interconnected, as violence that occurs in one context can affect the likelihood of its occurrence in another (Margolin et al., 2009). Whilst the authors of the CREV reported that they would continue to evaluate the measure to test the hypothesis that different content areas are relevant for different populations (Cooley et al., 1995), this research appears to have not been conducted.

Whilst the CREV and CREV-R are considered to lack data to reflect content validity, this does not necessarily mean that they lack validity altogether (Mash & Barkley 2007), but that rather the studies that have been conducted (e.g., Cooley-Quille, Turner, & Beidel, 1995)

have not assessed psychological or behaviour symptoms that are associated with ECV, such as PTSD (e.g., Fowler et al., 2009), or have reduced statistically significant results as a consequence of a reduced sample size. These findings would imply the need to undertake further studies to establish the validity of the measure, with larger and comparable samples.

4.3.4.5 Predictive Validity.

Predictive validity refers to the extent to which a finding or score on a measure conducted at an earlier stage predict scores on a later measure (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Whilst the CREV and CREV-R provide data regarding the frequency of ECV, they do not robustly measure the severity of exposure. The authors note that the lack of consensually agreed-upon definitions of the construct of community violence itself makes it challenging to make cross-study and measure comparisons, and relatedly to form criteria for measuring the severity of violence. Cooley et al. (1995) acknowledge this limitation, and whilst they report that further studies are underway to ascertain how to improve the utility of the CREV, actual studies employing the measure are lacking. The authors also reported their intentions to undertake more studies using the CREV, once definitional and measurement issues concerning community violence were clarified. As such, there would be greater clarity regarding ECV measure findings to establish concurrent and predictive validity. However, this would not appear to have happened.

4.3.5. Normative samples

A further measure of a good test is having appropriate normative data. This can enable researchers to compare community violence exposure scores to those obtained by a standard group, so that meaningful inferences can be made about levels of violence exposure (Kline, 1986).

As the CREV quantifies experiences, which are likely to be highly variable across samples, it is difficult to establish normative data. Cooley et al. (1995) do not provide standardised scores. Rather, they present the findings of using the measure with their pilot study sample of school children attending schools in urban and rural communities in South Carolina, US. Whilst the sample was primarily African-American (74%), significant differences between white and black children's reports of exposure to community violence were not noted, indicating that they felt differences in racial groups may be less relevant than giving consideration to setting and socio-economic factors. This idea is reflected in current conceptualisations of ECV, whereby researchers are emphasising the need to consider the socio-ecological context (such as the involvement of law enforcement, poverty, housing and family size) in which ECV occurs (Foster & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). However, ECV appears to affect African-American youth disproportionately in the US (Jenkins & Bell, 1994; Selner-O'Hagan et al., 1998), as a result of ethnic minority communities being over-represented in urban areas (Cooley-Quille et al., 1995), which would suggest the need to conduct research which explores the relationship between ECV and protective factors, such as improved socio-economic status within minority groups. A further difficulty with completing assessments with school children is that the sampled population will not be representative of youth who are not attending school because they are truanting or have been expelled. As such, youth who experience increased level of exposure to violence as a result of their more entrenched involvement in violence-related activities are likely to be omitted. The small number of studies using the CREV and the CREV-R have been conducted solely in the United States (e.g., Cooley et al., 1995; Cooley-Quille, Turner, & Beidel, 1995; Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; Howard et al., 2012), which means that there are very few data samples with which to

make comparisons. More use and testing of the measure across different countries, cultures and populations is recommended.

4.4 Conclusion

Research has reported that ECV is associated with various psychological difficulties as opposed to a single set of symptoms (Fowler et al., 2009; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014). However attempts to specify causal relationships would appear to be limited currently by the way in which ECV is defined and assessed. ECV tends to be viewed as a homogenous construct with little consideration into the types of violence, and the severity and stability of exposure an individual can be exposed to (Trickett et al., 2003).

There are various issues to be considered when assessing the reliability and validity of the CREV and CREV-R. Of particular note are short-comings related to its construct validity and content validity. The lack of theoretical basis to the definition of community violence exposure has impacted on the measurement of ECV, and this is evident within the CREV. Thus, whilst acceptable levels of internal consistency are reported for the CREV and CREV-R, the reliability of the measures is compounded because they sum items to form an unweighted composite scale; there is an implicit assumption that different experiences are experienced in a linear way. Therefore, the measure of ECV as a general experience does not aid an understanding of which combination of violence exposure have contributed to psychopathology and outcomes (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014). The recognition of ECV as a multifaceted phenomenon would suggest that measures such as the CREV and CREV-R should undergo revision to include assessment of frequencies and depth of experiences of ECV. Identifying which experiences occur in which conditions and their relationship to psychological outcomes can inform interventions better (Richters & Martinez, 1993). One option is to weight items according to the violence severity, relationship to victim or

perpetrator, severity and location (Kindlon, Wright, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1996), with greater weighting applied to those considered to be more extreme (Selner-O'Hagan et al., 1998). This approach would not be without its difficulties, however, as an incident identified as less violent may be perceived as of greater severity by an individual based on their subjective experience of it (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). The importance of subjective experiences of distress is demonstrated in a study, where there was a lack of agreement between researchers and participants in relation to ratings of the impact of witnessing murder compared with a non-fatal stabbing (Aisenberg et al., 2008). It may be beneficial for the three open-ended questions in the CREV and CREV-R to be revised to gain further detail regarding the individual's level of distress in relation to ECV.

Whilst it is positive that the CREV-R can allow for measures of two different time frames, it fails to explore these timescales with the appropriate level of detail regarding the contextual aspects of ECV. The measures discussed above may also benefit from conducting real-time assessments of ECV experiences, and from collecting data at more regular points to help reduce risks of recall bias. In addition, the recency of exposure has been found to impact on reported PTSD more significantly than lifetime exposure (Fowler et al., 2009).

Capturing ECV over a longer period of time than a year would also be advantageous. Gang-involved youth may experience ECV for a consistent period of time whilst they are in a gang and even upon exiting, the threats and potential for harm may still occur. In addition, repeatedly witnessing gang violence may be more psychologically detrimental than one instance of actual victimisation. Therefore, researchers need to pay greater attention to examining the chronicity of exposure, and the cumulative impact this can have. For example, if gang-involved youth become emotionally desensitised to ECV over time, a weaker link, may be reported between symptoms such as depression and PTSD, compared with the more

robust link between ECV and violence, leading to the increasing acceptance of violence as a viable solution for problem solving (Ng-Mak et al., 2004). This can lead to a lack of understanding amongst practitioners and researchers as to what the underlying function, and reason (i.e., trauma symptoms) might be for violent behaviour amongst gang-involved youth. As such, understanding the impact of ECV requires further exploration and attention to be paid to how varying patterns of exposure are associated with different outcomes for youth and their psychological and mental health (Foster & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). In particular, there is a need to focus on gang-involved youth; a population that has not been given sufficient attention in the examination of ECV. More studies are needed to identify the chronic symptoms experienced as a result of ECV with different age groups to determine differential effects based on developmental levels.

Finally, the inclusion of sexual assault as a type of ECV is recommended given this type of ECV can have a profound psychological impact on youth and may overlap with other forms of ECV (Carlson & Grant, 2008). Whilst the inclusion of threats of sexual assault and actual sexual assault has led to equally reported rates of exposure to community violence for girls and boys (Turner et al., 2006), the risk of sexual assault for males should continue to be a consideration based on research supporting its prevalence on male, particularly gang-involved youth (Carlson & Grant, 2008; Vera et al., 1996).

Chapter 5: Thesis Conclusions

5.1 Aims of thesis

This thesis aimed to add to the knowledge base regarding psychological factors (individual, peer and sociocultural) involved in gang membership. With an individual-level focus, Chapter 2 provides the first systematic literature review to be conducted exploring research looking at mental health problems in adolescent gang members: an area which has not received sufficient attention in the past.

Moving to peer-related factors, a further aim of this thesis, as presented in Chapter 3, was to explore the life journeys of gang-involved youth and their experiences of social support within a gang in order to gain a better understanding of the role of peers in within gangs. Lastly, to provide a basis for understanding the sociocultural context for gang involved youth, Chapter 4 provides a critique of the psychometric properties of two measures which aim to assess community violence exposure.The Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence Scale (CREV) (Cooley, Beidel, & Turner, 1995) and The Children's Report of Exposure to Community Violence Scale-Revised (CREV-R) (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009) were critically evaluated, and recommendations were made as to how to improve the measure with respect to its psychometric properties. The chapter concluded by encouraging the use of the CREV-R with specific populations at risk of community violence, such as gang-involved youth.

