

## **Can Professional Interventions contribute to an escalation in cases of youth violence? Considering the impact of the shift from informal to formal youth support on an inner city housing estate.**

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### **Abstract**

Youth violence is on the increase across many UK cities and although national trends, such as more networked entrepreneurial drug dealing, are contributing to the spread of such incidents, localised community environments play a significant role in the development of violent youth cultures. Based on a four year ethnographic study, this article explores how the shift from a resident led, relationship based interaction, to a more professionalised evidenced based intervention model, increased the risk of young people getting involved in youth violence. Efforts to address youth violence should consider including more relational informal support networks, alongside more specialist interventions.

### **Introduction**

The paper considers the impact that a shift from informal resident led to professional youth support, through the commissioning of a series of youth violence interventions, had on reciprocal intergenerational relationships and informal social control processes on a South London housing estate.

The research site is demographically typical of many of the housing estates within London, having a relatively diverse population, with 27% of the residents of Black African origin, 18% of Black Caribbean origin, 18% were White British, 7% were Portuguese, and 6% of other White backgrounds (Lambeth Living, 2012).

Historically, the estate had thriving resident networks which organised holiday play schemes, youth clubs, free legal workshops, mother and toddler groups and elderly lunches. However, much of this had fallen by the wayside, and by the time the local authority deemed it necessary to take action, the residents committee struggled to get 10 members to attend its meetings. Yet, there was still a small group of residents who spent much of their free time providing support for local young people.

During the study, the borough had the highest incidence of serious youth crime in the capital, and serious youth violence had increased by 35% over a three year period (Lambeth Council 2018). The research site has been an increasingly significant contributor to these statistics, with local young people being involved in at least 15 stabbings, and nine shootings, both as victims and perpetrators, over the past decade.

As concerns were emerging about the actions of groups of young people from the estate, the local authority commissioned a series of professional youth interventions to replace the limited resident led activities. However, their short term nature subsequently left the young people hanging out on the estate, more isolated, and gave greater space for a criminal youth culture to develop.

Quantitatively, the impacts of this isolation can be seen when considering the change in the growth of crimes such as weapons offences. Over the past 15 years, weapons offences have been on the rise in the neighbourhood where the estate is located. However, the ward crime data (Metropolitan Police Service n.d) for the area, shows a distinct pattern. In the five years when the residents were most active (2006-2010), weapons offences only rose by 20% compared to an average 55% increase for nearby wards. However, between 2012 and 2016, which saw professional support firstly dominate and then disappear from the estate, the rate of increase in weapons offences

tripled in the ward where the estate is situated, whilst the same offences less than doubled in neighbouring areas. This study seeks to explore the localised changes that have contributed to this accelerated growth in youth violence.

### **Neighbourhood Environment and Youth Street Culture**

Deprived neighbourhoods generally have increased rates of youth crime and violence compared to other areas (McAra and McVie, 2016; Morenoff, et al., 2006; Baumer, et al., 2006). Poverty increases exposure to risk factors such as childhood trauma, school exclusion and violence at both the household and neighbourhood levels (Kim et al., 2016; McAra and McVie, 2016; McCrea et al., 2019; Ross and Arsenault, 2019; Walters, 2018). It also decreases the likelihood of protective factors such as healthy family and community relationships being present (Kim et al., 2016; Gibson et al., 2009; McAra and McVie, 2016; Wikström and Loeber, 2006). Understanding youth violence, therefore, requires an analysis of the interplay between a young persons' local environment and their supervisory relationships (McAra and McVie, 2016; Salzinger et al., 2002).

The role that social relations play in neighbourhood control was first highlighted by Shaw and McKay (1942), who applied a systemic model in their theory of Social Disorganisation. Shaw and McKay (1942) showed how structural impediments, such as deprivation, population turnover and racial and ethnic heterogeneity, produce mistrust, fear of the other and a sense of alienation. This diminishes the neighbourhood's ability to develop shared values and establish informal social control mechanisms (Brunton-Smith et al., 2018; Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Sampson et al., 1997; 1999; Sampson and Groves, 1989; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999; Shaw and McKay, 1942).