5.2 Main findings

5.2.1 Chapter 2

The review was able to identify that there was an association between gang membership and various mental health problems. Ten studies in total were included with various mental health problems reported, including depression, anxiety, symptoms relevant to conduct disorder, hyperactivity and inattention, trauma, and suicidal tendencies. There were

also some differences in findings as some studies reported the absence of anxiety and depression symptoms in gang members (e.g., Madan et al., 2011), whereas others positively identified their presence (Corcoran et al., 2005). These differences may be explained by a variety of factors, including the ages of the participants and the period of time they had been involved in the gang. For example, it could be that young people join gangs to fulfil their need to feel supported, and, as such, the sense of belonging and social support experienced upon joining the gang serves to buffer symptoms of depression. Conversely, youth who have individual-level characteristics, such as impulsivity, inattention, psychopathic traits and aggression, may join gangs to fulfill their needs for gaining status and excitement, and/or justification of using violence as a means of exerting control can be met. It was also found that exposure to violence was positively linked to the mental health symptoms assessed, namely suicidal behaviours and PTSD symptoms. The question is whether these mental health problems arose prior to or upon gang joining. The findings of four longitudinal studies showed that the symptoms they assessed were present before gang joining and worsened once in the gang. Whilst youth are motivated to join gangs to experience support or a sense of belonging (Vigil, 1998; Wood & Alleyne, 2010), the effects may be short-lived, depending on how vulnerable young people are to manage the gang's violence-related activities. These findings suggest that experiences of social support within the gang can change and are likely to be influenced by how youth experience the activities and thus relationships within the gang.

These findings provide support for Wood and Alleyne's (2010) 'Unified Theory of Gang Involvement' to show that gang involvement is determined by an interaction of individual-level characteristics, including mental health symptomatology and peer influences, combined with social and environmental features. Understanding different trajectories of gang

membership provides support for Moffitt's (1993) theory of adolescence-limited (AL) and life-course time persistent (LCP) offending, given that youth with traits indicative of conduct disorder and antisocial personality disorder may remain involved with the gang into adulthood.

The studies within the review varied in their quality and it is important that the conclusions drawn are considered in the context of the limitations identified.

5.2.2 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 is the first known study in the vast research of gangs to explore the lived experiences of social support of gang-involved youth in the UK. Two elements were explored, firstly how youth make sense of their positive and negative life experiences leading up to their involvement in the gang, and secondly, how youth experienced relationships and social support during their involvement with the gang and the impact this had upon them.

Analysis of transcripts led to the emergence of three superordinate themes: *"For me, it's just how life was"*; "*The gang and I: A sense of belonging"* and "*Finding a new path"*. Each superordinate theme comprised of several subordinate themes. The superordinate and subordinate themes demonstrate a progressive trajectory of how participants experienced their lives before, during and after their gang involvement.

Four of the five participants reported that experiences of growing up (prior to joining a gang) included not feeling safe within their local areas and not being understood by key individuals, such as teachers and parents. To begin with, participants experienced the gang as providing them with a way forward and with hope, which they lacked in their existing social support networks. However, they also experienced a strong sense of enacted, practical and emotional support, demonstrating the concept of the gang 'being there' for them when others were not, participants reported a sense of being understood and accepted. The findings

supported the wider literature that identified the importance of a sense of belonging experienced when joining a gang (e.g., Gibbs, 2000; Harris, 1994; Vigil, 1988). The MPSO framework (Harkins & Dixon, 2010) provided a useful way to understand how individual, socio-cultural and situational factors interacted to explain the participants' experiences within the gang within the *"Being there" and "Feeling a part of something"* superordinate themes. The experience of group processes (e.g., social comparison theory, deindividuation) is considered to have led to the identification of the group's needs to be perceived as an extension of their own. As such, participants' thinking and behaviour is likely to have reflected the needs of the gangs and the way it functioned at that time (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Vigil, 1988).

However, over time, participants began to experience the gang as unsupportive for various reasons. Overwhelmingly, participants reported the negative impact of the perceived lack of safety, which stemmed from experiences of violent victimisation; this led to a shift in their connectedness within their peer relationships over time. Participants who had increased levels of exposure to violence reported symptoms consistent with PTSD, which was influential in them leaving. However, there were temptations to return once they had left, because the gang had offered participants a way of coping with negative emotions, and they experienced the loss of emotional connectedness when attempting to re-establish life outside of the gang. There was also fear of reprisals from the gang voiced by two of the participants, and their accounts suggested a greater level of involvement in not only the perpetration of violence but first-hand victimisation. Whilst this study did not specifically explore different levels of gang membership, it could be inferred that Tom and Jesse experienced symptoms of PTSD, possibly linked to their position and level of involvement in the gang's violent acts.

The current research adds to emerging literature by identifying the impact of social and emotional experiences of youth transitioning out of gangs, which are considered relevant to the desistance process (Hussong, Curran, Moffitt, Caspi, & Carrig, 2004; Pyrooz et al., 2010). A number of the participants noted that once they left the gang activities they engaged in, and who they spent time with, was central to affirming their new identities. This is not dissimilar from concepts discussed in emerging gang desistance research which recognises that leaving the gang is not a quick process, especially if youth continue to reside in the same neighbourhood or continue to maintain friendships as it would be easy to fall back into old routines and activities (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). It appears that leaving the gang will not only be a gradual process but that the connectedness and support formerly provided by the gang needs to be appropriately replaced to help youth make a successful transition.

The findings demonstrate that not only are victimisation experiences instrumental to leaving the gang (e.g., Curry et al., 2002; Thornberry, 1998), but that these experiences are likely to have an adverse impact on youth's mental health. Therefore, the findings from Chapter 3 provide support for the findings of Chapter 2 which concluded that there is an association between gang membership and mental health problems.

5.2.3 Chapter 4

The CREV was examined for its potential relevance to understanding the experiences of gang involved youth. The critique of the CREV and CREV-R concluded that the CREV was considered to have good reliability in assessing two as opposed to four different types of exposure, namely media and direct exposure, which suggested that items required further revision. The CREV-R was considered to have good reliability, however, the existing items were not revised, rather the measure was added to with the addition of questions examining war and terrorism. Furthermore, when examining the validity of the measures it became clear

that whilst the measures appear to have good face validity and moderate content validity, they lack content and predictive validity. The measures have not been specifically used with gang-involved youth, and therefore there are no established normative data for this group. It is suggested that the CREV-R should not be used as the sole measure of ECV in the context of gang involvement.

5.3 Thesis strengths and limitations

This thesis has added to the emerging literature exploring the mental health needs of gang-involved youth. It is also the first known study to examine in-depth the social-psychological processes involved in the experiences of social support and belongingness youth derive from engaging with the gang. Specifically, this study was undertaken with a UK-based youth sample with past gang involvement, a group which is typically challenging to access from a researcher standpoint. Furthermore, the participants who took part in the study noted the negative impact that exposure to violence and victimisation had upon them both in terms of their witnessing and experiencing violence when they were part of the gang. Furthermore, a fear of victimisation remained an ongoing concern for some of the participants upon leaving the gang. As such, the thesis provides further support for the impact of violence exposure on the mental health; and psychological wellbeing of gang-involved youth, a concern which requires further recognition and awareness, amongst researchers and practitioners who are involved with this group.

A particular strength of this study was that the data were subjected to the Interpretative Phenomenological Analytic (IPA) approach, resulting in a deeper analysis of participants' personal sense-making of their experiences of both positive and negative life experiences, and social support. Therefore, the findings provide an understanding of the lived experiences of

gang-involved youth and can lead to further exploration through research or provide assistance to practitioners working with gang-involved youth.

Limitations of this thesis must also be noted. As reported in Chapter 3, despite the aim to recruit seven participants, it was only possible to recruit five young males in this study. It could be argued that those participants who did take part in the study were more motivated to engage with the research project and were at a different stage in terms of their involvement with a gang to those participants who were not willing to participate in the study; hence potentially introducing an element of bias. The inclusion and participation of those participants who did not engage with the research project may have resulted in different findings. For example, participant responses may have differed if they were still involved with a gang. Furthermore, even though the participants were willing to discuss their experiences of being gang-involved and the ways they experienced support, their willingness to speak openly may still be affected by a fear of disclosing information to the interviewer, who may have been perceived as an authority figure who was linked to the criminal justice system.

5.4 Implications for practice

Chapter 2 showed that there is an association between mental health problems and gang membership in gang-involved youth. Significantly, many of the risk factors identified for gang membership are also causal for mental health problems in youth (Hill, Lui, & Hawkins, 2001; Hughes et al., 2015). As such, it would be helpful to adopt a public health approach that focusses on identifying at-risk youth from an early stage, in light of the risk factors for gang joining and mental health being multi-causal and inter-related. It may be helpful to assess youth's mental health symptoms, and at varying developmental stages to ascertain what needs they might be wishing to fulfil by joining a gang. This information can

be helpful in identifying what pro-social support networks could be put into place. It is likely that the older the youth, the more intensive support and interventions are needed, especially if their symptoms are indicative of features of conduct and emerging antisocial personality disorder, where the gang meets their needs for excitement, status and power through violence. However, it is noted that gang membership can also occur in the absence of mental health problems, and therefore greater attention should be paid to how the interplay of factors increasing the likelihood of membership (as outlined in Unified Theory (Wood & Alleyne, 2010) and the MPSO (Harkins & Dixon, 2010)) can increase youth's vulnerability. It would be helpful to provide practitioners with greater knowledge and awareness of risk factors from these models so that they can recognise early warning signs for both mental health symptoms and vulnerability to gang joining.

Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted that exposure to violence negatively impacted on youth's mental health, and, consistent with the literature, the experience of victimisation was identified as a reason for leaving the gang (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002). However, all participants demonstrated that, with the right support, they were able to re-connect with legitimate social groups, which appeared to provide a new, pro-social self-identity. It will be important for professionals to continue to provide youth transitioning out of gangs with peer mentoring programmes where youth not only receive support, but they also have the option of having a role in actively mentoring others.

The experiences of Tom and Jesse in Chapter 3 show that it is not straightforward for gang-involved youth to detach themselves from the gang. It is therefore important that practitioners can offer support for former gang-involved youth and access to an alternative lifestyle.

5.5 Future research

The findings reported in this thesis have highlighted where further research will benefit the study of gangs. Chapter 2 has shown that gang-involved youth do experience mental health problems, and Chapter 3 has shown the lasting impact some of their experiences within the gang, and prior to joining the gang can have, which support this finding. However, it is difficult to fully explain this relationship without more robust longitudinal studies in order to examine the direction of this relationship to infer causality. Furthermore, it is important that appropriate measures for assessing mental health symptoms, such as for PTSD, and related factors, such as exposure to violence, are appropriately validated and utilised in longitudinal research with gang members.

Longitudinal research could also examine whether there is an association between mental health symptoms experienced at different developmental stages when joining the gang, such as whether youth who join gangs during early adolescence show different symptoms to those who join the gang during late adolescence. Exploration of these symptoms in full has the potential to inform early preventative practices, as well as increase awareness of services involved with youth at different stages as to how best they can be supported. It may also be helpful for researchers to begin to examine the links between ECV and mental health problems specifically with gang-involved youth. Research has established not only the positive association between ECV and mental health symptomatology (Fowler et al., 2009), but also findings such as those reported in the current thesis which highlight the long-lasting impact of violence on gang-involved youth. The mental health needs of gang-involved youth and relevantly, their experiences of ECV, seem to have been less prioritised areas of study previously. The conclusions from Chapter 4 point to a need for the current available measures, including the CREV-R, to undergo revisions to ensure that they are able to

accurately capture contextual factors such as the type of exposure, the severity and chronicity of violence, and the relationships between the victim and perpetrator. Measures such as the CREV and CREV-R should be used widely to assess ECV with specific populations including gang-involved youth; a population that has not been given sufficient attention in the examination of ECV. This is necessary in order to gain a fuller understanding of how these factors, in the context of the gang, increase the onset of mental health problems.

The findings from Chapter 3 have shown that the gang does provide youth with the experience of social support and belonging they seek, when support from key individuals in their lives beforehand has been lacking. In spite of experiencing a shift in the perceived support, they reported that the process of leaving the gang is not a straightforward one; emotional ties and an experienced sense of loss can cause difficulty in leaving the gang. As such, it would be useful to undertake evaluations of interventions currently being used to support youth transitioning out of gangs, and to undertake longitudinal research examining relevant factors that hinder or help youth to maintain desistance from gangs (Hussong et al., 2004; Jacques & Wright, 2008). Future research has the potential to provide further understanding of the complex gang membership phenomenon which, in turn, can enable gang members to be given the support they require at an individual level.

In summary, this thesis has identified the positive presence and relevance of individual, peer and socio-cultural factors when examining the relationship between mental health problems and perceptions of social support within the gang. The research study showed that participants were influenced by, and adopted the norms of the gang, which increased their sense of not only belonging, but being part of a stronger, united collective, that shaped their individual and collective identities. Nonetheless, the experiences for the participants within this particular study also demonstrated the fluidity of the gang influence, and their changing

perceptions of belongingness were in part shaped by their difficulties in coming to terms with the impact and consequences of exposure to violence. Some of the participants were able to form new, positive and supportive relationships by accessing interventions which provide not only practical support, but also companion-based support; thus highlighting that belongingness and being important to others remain important goals in the rehabilitation of gang-involved youth.

To conclude, it is imperative that more is learnt about the complex experiences of gang-involved youth so that youths at risk of joining a gang can be identified and that tailored support can be provided to enable gang-involved youth to become pro-social members of society. This thesis has gone some way to address these issues and has emphasised the need for further research in this area to fully understand the interplay between individual, peer-related and socio-cultural factors for gang-involved youth.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Details of database search strategies

Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts – Proquest (ASSIA)- ALL dates (1985-2018) 29th September 2018

English Language

(youth OR adolescent*)

AND

(street gang* OR gang offend*)

OR

(gang member*)

AND

(trauma*)

OR

(depression)

OR

(anxiety)

OR

(conduct disorder)

OR

(psychosis)

OR

(hyperactivity disorder)

OR

(mental illness)

Total 106

PsychINFO – 1967 to 29th September 2018 Limited to: English Language

Included the following databases:

PsychARTICLES FULL TEXT

EMBASE 1974 to 28.09.18

Journals @ OVID Full Text 29.09.18

OVID MEDLINE ® 1946 to September week 3 2018

CAB Abstracts 1973 to September week 3 2018

PsychINFO 1967 to September Week 4 2018

Social Policy and Practice 2018 07.

2. juvenile$	335084
4. youth	310418
6. adolescent$	3904796
8. young	2205034
10. juvenile gang$	1165
12. (gang member$)	2855
14. (gang adj3 offen$)	250
16. (street adj3 gang$)	895
18. trauma*	1297715
20. hyperactivity disorder	104686
22. anxiety	1011877
24. depression	1616367
26. conduct disorder	33352
28 psychosis	231767
30. mental illness	155165
31. 2 or 4 or 6 or 8	5451836
32. 10 or 12 or 14 or 16	3877
33. 18 or 20 or 22 or 24 or 26 or 28 or 30	4450929
34. 29 and 30 and 31	842
35. Duplicates	220

34. Total remaining articles **622**

Web of Science (WoS) 29th September 2018

Limited to: English language

All years (1900 - 2018)

# 4	240	#3 AND #2 AND #1 Databases= WOS, BCI, BIOSIS, DRCI, DIIDW, KJD, MEDLINE, RSCI, SCIELO, ZOOREC Timespan=All years Search language=Auto	Select to	Select to delete this set. ☐
# 3	1,824,420	TS=(trauma* OR conduct disorder OR hyperactivity disorder OR anxiety OR depression OR psychosis OR mental illness) Databases= WOS, BCI, BIOSIS, DRCI, DIIDW, KJD, MEDLINE, RSCI, SCIELO, ZOOREC Timespan=All years Search language=Auto		☑
# 2	4,679	TS=(juvenile gang* OR gang offend* OR gang member OR street gang*) Databases= WOS, BCI, BIOSIS, DRCI, DIIDW, KJD, MEDLINE, RSCI, SCIELO, ZOOREC Timespan=All years Search language=Auto	Select to combine sets. ☐	Select to delete this set. ☑
# 1	3,973,522	TS=(juvenile OR youth OR adolescent OR young) Databases= WOS, BCI, BIOSIS, DRCI, DIIDW, KJD, MEDLINE, RSCI, SCIELO, ZOOREC Timespan=All years Search language=Auto		

Appendix B: Systematic review inclusion/exclusion form

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria	Yes (included|)	No (excluded)
Is the paper an empirical research paper		
Is the paper in English		
Does the paper investigate male gang members in addition to female gang members? (do not include female only studies)		
Are all the participants in the study aged between 10-24 years?		
Does the study make comparisons with other youth non-gang members?		
Do the study aims/objective include exploring mental health symptoms reported by adolescent male gang members?		
If longitudinal or cohort study, is the final age of study 24 years or less?		
Do the study aims include exploring the association between mental health symptoms and gang membership?		

Appendix C: Quality Assessment Forms - Cross-sectional

	Y (2)	P (1)	N (0)	Other (CD, NR, NA)*	Comments
Screening Questions					
1. Were the aims of the study clear?					
2.Was a clear description provided regarding the way in which mental health symptoms were measured?					
Total out of 4:					
Sampling and Selection Bias					
3.Was the sample size justified?					
4.Was the target population clearly defined? (Is it clear who the research was about}?					
5.Were the participants representative of the population from which they were selected? (i.e. taken from an appropriate population that represents the target population under investigation)?					
6.Was the sample recruited in an acceptable way? (i.e. likely to select a representative sample?)					
Total out of 8:					
Risk of selection bias: *Low* *Unclear* *High*					
Measurement Bias for Comparator					
7.Was gang membership clearly defined and measured in a valid, reliable and consistent way across all study participants?					
8.Was the distribution of participants in categories of gang membership likely to introduce any bias?					
Total out of 4:					
Risk of measurement bias: *Low* *Unclear* *High*					
Measurement Bias for Outcome					

9.Were the outcome variables measured appropriate to the aims of the study?					
10.Were mental health symptoms clearly defined in terms of how they were measured?					
11.Were mental health symptoms measured with a valid tool/measure?					
12.Were mental health symptoms measured with an objective tool/measure?					
13.Can the measures used be considered to be reliable?					
14.Were the measurement methods the same for all participants?					
15.Has the study accounted for all potential confounding variables in measuring outcome?					
Total out of 14:					
Risk of measurement bias: *Low* *Unclear* *High*					
Other Issues					
16.Does the response rate raise concerns about non-response bias?					
17.Was the statistical analysis appropriate? *(Were the assumptions of the data tested?)*					
18.Were confounding factors accounted for? i.e. were other factors that could have accounted for findings controlled for)?					
19.Can the results be generalised? (can mental health symptoms be predicted in other youth gang members? Consider age, ethnicity, geographical population)					
Total out of 8:					
Final total out of 38:					

*CD, cannot determine, NA, not applicable, NR, not reported

Appendix C: Quality Assessment Forms - Observational Cohort study

	Y (2)	P (1)	N (0)	Other (CD, NR, NA)*	Comments
Screening Questions					
1. Were the aims of the study clear?					
2. Was the participation rate of eligible persons at least 50%?					
Total out of 4:					
Sampling and Selection Bias					
3.Was the sample size justified?					
4. Were all the subjects selected or recruited from the same or similar populations (including the same time period)?					
5.Was the sample recruited in an acceptable way? (i.e. likely to select a representative sample?)					
6. Was the timeframe sufficient to reasonably allow an association between exposure and outcome to be seen if there was one?					
Total out of 8:					
Risk of selection bias: *Low* *Unclear* *High*					
Measurement Bias for Comparator					
7. For the analyses in this paper, were the exposure (s) of interest measured before the outcome (s) being measured?					
8. Was the exposure assessed more than once over time?					
9.Was the outcome variables (mental health symptoms) clearly defined and measured in a valid, reliable and consistent way across all study participants?					
10. Was loss to follow-up after baseline 20% or less?					