Although neighbourhoods are fashioned by wider socio-economic factors, they are also shaped by their specific context (Cole, 2019; Sampson, 2013; Schnell et al., 2016). Sampson and Groves (1989) considered localised contexts to explain how friendship and kinship networks built collective efficacy, a sense of trust and mutual expectations, resulting in informal guardianship and residents acting to constrain deviant behavior (Bellair 2006a; Maimon and Browning, 2010; Oberwitter, 2004; Sampson and Groves, 1989; Wikes et al., 2013). This ability to provide effective informal guardianship is enhanced by support from professional organisations and institutions (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993), strengthening young people's sense of what is expected of them during unstructured leisure time (Maimon and Browning, 2010). Therefore, neighbourhoods with higher levels of collective efficacy have lower crime rates (Maimon and Browning, 2010; Sampson and Groves, 1989).

These influential informal relationships are akin to Anderson's (2002, 1999) respectable 'Old Heads' who used their community status to positively influence the younger generation. Relationships between the older and younger generation, therefore, are seen as a neighbourhood's most important institution, providing mentoring, helping to solve problems and connecting people to resources and other networks (Anderson, 1999; Carter et al., 2017). When these 'old heads' disappear, street orientated peers take their place, resulting in violence and criminality increasingly seen as a way to earn respect. However, although the influence of 'old heads' may be waning, it can still be found in structured activities provided by members of the community (Sacha, 2015). Therefore, local pro-social activities are considered a vital source of additional relationship based supervision within neighbourhoods (Prince et al., 2019).

The isolation experienced by young people when the 'Old Head' relational support is missing can lead to a criminogenic street culture developing where the symbolic capital of violence, sexual promiscuity and drug dealing become embodied street capital and a vital way of achieving material goals and status (Fraser, 2013; Harding, 2014, 2020; Ilan, 2012; Pitts, 2020; Sandberg, 2008, 2012, Stewart and Simons, 2007).

In recent years, two coinciding developments have influenced this criminogenic culture. Local drug markets have become saturated with more young people selling drugs to make quick money, without the customer base expanding (Andell and Pitts, 2018; Robinson et al., 2018; Windle and Biggs, 2015). At the same time, enforcement efforts within provincial areas of the UK have reduced the local dealing market, creating a void (Andell and Pitts, 2018; Coomber, 2015). London based dealers have therefore looked for entrepreneurial opportunities to maximise profits and expand their drug operations into this void through developing county lines drug networks (Andell and Pitts, 2018; Coomber, 2015; Pitts, 2016; Robinson et al., 2018; Windle and Biggs 2015; Windle et al., 2020). As a result, younger, more diverse, profit driven groups competing for the same markets have emerged (Robinson et al., 2018). As there is no legal redress within drug markets, grievances are often addressed through violence (Jacques and Allen, 2015; Robinson et al., 2018). Increased violence is, therefore, a consequence of a coming together of particular, social, cultural, spatial, and historical factors (Coomber 2015), including neighbourhood dynamics as discussed above.

### **Seeking Professional Interventions**

Anxiety regarding the emergence of such street cultures has resulted in increased calls for professional intervention (Fraser and Hagedon, 2016). More recently in the UK, there have been efforts to develop a multi-layered, multi-agency public health

approach, bringing together universal and more targeted services to support those affected by serious violence (Abt, 2017; Densley, et al., 2020; Pitts 2019).

Commissioners' default position is often to invest authority and resources in likeminded professionals (Pestoff and Brandsen, 2010), with others, notably those from poorer neighbourhoods, seen as inferior (Mckenzie, 2015; Sanli, 2011) and unsuitable providers of specialist activities (Thijsen and Van Dooren, 2015). Notions of professionalism offer an assurance of competent practice (Brubaker and Keegan, 2018; James, 2016; Moskovskaia, 2012) and are often juxtaposed against those who lack particular training and experience. This process, driven by the notion of professionalism, identifies those who should be empowered and those who should be excluded (Brubaker and Keegan, 2018; Evetts, 2013; James, 2016; Thijssen and Van Dooren, 2015).