11. Were potential confounding variables measured and adjusted statistically for their impact on the relationship between exposure and outcome?					
12.Was the distribution of participants in each gang membership sub-category likely to introduce any bias?					
Total out of 12:					
Risk of measurement bias: *Low* *Unclear* *High*					
Measurement Bias for Outcome					
13.Were the outcome variables measured appropriate to the aims of the study?					
14.Were mental health symptoms clearly defined in terms of how they were measured?					
15.Were mental health symptoms measured with a valid tool/measure?					
16.Were mental health symptoms measured with an objective tool/measure?					
17.Can the measures used be considered to be reliable?					
18.Were the measurement methods the same for all participants?					
Total out of 12:					
Risk of measurement bias: *Low* *Unclear* *High*					
Other Issues					
19.Does the response rate raise concerns about non-response bias?					
20.Was the statistical analysis appropriate? *(Were the assumptions of the data tested?)*					
21.Were confounding factors accounted for? i.e. were other factors that could have accounted for findings controlled for)?					
22.Can the results be generalised? (can mental health symptoms be predicted in other youth gang					

members? Consider age, ethnicity, geographical population)					
Total out of 8:					
Final total out of 44:					

*CD, cannot determine, NA, not applicable, NR, not reported

Appendix D: Quality assessment results from the literature review

Study & Overall score	Aims	Sampling and selection bias	Measurement bias for comparator	Measurement bias for outcome	Other (generalisability, response rate, confounders)	Method of analysis
1. Craig et al. (2002) **66%**	2/4 50%	6/8 75%	7/12 58.3%	10/12 83.3%	4/8 50%	Between groups comparison (t-test), multivariate analysis of variance, means and standard deviations, chi-square
2. Corcoran et al. (2005) **63%**	4/4 100%	3/8 37.5%	2/4 50%	9/14 64%	6/8 75%	Chi-square, means and standard deviations, partial correlations
3. Dmitrieva et al. (2014) **76%**	4/4 100%	6/8 75%	7/12 58.3%	9/12 75%	6/8 75%	Regression-based analyses
4. Dupere et al. (2007) **66%**	4/4 100%	5/8 62.5%	6/12 50%	9/12 75%	5/8 62.5%	Mean and standard deviation, bivariate Pearson correlations, multivariate correlations
5. Madan et al. (2011) **63%**	4/4 100%	5/8 62.5%	2/4 50%	8/14 66.7%	5/8 62.5%	Bivariate Pearson correlations, logistic regressions, Sobel tests
6. Merrin et al. (2015) **66%**	4/4 100%	5/8 62.5%	3/4 75%	9/14 64%	4/8 50%	Multinomial logistic regression, means and standard deviations

7. Thornton et al. (2015) **84%**	4/4 100%/	5/8 62.5%	¾ 75%	14/14 100%	6/8 75%	Correlations, Logistic regression
8. Cepeda et al. (2016) **66%**	4/4 100&	6/8 75%	3/4 75%	11/14 78.6%	5/8 62.5%	Means and standard deviations, T-tests, chi-square
9. Kerig et al. (2016) **76%**	4/4 100%	4/8 50%	3/4 75%	12/14 86%	6/8 75%	Chi-square, Multivariate analysis of variance
10. Watkins & Melde (2016) **73%**	4/4 100%	5/8 62.5%	9/12 75%	9/12 75%	5/8 62.5%	Chi-square, t-tests, regression model

Appendix E: Data extraction proforma for literature review

Study information

Title	
Author	
Year	
Country of Origin	

Method

Study type	
Recruitment of participants	
Sample size	
Characteristics of participants	

Quantitative

Measures used	
Validity of measures used	
Statistical tests	
Findings	
Strengths	
Weaknesses	

Qualitative

Data collection method	
Analysis method	
Findings	
Main themes	
Strengths	

Score

Quality Score	

Appendix F: Information sheet (part 1: interviews)

INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Understanding the life journeys of urban youth and the role of peers in their experiences

Why is this study being done? I am a research student at the University of Birmingham who is trying to understand how the life experiences of young people living in urban areas shapes them as individuals, and how such experiences might have affected you in a positive or negative way. I am also interested in the role that peers might have on these experiences and would like to explore whether your peers can act as a source of support for you. These experiences will help me to understand what goes on in the lives of people which I would like to communicate with organisations who have a role in supporting youth in the community. I would also like to be able to share what I find with other researchers studying urban youth and social support and contribute to developing a better understanding of how young people make sense of problems they might have had and the role their peers play in their lives. The study will be written up as a research project.

Why am I being asked to take part? Because you are aged 16-21 years and have experience and knowledge of living in areas where peer groups or street gangs exist.

What will I be asked to do? You will be asked to attend an interview with myself (Jag Sandhu, Researcher). Your Coaching Mentor will also be present throughout. It will take about an hour to talk about your life experiences. The interview will be audio taped so that the researcher can remember what you said. Recordings will be transcribed by the researcher, who will receive regular supervision with a research supervisor has knowledge of using data such as this in past research projects. The interview will then be written up. The tapes and transcripts of the interview will be kept in a locked cabinet in the psychology department at University of Birmingham where they will be

held and can be accessed for ten years until they are destroyed. You will not be asked to tell us any identifiable personal details, like your name and address – the study is anonymous. You can use a made up name during the interview. This allows us to identify your interview in case you decide you want us to remove your responses at a later date. The consent form explains more about this.

What are the benefits of taking part? People usually enjoy talking about their experiences and often find telling their story a positive and helpful experience. You will also be helping to promote positive experiences for future generations by helping us learn about your experiences. You will receive a retail voucher if you complete some or all of the interview.

Do I have to take part? You do not have to take part. If you choose not to, this will not affect your ability to attend the mentoring service in any way. If you do decide to take part you can pull out of the study at any time, even during the interview. If you start the interview and then decide to stop part way through, you can, and, if you want us to, we will ensure that any information you have provided will not be used in the study. If you want to pull out of the interview part way through and rearrange for another date and time you can, so let us know and we can arrange this. You do not have to give us you reasons for pulling out during an interview. If you get home and decide you do not want us to use your data for any reason you can simply contact your Coaching Mentor after completing the interview and let them know your made up name – they will tell us and we will exclude your interview from the study.

What do I do if I want to take part? If you want to take part you need to let your Coaching Mentor know. Your Coaching Mentor can introduce you to the researcher to gain further information about the study before you make a decision. If you are happy to continue to take part, then a date, time and venue will be arranged and you will be told by the Coaching Mentor and the researcher. On that day you will be given another copy of the information sheet and a consent form to sign saying you are happy to take part in the research.

Will what I say be kept confidential? Yes it will. The researcher will not know who you are and can therefore never disclose what you have said to anyone. If you do disclose any identifiable information by accident (like names of family members or friends, locations of various incidents) in the interview it will be removed from the study records. The only time when someone will need to know who you are is if you disclose specific details about any criminal offences that you have been involved in (that you have not been previously convicted of), or intend to carry out, such as names of offenders and dates on which offences have taken place. Also, if you are under 18 and let us know that you are at risk of harm from others. If you do this the researcher will have to inform ……. staff who may have to inform the authorities. There is no need for you to disclose any information like this to the researcher. All tapes and transcripts of the interview will be kept in a locked cabinet in the psychology department at Birmingham University where they will be held and can be accessed for ten years until they are destroyed.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part? Sometimes talking about one's life experiences, whether it be your own or a friends, brings up sensitive issues and the researcher will make every effort to put you at ease during the interview. You do not have to disclose personally distressing information in the interview. However, if the interview does bring up issues for you, you can stop the interview at any time. If you are upset after the interview, the researcher will give you a list of numbers you can call. That list of numbers is also printed at the end of this sheet, in case you would like to utilise any of these services now.

What happens when the research stops? When the study is finished a report will be provided to ……. The interviews will be transcribed and written up as a research project which may be published in the future. You can freely view the report or research. Your name or personal details will never appear in the report or the research.

Who is organising the research? This study is organised by The University of Birmingham.

Thank you for your time

If you think you would like to take part in the research project, or learn more about it, please contact your Coaching Mentor at ……..

Appendix G: Information for Coaching Mentors

Part A: Participant criteria

- Male.
- Aged between 16-21 years.
- Has engaged with the Coaching Mentor and has completed between 10 and 15 sessions.
- Is likely to talk openly/in some depth about their experiences and thoughts without becoming distressed.
- Gang membership:
  – past (in their lifetime) or present (within the last 12 months)
  - a young person (adolescent to early twenties)
  - who identifies themselves with a group (for at least three months),
  - is street orientated, (away from the home, work and school) and
  - has engaged in illegal/criminal activities with a group.
- Please speak with ……. to discuss proposed referral.

Part B: Information for Coaching Mentors to give to participants approached for taking part in interviews

There is a research study that is taking place with ……. that aims to explore how the life experiences of young people living in urban areas shapes them as individuals. Would you be interested in taking part?

If participant respond yes, then: I can give you some basic information about the study to begin with. If after this, you would still like to continue, I will go through an information sheet which answers specific questions you may have.

The researcher would like to understand what goes on in the lives of young people and will explore things like good and bad experiences you have had and what you have taken from them, and what your friends and people you hang out with means to you. This information will help the researcher to understand how young people make sense of problems they have, and areas where they might still need further support.

The researcher is a research student at the University of Birmingham and she is happy to meet with you before the interviews if you want to gain further information. I can put you in contact with her if you wish.

When you have agreed to take part, the researcher will meet with you and I (Coaching Mentor) will also be present, to conduct the interview. The research requires that you give your verbal and written consent to take part in a recorded interview. The interview will last about an hour. The interview will be transcribed and then written up as a research project, which might then be published in the future.

Are you interested in taking part? If yes then:
I will go through the information sheet and consent form with you. (Coaching Mentors to go through Appendix A: Information sheet and Appendix B: Consent Form with participant).

Would you like to get in contact with the researcher Jag Sandhu? If yes, then:

Jag Sandhu and Zoe Stephenson

Address: School of Psychology,
University of Birmingham,
Birmingham,
B15 2TT

Email: JXS150@bham.ac.uk

Please note: The researcher is contactable in the first instance, by email. Should the participant not have access to the internet, please can Coaching Mentors make contact with the researcher on the participant's behalf.

Once the participant has given their initial verbal and written consent, or has spoken with the researcher Jag Sandhu, then please contact Jag via email so that interviews can be arranged.

Appendix H: Consent Form

Consent Form

Please choose a made up name that you can remember and write it below. This is so that if you choose to withdraw from the study you can do so anonymously, without telling us your real name, you can simply quote the below made up code word.

Made up name: ……

Please feel free to ask any questions about taking part in the study. By signing the below form you are showing that you understand and agree to the following:

- I understand that I am being asked to participate in a research project being carried out by researchers at the University of Birmingham.
- I have been informed in writing about the nature and purpose of the study, I agree to take part in an interview that is audio-recorded.
- I agree to take part in an interview that will be audio recorded, transcribed and that the research may be published in the future.
- I understand that I do not have to take part in this study and, if for any reason I am unhappy about participating, I can withdraw from the study at any time and ask for my data to be destroyed without explaining my decision and at no consequence to me or others.
- If I am struggling with the interview I can ask that it ends at any time during the interview. I can ask my Coaching Mentor and the researcher for another appointment to carry on.
- I understand that taking part in this study (or withdrawing from the study) will not affect my ability to attend the ……. in any way.

- I will not be asked to tell anybody my name or any other personal details about me. I will be asked to give a made up name – and state this above - in case I decide to remove my responses at a later date.

- If I disclose specific details about any criminal offences that have taken place or are about to take place that have caused or have the potential to cause harm to others, the researcher will have to inform ……. about this that may have to inform the authorities. I understand that if I share information about a risk of harm to myself or others during the interview then the researcher will have to let relevant agencies know. This depends on what I share and the agencies may include, for example, the mentor service, social services or the police.

- If I take part in the interview I will receive a retail voucher.

I understand that I am consenting to participate in this study conducted in association with the University of Birmingham. I will confirm this verbally at the beginning of the taped interview with the researcher. I will also sign below to confirm my consent.

Signed…… Date……..

Appendix I: Debrief Sheet

DEBRIEF SHEET

Thank you for your taking part in this study.

The study aims to explore the experiences of young people living in urban areas and how they are affected in a positive or negative way. We wanted to hear what you have to say so we can understand what goes on in the lives of young local people to develop a better understanding of how young people make sense of problems they have, and how relationships with other young people are experienced. This understanding can help agencies to work effectively with individuals so they can move forward with their lives in a positive way.

If you wish to withdraw your consent for your interview to be used in the study please do so by contacting your Coaching Mentor at ……. or the researcher using the contact details below. If you have any queries, questions or concerns regarding the study, please contact the researcher on the below contact details.

Contact details:

Name: Jag Sandhu and Zoe Stephenson

Address: School of Psychology,
University of Birmingham,
Birmingham,
B15 2TT

Email: JXS150@bham.ac.uk and/orStephZME@adf.bham.ac.uk

The list below contains contact details of confidential organisations that offer individuals free advice and support over the phone or via the Internet. If you should wish to contact them for further information or support in the future please do so.

Sources of support- free services you may wish to contact for advice or support

Youthspace http://www.youthspace.me/Default.aspx

0800 953 0045/0121 678 4455 (PALS 8AM-8PM, Mon-Fri)

Facebook & Twitter: @Youthspace1

Raises awareness, challenges discrimination and promotes positive mental health by offering advice, information and support to young people.

YoungMinds http://www.youngminds.org.uk/about

020 7089 5050

Facebook & Twitter: @YoungMindsUK

UK charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Driven by their experiences we campaign, research and influence policy and practice.

Anxiety care http://www.anxietycare.org.uk/docs/home.asp

Tel: 020 8478 3400 (Open Monday and Wednesday 9.45am-3.45pm)

A charity that specialises in helping people to recover from anxiety disorders helping to plan, initiate and carry through personal recovery programmes.

Appendix J: Interview Schedule

Introduction

- Explanation of rationale of study and what will happen before, during and post interview
- Explanation of confidentiality including limits
- Check consent form signed and obtain verbal consent form participant
- Allow participant to ask questions before and after interview
- Ask participant to provide a fake research name when consenting to take part in the interview
- Check and confirm participant's age
- Ascertain gang membership (past or present) with the following – this can be asked at the end of the interview as coaching mentors will have provided details on membership beforehand:

If, lets say, a gang is defined as 'a group of peers who have known each other for at least a few months, who hang out together, often in public places, and carry out illegal acts together' – which of the following best describes you?

- I am a member of a gang
- I am involved with a gang but am not a central member
- I have friends/family who are involved in a gang, but I am not
- I have no current links at all to a gang but used to a) be a member; b) be involved but was not a central member c) had friends or family who were involved
- I have never had any links to a gang

Building rapport

- Tell me a bit about your neighbourhood – what is it like to live around here?

Prompt: What do people do around here? How long have you lived here? Who lives here? What might be a typical day for you? If you were to show me around, what would be the main things you would point out?

Semi-structured interview questions

(**1:** How do youth make sense of positive and negative life experiences leading up to their involvement with a gang?)

- What kinds of experiences have shaped you to be the person you are today?

Prompt: Comment on bad things that have shaped you, good things that have shaped you. How has [experience described] affected you? Did it change you attitudes towards…..?

How has it affected you ability to cope with..?)

- How would people close to you (e.g. mum, dad, family member, carer) describe you growing up?
- Is there anything else you think you might want to share about your past or current experiences?

(2: How did participants experience relationships and social support during gang involvement and in what way did this impact upon their day to day functioning?)

- How did you meet your friends? How often do you hang out together as a group?
- How would you describe your group of friends to me? How close would you describe your group?
- Do you see hanging out with your friends as being in gang? If not, how do you see it?

Prompt: What do you get from your friends? Why do you think you hang around with your friends as much as you do?

- How do you feel about being involved in these things? (emotionally) How were you affected? (emotionally, psychologically, behaviourally). What do you like and dislike about the things you do?
- In your experience do you or your friends have worries or fears?
- *Prompt:* What kinds of things did they experience? Would they turn to anyone if they did? Who may this be? How would they turn to them (to talk, for advice, for money etc).
- Were you able to identify with some of their experiences?

Prompt: Have you asked for help from others when you have experienced difficulties?

- Do you still feel the same about being involved with your group /gang as you did at the start? (if not, what has changed?)
- If you were to sum up your experiences of being with the group, what would be the good/positive things taken from it? What would be the not so good/negative things taken from it?

Debrief

That was all the questions I wanted ask:

- Is there anything would like to add to what you have said?
- Do you have any questions of your own come to mind after what we have talked about?
- Provide debrief sheet and briefly explain.