The study uses a systemic model of analysis (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974) seeing neighbourhoods as a complex system of friendship and kinship connections, which operate alongside more formal networks to establish local values and levels of guardianship over young people. The project aims to understand how the introduction of professional support on the estate damaged rather than complimented the existing informal guardianship processes akin to social control stemming from a strong sense of collective efficacy. It considers the influence that 'old heads' once had on the estate, before exploring how violent street culture became more embedded once this relationship structure was replaced by professional support. The study suggests that attempts at addressing serious youth violence should consider how they can support and enhance informal forms of guardianship rather than relying solely on professional interventions.

## **Methodology**

The study was an auto-ethnographic opportunistic Ph.D. project as my involvement in the field preceded the research (Adler and Adler, 1987; Anderson, 2006; Charmaz, 2004; Denshire, 2014; Murphy, 2001). I had already lived in the area for several years, was a member of the estate's residents committee, and was involved in resident activities to support local young people. The fieldwork was, therefore, an extension of my everyday life. As I already knew many of the respondents, to take a distanced stance seemed unnatural. Therefore, I positioned myself as someone who researched through collaboration (Amit, 2000; Eglinton, 2013).

Although this was an insider research project, to the young people, some whom I had known for over 10 years, I was a trusted outsider. Whereas to others, who had appeared on the estate more recently, establishing a rapport and trust was more problematic. Therefore, I relied on gatekeepers with whom I already had a trusted relationship with to explain situations and to negotiate access to other young people.

Although insider status allowed me to gain a richness of understanding that may not have been possible otherwise (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), throughout the research, I had to balance the benefits of my closeness to the research site and the potential bias this may lead to. To do this, I used various data sources to cross verify my understanding of events and accounts (Dhattiwala, 2017; Kelly, 2014). This included asking respondents formally in interviews about their views of incidents I had already collected data on, and drawing understandings from documented accounts from organisations involved in the life of the estate. However, this in itself was a judgement call, which could have been influenced by my preconceptions (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Therefore, it was important for me to continually ask both adult residents and young people throughout the study, what the research should focus on.

## **Data Analysis**

The data presented below form part of a larger research project which looked at changing relational dynamics on the estate in which 914 individual data sources were collected. Of these, 424 directly related to the activities of young people on the estate. These included 119 emails, which I received because of my involvement on the estate, or passed on to me by residents or council staff to support my research, 140 ethnographic field notes from four years of fieldwork, minutes and documents from 48 meetings that were either about or had young people as an agenda item, 24 government documents and 41 interviews. Theoretical sampling (Emmel, 2013) was used to identify interview respondents who could provide information on specific theoretical concepts or themes that the coding identified as important. 17 of these interviews were with adult residents or ex-residents, 19 with young people and five staff members from the council or organisations working on the estate.

Some young people were comfortable being interviewed in the traditional way, sitting down and answering questions whilst being recorded, however for others the thought of this made them uncomfortable. Therefore, many of the interviews were conducted over a series of informal chats while sitting on walls whilst the young person was hanging out on the estate, or in the local park during football coaching sessions. These sessions were then pieced together to make an interview. When the young person allowed it, the interviews were recorded, however, some young people preferred me to only take notes. To ensure the notes interpreted the young people's views as accurately as possible, I talked the final transcripts through with the young people to ensure that they were happy with my interpretation of our sessions together.

Some refused to sign consent forms, in these instances, I accepted verbal consent as a suitable alternative. The less formal approach seemed to suit many of the young



people who were suspected to be involved in criminal activities (Coomber, 2002; Wiles, 2013).

This stance was vividly highlighted as an appropriate response on an occasion when the police came on to the estate and lined a group of young people up to search them for drugs and weapons. As I was walking past, a young person called out

*'James are you seeing this, make sure you stay and watch for your Ph.D.,'*

(Field Note Journal 17.07.14)

The same person had taken part in an interview a few weeks earlier but asked not to sign a consent form.

The data was coded openly to identify key ideas and themes, before being recoded using a defined coding structure, including parent and child nodes. Finally, the data was coded line by line until no new themes or issues arose. Thematic and deductive cross tabulating queries were used to understand what key relationships should be explored further.

The narrative was constructed by combining the interview, field notes, and meeting document data together into one coherent discursive commentary (Atkinson, 1990), with the analytic commentary being inserted afterward. Although the presentation of the actual data was kept as true to its original form as possible, the excerpts were edited to ensure anonymity.

Due to the nature of the study, pseudonyms were used for the name of the estate and the research participants.

## **Relational Isolation and the Normalisation of Criminality Among Young People**

In the summer of 2015, a group of young people organised barbeques throughout the summer months, with two aims, to make money through selling food, drink, and drugs, and to have a good time. Below is an account of one such event that took place in a playground area that was overlooked by two low rise apartment blocks:

*By around 6 pm a barbeque was in full swing with 30-40 young men and a few 15-16 year old girls in the Turner Park. A DJ was situated behind the swings playing a mixture of Afrobeat, Hip Hop, and Drill. A generator powered his laptop and Mackie speakers that sat on either side of a trestle table. A selection of chicken, tilapia, jollof rice, chicken stew, was being cooked by Ola (a young person from the estate), who was wearing an Ola's Kitchen t-shirt.*

*About five or six adult residents, including Charis and Elizabeth, were standing on the walkways of the blocks overlooking the park, watching what was going on, but no one came down. As the night wore on more people showed up, around 150 in total. Various groups formed around people holding bottles of Courvoisier or building large joints. Ashley and a few others could be seen periodically walking over to some bushes looking for their stash of weed or coke wrapped tightly in black plastic so they could make a deal. When a track the young people made came on, they would pull their hoodies over their head and film themselves making shooting symbols with their hands.*

*By now, about 30 adult residents were watching the barbeque from the walkways of the overlooking flats. The majority seemed fairly disturbed by the events, but all were content to simply watch the events unfold.*

*Sometime after midnight, about 40 young people could be seen rushing to the edge of the park. Joshua, a 16 year old from the estate, had got into an argument with someone, and the two had to be separated. Joshua was led back to the main barbeque area whilst others led the other young man away. As he was walking off, he turned and drew a gun waved it around a few times shouting, "you don't know about me" and then fired the gun toward Joshua then left. There was some panic with people ducking and running for cover, however, within a few minutes, everything seemed back to normal. After 10 minutes an armed police unit turned up in two SUVs along with several other police SUVs and a bully van. The police stayed on the estate for about 45 mins without getting out of their vehicles.*

*As the first police car turned up, most of the young people left, with many of the older attendees getting into cars and driving off. Within ten minutes of the police arriving there were only about 25 people left, mainly young people who lived on the estate or those who had driven to the barbeque but didn't want the police to link them with the car they were driving.*

(Field Note Journal 31.07.15)

## **The Changing Face of Social Relations**

The above account encapsulates the street culture that had developed and embedded itself on the estate in recent years. How this localised social space opened up, maybe best explained not by looking at the event itself, but by what happened previously.

In the summer of 2006, Charis, worried about her youngest daughter following the path of Miche, her elder, who became pregnant at a young age, asked her neighbour, Elizabeth, what they could do to calm the young people down over the summer.

Throughout that summer Charis and [author], supported in the background by Elizabeth, spent their evenings supervising the children and young people as they played or hung out on the estate. By the autumn the three residents, with the help of Miche and volunteers from two local churches, ran a twice weekly youth club in Our Place, three flats converted into a community space. Activities included; homework support, arts and crafts, music sessions, and a Friday movie night using a borrowed projector and illegally downloaded movies. Soon Charis, Elizabeth, and [author] became the go to people if a young person needed support or if an adult was worried about the actions of a young person. Charis comments:

*“It worked because we knew them all if there was any trouble we would go round their parent’s house and people used to call us to check on their children.”*