Appendix K: Research methodology & IPA

IPA is "*committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experience*s" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p1) and as such was consistent with the research aim. By recognising that every methodological stance can create reality as well as explain it, this approach positions participants as the experts of their own experiences, focusing on ensuring people's experiences are expressed in their own terms, i.e. from participants' frame of reference. Therefore, IPA endeavours to give voice and make sense of experiences, utilising a bottom-up approach that avoids creating theories (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). IPA also recognises the role of the researcher when collecting information, adopting the term 'double hermeneutic' to acknowledge how the researcher's own views and or experiences may influence data analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology

Four key phenomenological philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre have been key in the development of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Their ideas form the basis of IPA highlighting the importance of focusing on experiences and perceptions. Further there is a focus on how an individual is embedded in the relationships, culture, and objects in their life, which provides the impetus for focusing on an individuals lived social context to understand their perspectives (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics

Given that individuals will try to make meanings of the activities and experiences they have, the second focus of IPA is on the interpretations they make. There is recognition that whatever is presented for interpretation will be impacted by the researcher's own preconceptions. There is a double hermeneutic involved in IPA when the researcher makes

sense of the participant who is trying to make sense of their experience of the thing which is being explored (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The IPA researcher is encouraged to be mindful of not always knowing what one's preconceptions might be in advance of analysis and therefore being aware of the impact of one's preconceptions is key, and the use of reflective approaches to identify them is recommended. Hermeneutics are central to analysis of data because the process is a dynamic one and can be considered cyclical as opposed to linear as the researcher moves back and forth in their thinking about the data (Smith et al., 2009).

Idiography

Idiography places importance on the particular individual rather than making generalisations which can be applied at a wider group or population level. Therefore there is an increased level of importance given to a single case study and the experiences and features of the phenomena in question for the individuals involved. This level of detail and focus is of great relevance to the existing literature findings of the area of exploration and can further the understanding of it.

Researcher's position

Acknowledging the researcher's position and recognising the challenges of remaining impartial and objective is fundamental in the validity of research. As such, author reflexivity is key (Harris, 1976; Smith, 1983). As Smith et al. (2009) assert, experiences are brought to the research; and the author's identification as a British Indian female with no experience of gang membership within their family, will somewhat impact the interpretation of the data. A bracketing interview was conducted in addition to measures of self-reflexivity (reflective journal and interview logs/ notes) to consider the stance in which the author relates to and interprets experiences of gang membership.

The researcher utilized an interpretivist position. Interpretivists believe that society operates differently from the natural world and believe reality is subjective. This approach is less interested in universal meaning or commonality, but instead focuses on how a person develops their own unique views based on their individual experiences (Willis, 2007). Rather than measuring phenomena, interpretivist research attempts to gain an insight into what life is like for a person and is congruent with the researcher's own personal epistemology.

Informed consent

Participants were approached by coaching mentors in the first instance with an information sheet that clearly explained the purpose and nature of the research (Appendix…). The coaching mentors had been provided with a detailed session explaining the research so that they could provide information such as the areas discussed and explored with potential participants. Coaching mentors and the information sheet provided detailed the researcher's email address so that contact could be made in the event of further questions or to clarify questions. Participants were given time to decide whether they wished to take part and met with the researcher prior to the interviews where their wish to participate was verbally confirmed. At this stage, participants were reminded they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the interview, and afterwards upon to one month after completion without the need to give a reason. Verbal and signed consent was obtained. The latter consent also provided information regarding how the data gathered be stored and written up in the researchers' thesis and other reports published.

Confidentiality and anonymity

The information sheet provided details about confidentiality and its limits in addition to a verbal explanation before the interviews took place. Recordings of the interview were deleted once they had been transcribed. Anonymisation of transcripts took place and

pseudonyms were used for participants. Names of locations or other individuals they referred to in the interviews were also anonymised. Only the researcher and research supervisor had sight of the transcripts. The contact details and transcripts, and signed consent form, were securely stored in a locked office where they will be kept for 10 years as per University of Birmingham guidelines.

Potential distress

Given the nature of the topic and the participant sample, and bearing in mind that they had been identified as individuals' with difficulties with managing feelings relating to distressing past experiences, a number of processes were adhered to prior to the actual identification, referral and interview taking place. Firstly, coaching mentors only referred young people who had completed between 10 and 15 sessions with coaching mentors and are assessed through consultation with their senior practitioner to be suitable to engage in the research interview process and manage the questions asked of them. Secondly upon indicating their willingness to engage, contact was made by the research supervisor to the local mental health team operating within the locality for adolescents, to advise of research taking place with individuals involved with both the youth offending team and the service outlined. The purpose of this information sharing was to provide some information to how a young person might be adversely affected during or following interview, and in the event of decompensation and distress, require more professional support. This did not happen for any of the participants who were interviewed, but rather was borne out of need to be prepared to take precautionary actions to support youth who become overwhelmingly distressed afterwards. Participants will be recruited with the aid of a coaching mentor who is presently working with participants and with consultation with the senior practitioner who supervised the coaching mentors.

Prior the interviews taking place, participants were informed of the risks such as talking about life experiences to have the potential to be upsetting or distressing. Participants were informed that the interview could be stopped at any time they wished and that there were no consequences for withdrawing from the study. Participants were informed that their data would be destroyed once consent was withdrawn.

The potential for underreporting of experienced psychological distress including symptoms of depression and anxiety was acknowledged with this participant population. Therefore, participants were made aware of psychological support being made available to them following the interview. This included lists of local agencies available to support and online services. Contact was made by the researcher's supervisor to the local mental health teams during the times of the interviews once they were confirmed.

Before the start of each interview, a handover and consultation with coaching mentors took place to discuss the participants and how their presentation. Participants were asked to attend the office half an hour prior to the planed interviews to meet with coaching mentors. If identified participants were considered to present in an unsafe manner (e.g. unsettled, anxious, upset or angry) it was agreed the interview would be postponed to a later date to suit the participant, coaching mentor and researcher. Postponement or termination of interviews if necessary was planned to be undertaken sensitively, in order that participants did not experience negative emotions linked with poor self-worth. It was also planned for the researcher to remain on site for the planned duration of the interview should the participant have had any further questions.

Appendix L: Reflective statement

As a trainee forensic psychologist enrolled on the Forensic Psychology Practice Doctorate, I was aware of being the primary researcher in this study, and the potential challenge to remain objective. I had been enrolled on the course for three years, whilst also working in a secure forensic psychiatric hospital for a total of eight years. During this time, I have worked with a range of populations, including adult male and female clients suffering with various mental health problems, who present with a range of complex issues, which often requires having a flexible and open approach. I also reflected that one of the key treatment targets with any of the clients I have worked with over time was the importance of developing therapeutic rapport and trust, in order to allow them to be open with their difficulties. I was aware of having a bias of working with firstly, a predominately adult population, and secondly, being accustomed to having the time to get to know them over a longer period – something that was not possible for the current study.

I reflected on where my initial interest for working with gang-involved youth might have come from. Prior to enrolling on the Doctorate course, I was employed as a Probation Officer, where I worked for a period of time with young adolescent offenders. I had experience of supervising a few youths who were gang-involved and recalled some of the issues which had been of importance for them during our discussions. I was mindful of a further bias, based on my experiences with what gang-involved offenders had shared, and what I had subsequently read and learned about within my studies. As such, I was aware of a bias to interpret or look out for information to support the negative impact of victimisation in a gang, for example.

I was also mindful that there might be some resistance by the participants to share information with me. I reflected on my position as a researcher, with young male participants who were recruited from youth offending services, which they attended as part of their

community rehabilitation order or licence requirements. They were already within a system where professionals assumed a level of power and authority over them, and I considered that as a researcher I may be an extension of this system, and thus perceived as holding that power too. In spite of participants having consented to taking part in the interviews, I was mindful that I was automatically in a position of power because I led, and, to some level, controlled the interview process itself.

Secondly, I considered my role as a female researcher, and that I might be received differently to a male researcher, perhaps considered as 'softer' in some way, and therefore it could impact on how I might present, in terms of my non-verbal body language, and perhaps efforts to come across or to 'prove' myself as a female researcher. I believe that my thought processes at the time were influenced by what I had read about females and their mistreatment in the context of the gang, noticing a bias in terms of an awareness of male participants potentially having negative attitudes towards women, especially in the context of the power dynamic of the interviewer-participant relationship. I also wondered whether because I was female participants felt more able to share their vulnerabilities with me, as a result of potential transference and counter-transference processes taking place, which were being played out during the interview, and I could be perceived as taking on an almost 'maternal' or 'helping' role.

Whilst conducting the interviews, I was aware of the challenge of attending to the different aspects of interviewing for research, such as attending to the 'housekeeping' aspects (e.g., the room, recording, space and light), as well as the interview itself, such as giving the participant a voice, my responses, actively listening to the participant to ask relevant questions, and being mindful not to impart my own views or feelings so as to encourage a particular response from the participant. I think I was more aware of the latter challenge in my

first interview, which was with David, as he came across as quiet, responding quite minimally, and I did ask more prompting questions. I noticed a sense of worry that the data might not be rich in quality and needed to be able to stay focussed on the interview as this too had the potential to impact on my responsiveness to him. I noticed quite the opposite with Jesse and Paul, however, because they talked at length and seemingly quite openly, and I wondered at times whether they had gone off topic, and I had allowed them to, by listening or asking about the particular aspect they were discussing at that time.