(Interview with Charis 13.6.13)

During these years, young people organised events, however, they were remarkably different from the barbeque discussed above. On one occasion, a group of young people wanted to organise a party and their starting point was to ask Elizabeth and [Author] for permission, with both being told that the other had already given their

permission. However, once the ruse was uncovered, the adults thought the best way to contain the event was to help plan the party, including providing the venue and sound system and setting the end time. When some residents heard what was happening, they decided to support and cash in through cooking food to sell on the night, while others indicated what time they wanted their child home. The most eventful issues to take place that night was that some young people got a little too drunk or high and one 14 year old girl sneaked out past her curfew causing her angry mum and two neighbours to come down and drag her home.

However, this and other collaborations between residents and young people had their problems, generating numerous complaints about noise and anti-social behaviour, along with accusations that those supervising were tolerating weed smoking and drinking. Yet it was felt that supervised deviance was an acceptable compromise and the best way to influence the young people's actions. The limited number of young people on the estate, alongside the young people's recognition of residents such as Charis, Elizabeth, and [Author's] role in supporting them, meant that such activities were largely contained.

The structured resident youth activities stopped in September 2009 after a 15 year old boy was shot at whilst on his way to the estate, and the police advised against activities that congregated young people together. Despite this, the residents continued to support the young people through organising training projects, helping them to set up a music studio, taking them on residential trips, sourcing work experience and generally just being around.

The following summer, the same young person was stabbed to death outside his school and, in an attempt to improve the situation, the local authority commissioned

two borough wide gang intervention programmes to run from Our Place. The residents committee objected to bringing outside young people onto the estate, however, as the plan had widespread local political support, the services went ahead. This was the first time anyone from outside the neighbourhood had provided some form of youth support for a long while, and it signaled the beginning of the end for resident engagement with young people.

By the time the interventions ended, the young people who hung out on the estate doubled to around 30. Seeing the need to continue some form of provision, the council agreed to move two of their youth workers onto the estate to run a session once a week.

One evening in June 2011, Kwaku, a 17 year old, was killed in a drive by shooting outside his block after hanging out in Our Place. The incident intensified both the residents committee's and the council's desire to find a more effective solution. This, for the council, meant bringing the estate in line with other areas which already had established professionally run youth clubs and services.

The council brought together representatives from the estate, residents from neighbouring areas, local authority staff, and employees from Saplings, a local education charity, to work out a way forward. At the initial meeting, the deputy director presented a document to guide the proceedings, which included the following points:

- *St Marys is a priority for the Police and Community Safety. There are a range of organisations based or potentially working in the area.*
- *We have put aside £25K for youth activities in the area but this funding will require an acceptance that there is a youth crime/gangs issue who need targeted support.*

(Taken from the council's commissioning proposal)

Targeted, here, meant specialist support, which made it clear that the council would only fund a professional organisation. However, they conceded that the residents could submit their own project proposal. Its focus on strengthening local informal relational support (exemplified by the extract below), confirmed the council's suspicions that the residents could not provide the specialist support needed.

*Without Charis, there is no project. Her position as the person who knows all the young people individually as well as many of their parents is incredibly important. She is the only one who is able to work on the level that she does. As an example, she has already said that she will personally visit the parents of any young person who becomes part of the group. She automatically 'goes the extra mile' and totally dedicated to the young people of the area.*

*(Taken from the residents committee's proposal to run the co-produced youth support).*

The council's view was that the young people were so entrenched in a violent street culture (Fraser, 2013; Harding, 2014; Ilan, 2012; Sandberg, 2008, 2012) that the residents needed to step aside and let specialist professionals with the right qualifications and experience take over (Brubaker and Keegan, 2018; Evetts 2012; James, 2016; Moskovskaia, 2012), led to Darren to comment, at a subsequent meeting:

*"Well, you have read it, you can see why it can't be accepted, I mean it just can't be."*

(Field Note Journal 27/11/11)

Once it was clear the residents did not feature in the council's plans, the chair of the residents committee emailed round an annotated version of the council document to all at the meeting, which included the following final points:

*You don't have to deliver anything – WE WILL DO IT OURSELVES – again, we find it outrageous that we have developed a sustainable, sensible, responsible plan and you REJECT IT!!*

*WE LIVE HERE. WE CARE. WE ARE PREPARED. YOU STOP US. WHY?? -  
"The young people deserve better."*

### **Differing Ethos**

The resulting change in ethos can be seen in a plan that the residents put to the local authority and in early exchanges between Saplings' staff and residents. The residents supporting the young people were used to operating out of a personal connection and care emanating out of the obligatory connections. This relational approach, whereby adult residents acted out of care and concern for the young people, stood in contradistinction Saplings' approach, leading Dwight, the Saplings' Youth Coordinator, to comment:

*"You know what is starting to annoy me, all this talk of 'our children' by Elizabeth and Charis, it's gonna cause problems. They are not their children they didn't give birth to them."*

(Field Note Journal 21.04.12)

The preference for a more boundaried support was promoted throughout the Saplings' project from both Saplings and the local authority. In a local area forum youth subgroup meeting, Martha fed back on why no residents were involved, commenting:



*“Although it would have been nice to have some residents involved, ultimately we prefer not having people from the estate working with the young people, as it would be very hard to keep professional boundaries.”*

*(FNJ 13/09/12)*

After 18 months, Saplings were contracted to manage the council’s adventure play facility on the edge of the estate and rehoused their youth support there. However, the new location never really took off with the young people, and the support died out. The residents group discussed restarting their own youth provision but decided against it as they felt they no longer knew most of the young people who now hung out estate well enough to influence them.

### **From Connected Compromised Control to No Influence**

The behaviour of some young people had been an issue before the commissioning of professional interventions. However, throughout the resident led provision there seemed to be a respect that meant certain residents could influence the behaviour of younger residents, and their actions on the estate had a degree of adult oversight. Crime was on the rise, but at a slower rate than in other areas. The engaged residents very much played the role of the ‘old heads’ passing on their experience and helping young people navigate their lives. Fast forward a few years, the situation was different. The ability to provide informal relational social control was lost when the paid services took over. By the time these services ended, the young people who hung around on the estate had changed, and a newer group of young protagonists, with seemingly very little contact with adult residents, had emerged. The previous intergenerational connection was lost and so was any chance of informal social control and the influence of the ‘old heads’.

Rather than celebrating the relative freedom to deal and party unreservedly, the young people recognised this intergenerational disconnect negatively, as something missing in their lives. Kwame, who spends his days sitting on a wall on the estate waiting for his phone to ring so he can go and make a deal, commented:

*“All they (local adults) have is their meetings and they talk, and nothing gets done. You need to blame the adults, if they’re not going to help us, what do they expect no one wants to be on the road, but they have to survive,”.*

*(Interview with Kwame 30.09.2016)*

Tyler, who was out on bail after being arrested for possession with intent to supply, commented on how he understands the situation on the estate.

*“You have to say it’s everyone for themselves... Coz, you don’t know the help I need. It makes me feel... like... It still makes me feel like I am doing something wrong because I am not seeking help then even though I don’t know them to ask for the help... it’s just fucking shit.”*

*(Interview with Tyler 23.08.14)*

Darren, who ended up going to prison on a drugs conviction, and Anton, another prominent young person from the estate, both echoed Tyler’s views about being largely left to their own devices on the estate.

*“No one really looks out for me, just my parents, but not anyone else. They couldn’t really support me the way I wanted to be supported though. I was just left to find my own way. Apart from my parents, there isn’t anyone looking out for me.”*

*(Interview with Darren 06.07.15)*

*“I wouldn’t say any other residents would help, I would say that people’s individual parents would try and put sense into their head and guide them the right way, but I wouldn’t say any other people’s parents would try and help.”*

(Interview with Anton 15.04.15)

This stands in stark contrast to comments made by Ola, a young person a few years their elder and who had experienced the benefit of the previous resident led youth project, who commented.