In preparation of the interview schedule, and for the interviews themselves, I was mindful of my position of responsibility, especially if participants were to make disclosures or discuss something which was distressing or difficult. During the interview, I needed to pay more attention to noticing this, as some of the participants were more matter-of-fact about discussing trauma. Whilst it can be positive for some individuals to be able to label and talk about traumatic experiences, I was aware that I did not know the participants sufficiently well to predict how they might feel, and that they may internally feel differently, and therefore there was the potential that they felt re-traumatised having activated past experiences and memories. It was evident from how Tom had responded when reflecting on his experiences that he found it difficult to talk about them (or at least struggled to find words to explain), and I acknowledged this with him. I remember pausing and giving him the chance to have a break, which he declined. Despite assurances he was fine, his response stayed in my mind and allowed me to think about how the experiences had affected him at the time and continued to do so in the present day. I also got a sense that he wanted to continue to tell his story, and therefore labelling the experiences as traumatic may have been important to him in that moment. I did share my observations with the coaching mentor, being mindful I was not

disclosing what Tom had discussed per se, but to ensure he had support available afterwards. In some ways, I was also struck by the things the participants, including Tom, did share.

The interview itself allowed them to talk from their perspective, which may have been experienced as quite refreshing and validating, bearing in mind that their experiences of discussing their gang involvement prior to this (e.g., with professionals in the criminal justice system) may have likely been in the context of gang involvement as a risk factor for crime.

Excerpts from reflexive diary; Interview four: Jesse

At line 48, so quite early in the interview, I was struck by how quickly Jesse began to share what seemed to be the important 'experience' or the 'thing' on his mind, and in his life right now. The idea of coming to terms with change, and the way he personally reflected on how different things were now compared to when he was a child. It seemed he was coming to terms with what taking responsibility involved. I noticed my own reaction to the sense that he had not been 'prepared' to face consequences of wrongdoing as a young adult, because he had naively thought it would be the same as a child making a 'mistake'. I felt empathic towards him and a bit helpless. I wondered whether he felt helpless at the time too. It was only once I had returned to the transcript that I thought about whether his sense-making suggested that he might be justifying his behaviour by inviting sympathy.

I found myself oscillating between feeling sorry for Jesse and feeling as though he was 'blaming' others for not doing enough. How were others supposed to help him if they didn't know what he wanted? Then I realised he might not have known what he wanted either. And that he could reflect on that now, but at the time he didn't have that understanding or awareness himself.

Appendix M: Example of an annotated transcript; Interview four: Jesse

Emergent themes	**Interview extract**	**Initial noting**
	Interviewer: So were there consequences to that argument?	
It got out of control	Jesse: Yeaahh. Some people end up getting you know injured… or hurt, if you say, whichever way you say it (pauses) yeah that's pretty much it. Yeah but it jus it's just the fact that it started off all small? To something so big an er when when you're a kid, an arguments an argument you know, 'ah she hit me' ah you know or I hit them or they hit me both you say something I said. Now it's nothing like that. You know, if you hit someone (pauses) like (inhales sharply) I'm you always expect the worse but it it's more than ah it's not a sorry thing and they hit you back an you say a sorry after there's a bunch of	Do they mean the same thing?hurt implies more than physical pain? Trying to convey emotional impact? 'Pretty much', all really, not much, a sense there are worse things that have happened. 'Started off small' – didn't expect it to escalate.
Taken by surprise; didn't expect it		
Child>adult: Facing up to consequences		Elicits empathy with the example given – doing wrong as a child; which implies innocence, not knowing. However, is actually making reference to something which is contextually very different, and more serious. Attempts to normalise that can still do wrong now, as a child.
Different ballgame: it's serious		
It doesn't end		
Looking over your shoulder		'Not a sorry thing' – realisation its serious (but almost implying should not be?). More than one consequence – suggests it taken seriously, prolonged punishment? 'have to be' – there is no choice here, sense of being prepared. The consequences linger, an expectation for some sort of payback.
Living with fear		

Living with uncertainty Paranoia Who can I trust? Fear Learning to trust again Fear of unexpected Putting on a front, don't show your feelings Trapped	consequence to that, or you have to be looking over your shoulder at these type of things. Interviewer: Hmm. And, you've mentioned consequences and you've talked a little bit about the idea of looking over your shoulder? Can, can you give me an idea of what this feels like? Jesse: Um, well, with the consequences, they doesn't turn out to be a good (laughs) things. You basically, you're you're paranoid you know you're worried about yourself you're constantly looking over your shoulder an you don't know what's gonna happen next so, what's like you jus don't know what's next so you have to be aware of the surroundings and these type of fings. Interviewer: Hmm. And how does that make you feel?	Not what you expect. Laughs – makes light of a bad/scary situation. 'you're' – not 'I' -creates distance, difficult to personalise? Repetition of 'you're', stresses how pervasive and acute the threat was to him. 'Paranoid' – belief that being watched becomes so real, frightening, not in control of situation. Present tense – reliving the fear. Unpredictable, unsafe Not having the knowledge of what to expect, can't trust what he thinks because the situation/threat is bigger than he. Therefore, have to rely on cues outside of him. Moved on from here. Don't need to discuss. Don't need to revisit the feelings (negative ones). Resistance to go there? Unpleasant, avoid. 'I was it was' – reluctance to relate to self as too scary? 'Nerve racking' – stressful Seen to be looking around – shows others I'm frightened. 'look' and 'act' – putting on pretences for the sake of others – how will I be evaluated? Sense of being forced to do this, wear a mask, to hide real feelings of fear. How others saw me mattered. Does this define identity? Fear of being seen as

	Jesse: Um not what I have to worry about coz you know I'm past that stage, but when I was back in that stage I was it was nerve racking you know you don't wanna be all lookin around, worrying about who's watching what you're doin or do I have to look a certain way act a certain way in front of people an jus knowing like it's hard. You jus wanna be yourself.	"weak"? What message does it send? Cannot defend self, is vulnerable, weak.

Appendix N: List of themes which emerged for Interview four: Jesse

Themes	Page/line	Key words
Difficulty/ambivalent about how much responsibility willing to take himself	L43 L49 L214	was it meant to be this hard? Not told the fully story like I don't say had to as in I had to but
Not my fault	L109 L211	caught up in the middle brought on me
Facing consequences	L50	you have to go over the consequences a bunch of consequences
Dealing with consequences Consequences have an impact Consequences can be dangerous	L142 L72 L72	looking over your shoulder it's a lot…burden they were older than me didn't feel like the rght thing
Lack of choice	L468 L107	either I do have choice but I didn't
Accepting responsibility is not straightforward	L126 L127 L129	Confusing Don't have to go down that road
It wasn't a good start	L86 L275	It was rough No food no electric
Needs not met Not understood	L90 L98 L99	Can't get certain help Not helping the right way Nagging on Its not getting through
Violence and drugs is normal The areas you grow up in dictate what you do People around me can guide me	L109 L115 L117	Its normal life Different places with different people but same thing Get shown what to do
People around me can't be trusted	L499	Don't trust them
I am drawn to this life; inevitable	L153 L155	I was very very aggressive Short tempered
Violence as a solution/excitement Need for respect	L294 L299 L305	wouldn't back down if he says please do what you have to

Coming to terms with my changing self	L137	Recognise what you want as a person
	L157	Can't always stay do the same thing
Questioning self	L544	Why am I doing this, this is wrong
Separating self from group will be hard – cut off quickly	L137	Go for it
	L138	Dropping people out
Loyalty	L198	Someone's always helped somewhere
Sense of betrayal	L199	Disrespectful
	L199	Violating them
	L198	Drop them
I can be heard	L165	He can cut you out, he can if he needs to
Self- doubt and questioning judgement	L170	Is it best if.. or do I just..?
	L177	Second thoughts
	L182	How's it gonna work
	L250	Can I do it
Trust my judgement	L187	What's the worst that can happen
Self-growth	L219	Bettered as a person
	L315	Look back and learn from it
Learning from past experiences protect me and are a reminder of negative consequences	L583	This will happen to you if you do this good to always have a negative reminder

Re-connecting with others Hope	L225 L227	Shared experiences Showed me things are possible
Self-belief	L250 L241 L241 L256	I can Let me see How You can pick yourself up
Growth is continuous Change is fragile Temptation to return to old ways	L350 L526 L528	Still learning Do stuff I shouldn't Offer you the choice
Tied to the group It's binding	L517 L522	Can't get rid of them I've tried, it doesn't work
Haunted by the past Living with fear Need to be prepared	L312 L364 L313	Flashbacks an recaps Things got out of hand Will, have to look back Know a situations coming Vibe
Disbelief over own victimisation Protective strategy to cope	L423-424 L552	Confused, whoa, imagine if, Oh wow Nerve-racking
Fear of serious injury/death	L554 L576	Plays in my head, really got me
Incapacitated Loss of dignity/of self	L573 L576	Won't be able to do something Wipe ma arse, move my arm
To act quickly in the face of perceived threat	L431 L442	Something is going to happen, Quick warning,

Dealing with difficult emotions Emotions experienced as too much; overhwelming Experience sadness as anger	L317 L424 L319	wouldn't say the word sad but unhappy bunch of emotions unhappy like pissed off