*“We used to have the adventure playground and then a little youth club in the community flat. There were residents like Charis and others trying to help us. There still that major respect regardless of what goes on and showing them that my head is still screwed on.”*

(Interview with Ola 03.05.14)

The lack of relational networks that are key for neighbourhood social control (Sampson et al., 2002; Sampson and Graif 2009; Sampson and Groves 1989; Wickes 2013) has led the young people feeling freer to act as they like. However, the young people's accounts showed an obvious sense frustration at not being able to draw on older generations for help and guidance.

The new group came into their own as the 'olders' had largely stopped hanging out on the estate, which coincided with the transition to professionally run youth provision. As a result, they were supported by paid workers, not residents. The relational dynamic that saw the 'olders' feel the need to seek permission to hold a social event was missing. Elizabeth and the other residents previously involved in running youth activities were still interested in the young people's wellbeing, yet there was no longer a space for regular interaction to take place and relationships to form. Therefore, those who now sought to organise events approached things with a different attitude.

## **Discussion**

This account does not describe an isolated incident, rather encapsulates an ongoing intergenerational ambivalence and increased entrenchment of an increasingly criminal

youth culture on the estate. The existing neighbourhood dynamics of poverty and low levels of resident interaction had already heightened the risk of young people being involved in criminal behaviour (Kim et al., 2016; McAra and McVie, 2016; Sampson and Groves, 1989). However, the actions of the young people were also influenced by the local context (Cole, 2019; Sampson, 2013; Schnell et al., 2016).

The neighbourhood was already problematic, with serious youth violence on the rise and the informal resident relationships that were once so prevalent were disappearing (Bellair, 2006a, 2006b; Morenoff et al., 2001; Putnam, 2000). There was, from all accounts, a general atrophy already occurring, with only a handful of people whose efforts were, at best, only slowing the increase in serious youth criminality. However, these residents had formed strong relationships with young people, which along with their continued presence on the estate, allowed them to be a positive influence (Anderson, 1999; Carter et al., 2017), helping to keep the rate of increases in violent crimes lower than in nearby areas.

Professionalising the youth support, at the exclusion of residents, acted as a catalyst, creating a void and increasing intergenerational isolation. This led to a greater risk of a violent street culture becoming embedded and increasingly normalised on the estate. If approached collaboratively, the introduction of professional support for the young people could have been an effective addition to the informal support already being offered; strengthening local the collective efficacy and enhancing guardianship on the estate (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Maimon and Browning, 2010). Structured activities involving local people, offer the opportunity for influential intergenerational relationships to develop (Sacha, 2015, Prince et al., 2019), and incorporating the residents could have provided a more holistic support network for the young people. However, the residents were viewed as unsuitable exponents of the support the local

authority had identified as needed (Mckenzie, 2015, Sani, 2011; Thisjssen and Van Dooren, 2015). The two approaches became juxtaposed, with there being no professional recognition of the value of informal intergenerational relationships akin to Anderson's (2002, 1999) 'old heads'. This ultimately resulted in less relational guardianship (Brunton-Smith et al., 2018; Sampson et al., 1997; 1999; Sampson and Groves, 1989; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999). A process that could have provided additional support on the estate disempowered those already engaging with the young people and led to more relational isolation.

The disappearance of localised support coincided with the development of more entrepreneurial, profit driven youth drug dealing (Andell and Pitts, 2018; Robinson et al., 2018; Windle and Biggs, 2015). This led to a rise in violent crime in many areas and its influence did not escape the young people from the estate. Over the past few years, nine young people associated with the estate have been arrested and charged with county lines related offences, and the young people were displaying the potential to become entrenched in a violent criminal culture. The argument here is not that the resident support was preventing a rise in criminality, but that it was slowing down the rate of increase. This is evident by the estate having a slower rise in cases of violent offences than other areas during the residents involvement, and a greater rise once their support had gone. If incorporated into the commissioned services, young people would have benefited from both relational and targeted support, rather than one then the other, before neither.