Appendix O: Overview of emerging themes across participant accounts

David	Paul	John	Jesse	Tom
	The area is influential - "..there's only so much a parent can do, you know. An the area does, does that'll shape you. Like as much as people may say yeah I'm from here it doesn't matter but it does, like." its jus jus the area. Little fings like that [pause] it was like I was scared of the area even though, I wasn't? Because I knew the stigma the area had. Y'know I knew….was meant to be this big bad place where everyone does this an everyone sells drugs an everyone has a knife or somefing like that.	What happens in the area is 'normal' - 'everyfing, really everyfing. Like..crime, like petty crime, selling drugs little things like that'	Growing up was rough- It was rough but it wasn't always rough growing up…sometimes there wasn't no food there as sometimes there was no electric an stuff like that. It wasn't as bad as it seemed'	Having friends in the area who are already ahead of everything- already involved in crime
	Not feeling understood - '..the thing that affects me the most was, not having (pause) what I felt	Losing myself, loss of connection - '…before he got mixed up with gangs, he was	Not feeling understood - '..alot of people really wanna help you but	Not feeling understood - Relationship with family: 'Same old. I dunno. Jus,

	[emphasised] like I needed at the time'. Not feeling understood/ Need to connect - 'I know how it is (spoken quietly) so I know how life can be. You know can be put in situation where you feel you're all alone, the only way you're gonna be a Team is, to be with people that do stupidness'.	doing things like, I looked up to him…then when he went inside I was so, so upset' - my role model taken away form me – who do I look up to now an dhow to a define my identity	they're not helping in the right way'. Lack of choice - 'Coz when you're when you grow up in like these kind of, the hood or the streets or whatever you wanna call it, you don't really get shown that these fings are possible'.	difficult innit? It's jus that (sighs)
Showed me a way – 'showed me people, and showed me around so I got comfortable'.	Identified with a group because of similar experiences – Riding bikes, football, talking, hanging out. Was the outgroup when the ingroup wanted to sell drugs – stuck together. Doing social activities together.	Boredom quickly leads me intro trouble with them, sense of not being able to help oneself: '…it were goin well, I'm playing sports an I was keepin far away from it, then when I had a little time on ma hands like I jus end up getting myself into foolishness'.	This is an option– 'It didn't feel like the right thing to do but it didn't feel like the wrong thing to do' There for me/support and protection from others – 'helped through money issues you know, like if I had problems with other people'.	Being shown the path – '.., so I was, they had the new stuff an I'm thinkin how you getting that? They said to me yeah it's jus gotta work hard for it, it's easy so yeah..' 'An I been around them an learnt a few skills an then started using the skills' Selling drinks and crisps in school – 'rah this is easy'

Group norms – I'm going to act if I need to – not going to stand and watch my friends being harmed. Emphasises how automatic this thought process is to help his friends, unconditional.	Connecting with the group – takes on role of a funny friend, the one who cheers others' up, a sense of purpose and identification with the group. Provided advice and emotional support. 'I used to chat more about my problems than anyone else because we all went through the same thing pretty much' sense of oneness with group.	Family - 'I feel like they're **family** to me. Um, like they help me out with fings. Like jus everyfink I don't know'. 'there's **love, a lot of lovin**. Hmmm. Yeah' Advice giving – 'dey dey inspire you to do fings like, inspired me to carry on my sports an fings like that'.	Stronger, invincible – 'Um well I joined it, the reason I joined it was the excitement, I used to love being aggressive to people…it was the fing where pauses) joinin it was yeah the excitement…'	Unconditional support - 'none of the times I've had to ask for help' There for me – 'um their support was was needed so, that's why I'm saying I still have that love for them coz at that time, I the support them being outside with me it was was good'. Family - "jus like they were **bruvvers**, literally". Feel good - 'if you feel like someone's lookin after you you it's good innit? 'we was we became part of the family as well, so then it was a fing where we had to learn I had to do fings an I was a bit more in it..'

Not there for me now - betrayal '…being inside made me fink like there are people who are not really there for me now' Not sure who I can trust – 'Close with friends like talking but you don't trust yourself like, you don't trust each other enough to share everyone' business to each other'.	Realisation – 'showed their true colours I guess' – friends are not who they say they are. Consequences lead to realisation that friends did not serve him well- 'if I wasn't friends with them, and if I wasn't loyal wiv them as I was, I don't think I would have got into trouble for'.	The relationship changed – 'in the beginning yeah…it brought us together but, in the end..not really jus talk bout over fings yeah'.	Didn't tell me the whole story – 'there was the over one that was like 'yeah join us yeah come come 'It's fun', 'we get money', 'we do things you know', live in luxury an all this other stuff, but then, they don't really show the consequences or they don't show you the outcomes, they show you the bright side not the dark side of fings'. Not really looking out for me - I kind of realised that some people were kind of like I, I don't know if not jealous but jus I don't know, they always tried to drag me down or stuff like or make me get into silly fings' The pain –	The expectation of engagement in violence within the gang became too much – not able to express feelings freely 'Ma escape route [sighs] didn't even have one I jus kept it in, jus kept goin'

			‘I fink it was my experiences that made me leave. But, the main fing was the emotions the feelings you know the trauma all these fings that make you wanna fink no you know I can’t go through them’.	
	Loss of friends ‘experienced as sad, unwavering experience of the bond – And it was them. But they were really close friends of mine. Not to knock that’.	Coming to terms with own responsibility - ‘…the reason I’m here is not coz of them, I can’t really say its coz of my ……. coz I make my own decisions – he is where he is. So it was just thru ma own foolishness so I can’t really say it was dem having an influence over me’. Difficulty separating own and friends’ role – ‘when the time comes they’ll change’.	‘Was it meant to be this hard’, missing the connection – ‘Yeah um…I mean I don’t expect it to get easier but(pauses) you know it’s like, was it meant to be this hard?’ (laughs) Challenges of leaving friends, loyalty and consequences – ‘consequences are mainly dropping people out’. Accepting consequences of “leaving” the group – letting go is hard-	Anger at loss: ‘I dunno, I dunno, they just a bunch of haters, it burns me an that. Um it’s crazy’. Loss of sense of self and role - ‘…it was difficult because it happened when I was going through a stage of change when I changed, I was tryna change I was tryna pull maself away from crime? So, ma friends died at that moment as well. An them, um yeah it was it was jus hard coz

			'…it's not like you can jus say 'no I don't wanna talk to you'. An jus never talk to them again. It does take a while… you know, try to make it permanent that I'm not talking to that person or we're no longer friends. But that comes with consequences. Dealing with emotions – sadness, loss - Yeah it does sometimes get emotional or sometimes I wouldn't say the word sad but unhappy…'	I didn't know what to do….' Loss of way of coping – 'It was hard. Coz everytime I jus wanted to go I jus chill an jus cool off but like if, if anyfink happens, I can jeopardise what I'm tryna build up so I need to I was just tryna find a balance.' Dealing with violence from the gang - 'because of what I was part of there, some people that was tryna um, get to me an try an try um yeah try an get to at me an saying yeah um still gonna get you what not what not so'.
Staying focussed – '..that stuff is not, is not the way forward. So, I try to sort of change like I fought to myself , just change myself round'.	Staying focussed and self-determination – 'I just know for a fact, that the people you surround yourself with, makes a difference. An education, as much as I hate it, as much as I hate	The people/support around you makes the difference – 'I just know for a fact that the people you surround yourself with makes a difference'.	The struggle not to go back- 'Um, every now and then I do think about doin something some stuff I shouldn't be doing, but you remember that I have	Staying focussed – Probably be in jail'. 'Or I still be in a mix up let's jus say that. I still be in that circle. In that loop'. Being involved in role as mentor –

	school and college, it's really good for me so I gotta do it…two years ago I would have been like nah, that's not fo me I don't do them fings. But now, bang, I gotta do this, you know I gotta take every opportunity as it comes'.		fings to lose like the the you know the fings that I'm doin an can bring back down to a place where I can't pick myself up from an I will be stuck here doing the things I shouldn't be doin'.	'helping me a lot'. Staying focussed – How do I cope? You know jusss….I don't know. Actually I know I just, I just started to keep focussed wiv what I had to do coz coz I had to coz at the time it just yeah it was hard but I kept focussed wiv what I had to do.'
	The long term effect of growing up in the area and not feeling safe: ' I guess as I said I was jus more aware. Y'know, I wasn't always on edge but [pauses] no I think I would say I was always on edge but, just grew up, so it jus became kind of normal'. Losing friends to violence – 'It's something I got used to but I shouldn't be used to, like I lose friends and it's like…I knew him from nursery'.		Cumulative impact of early experiences and the gang – 'I don't know if most of these are from when I was younger I had these experiences but when I was younger there was those couple of times'. Hypervigilance, sensitive to perceived threat – 'But if something similar happens or I feel that something similar is going to happen then	Coming to terms with the experiences of trauma – 'traumatisin things' and 'seen a lot of stuff'. Difficulty experiencing and articulating trauma experiences – 'a bit dark…a bit like hard' and 'but I try to escape it its mind gaming it's in your mind know what I mean. It's the mind battle'.

	Coming to terms with own feelings and loss when others are grieving – ‘ there was people sitting in the counsel room like crying their eyes out I’m never gonna be able to live normal again, you know they’re the people that having a laugh about getting stabbed up.		it does come up again, and it does make me like, double check what’s happening around me and maybe make a different decision that everyone compared what everyone thought I was gonna make. So, yeah. Pretty much it’.	