The escalation of youth violence on the estate can, therefore, be understood as a consequence of the coming together of various interlocking factors (Coomber, 2015). The wider youth street dynamics that have seen an embedding of money motivated (Andell and Pitts, 2018; Windle and Biggs, 2015) violent and trauma inducing culture

(McAra and McVie, 2016), was given the space to do so by the disappearance of localised support for young people. This disappearance was expedited by the move to address increasing concerns about the young people's actions by providing professional support.

Once staff members go home, move on, or funding streams dry up, residents can be left to figure things out on their own. Although a general ambivalence existed on the estate before the professionalisation of youth support, the actions of the few residents supporting the young people were evidence that an alternative was possible. In the account of the barbeque, the only adults who were present, although largely in a passive observation capacity, were the very people who were devalued and disenfranchised. Charis and Elizabeth, just watching alongside their fellow disconnected residents, is symbolic of the depth of intergeneration disconnection that had developed on the estate.

The process to bring about more order on the estate inadvertently weakened a potential longer term source of potential social control through decreasing the opportunities for residents and young people to interact and form obligatory supportive relationships.

The earlier events organised by young people had a degree of adult supervision, albeit with the view of limiting rather than preventing deviance. This support was largely motivated by a care and concern for the young people rather than any professional obligation. The young people who experienced this support recognised the efforts of others, accepted their support and guidance and wanted to show them that their 'heads were screwed on'.

In contrast, those who had become the dominant group of young people during the period of professional support, had none of the protection afforded by the relational support, and were more at risk of more criminogenic influences (Anderson 1999).

The intergenerational connections influential in curtailing criminality, only developed because of activities that brought older and younger residents together allowing trusted relationships to be established (Sacha 2015). When the adult residents left these spaces, there was no opportunity to build these types of relationships with the new group of young people that were emerging. These young people expressed a sense of isolation and being on their own, and some blamed the residents for their current predicament, seeing them as a potential but unobtainable source of support.

In neighbourhoods where relationships necessary for informal social control struggle for existence, projects aimed at providing location based interventions should consider their impact on such relational, and potentially more present, influences.

## **Summary**

The above was an attempt to explore some of the localised dynamics that help create the space for a deviant and violent form of youth street culture to develop. Although the project was limited to one neighbourhood, the time frame in which the research took place allowed it to compare the impacts that different localised situations had on two separate groups of young people. Given the continued concern about serious youth violence across the UK and increased focus on the coordination and funding for evidenced based professional interventions, it would be interesting to see if other neighbourhoods have had the same experience as St Marys, and equally, whether more collaborative hybrid interventions have been successfully developed. As such, further research is needed to better understand the interplay between specialised

interventions and more informal support structures and how they can combine to provide more holistic support to young people involved in serious youth violence.

Youth violence was already on the rise in the research site before the research started. However, young people's behaviour was once abated somewhat because of the involvement of key residents whom the young people respected. The estate underwent a significant transition during the study, as the local authority attempted to stall the social decline and an increase in youth criminality by replacing the informal resident support with commissioned interventions. However, this move led to the disappearance of the joint social space where residents and young people formed obligatory relationships. If nurtured, these relationships could have formed part of a hybrid intervention. However, it became clear that this would not materialise. The parochial, instead of working alongside and supporting the informal, acted as a catalyst for its disappearance. The little relational social control that existed on the estate all but disappeared. At the time of the barbeque, there was enough relational distance for the close physical proximity between the residents and young people to have little impact. The young people's spatial and socio-economic isolation (Ilan, 2012), combined with the increasing influence of more entrepreneurial drug dealing (Andell and Pitts, 2018; Coomber, 2015; Pitts, 2016; Robinson et al., 2018; Windle and Biggs, 2015) have contributed to the development of a potentially more violent youth street culture (Fraser and Atkinson, 2014; Harding, 2014; Ilan, 2012; Shammass and Sandberg, 2016; Sandberg, 2008, 2012). However, how normalised this street culture becomes within particular areas is influenced by the localised neighbourhood dynamics, including whether or not informal intergenerational connections are valued and given the space to develop.



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