Ministry of JUSTICE

Understanding the psychology of gang violence: implications for designing effective violence interventions

Daryl Harris, Russell Turner, Ian Garrett and Sally Atkinson

Understanding the psychology of gang violence: implications for designing effective violence interventions

Daryl Harris, Russell Turner, Ian Garrett and Sally Atkinson

Analytical Services exists to improve policy making, decision taking and practice by the Ministry of Justice. It does this by providing robust, timely and relevant data and advice drawn from research and analysis undertaken by the department's analysts and by the wider research community.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Ministry of Justice (nor do they represent Government policy).

Contents

Executive summary

This report outlines the findings of an exploratory project seeking greater understanding of the psychological processes contributing to violence carried out by prisoners identified as street-gang members. Specifically the research aims to provide information relating to the following questions:

1. What is a gang?
2. What factors motivate individuals to join a street gang?
3. What factors maintain gang membership in prison and the community?
4. What factors are associated with desistance from gang involvement/membership?
5. How does gang membership influence an individual's use of violence?

The study employed a qualitative approach in which 44 male gang-affiliated prisoners convicted of violent offences were interviewed about their own experiences and perceptions of gang affiliation. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to identify themes that emerged from participants' accounts.

What is a gang?
Participants held different views about the nature of gangs and there was a lack of consensus about what constituted a gang.

What factors motivate individuals to join a street gang?
This study identified important psychological motivations 'pulls' contributing to gang affiliation. These included:

- the need and/or desire to make money;
- seeking protection against victimisation;
- gaining a sense of belonging or connectedness with others; and
- a means of achieving status and respect.

What factors maintain gang membership in prison and the community?
This research suggests that criminality reinforces gang affiliation and gang identity in several ways:

- criminal activity was positively reinforced by others in the gang, through praise, enhanced status, greater inclusion, and financial reward;
- criminality also reinforced gang affiliation by the avoidance of unwanted consequences, such as rejection from the gang or victimisation by others;
- territorial disputes maintained gang cohesion and justified the need to group together to protect the gang's territory.

What factors are associated with desistance from gang involvement/ membership?

Some participants in the study described themselves as desisting from gang involvement as they matured and reflected on past behaviour. Some spoke about the positive impact of acquiring a new role in life, such as becoming a father, in helping them to re-evaluate their gang associations. Others identified feeling let down or abandoned by the group to which they belonged as a catalyst for re-evaluation.

Some participants expressed a sense of wanting to be in control of change. However, this was sometimes linked with doubt about being able to change without positive support. Some of those who had completed accredited offending behaviour programmes reported personally benefiting from them and provided examples of how their learning had helped them to avoid using violence in prison.

Participants often had positive plans for the future. However, these tended to sound like general, simplified hopes that often overestimated the ease with which they would overcome potential difficulties. Some participants discussed the risk of continued gang involvement if they returned to live in the same area on release. Finally, participants discussed how members of the criminal justice system might not acknowledge positive changes.

How does gang membership influence an individual's use of violence?

Findings from this study suggest the meaning of violence for participants can be understood under the following themes:

- using pre-emptive violence to protect themselves from victimisation;
- a willingness to join in with violence to gain approval for inclusion in the group;
- using violence as a means of having fun or excitement;
- having a propensity for violence that existed before joining a gang;
- using violence to achieve and maintain status and respect;
- viewing violence as a necessary and acceptable means of making money and protecting 'business' interests.

Practical implications

The research highlighted a number of issues relevant to assessment and intervention with gang-affiliated offenders.

- It is important to explore an offender's own sense of their involvement in collective offending and avoiding labelling and simplistic assumptions about gangs.
- Assessments should include the full range of domains linked with gang affiliation.
- Personal motivations for affiliation may be closely linked to a gang member's use of violence. Exploring these links may help to inform intervention.

- There may be some differences in the criteria (and information) used across agencies to prioritise offenders, which reinforces the importance of information sharing and collaboration in assessment and management of risk.
- There can be significant rivalry and conflict both between and within gangs. This has obvious implications for allocation of offenders to intervention groups.
- There can be considerable variation between different participants' experience and sense of gang affiliation. Exploring and understanding these differences may help to inform and refine decisions about appropriate allocation.
- Motivation for the use of violence by gang-affiliated offenders overlaps considerably with patterns of thinking linked with the use of violence in other violent offenders. This suggests that many gang members could benefit from the same interventions as those designed for generally violent offenders, which focus on underlying values, beliefs, and expectations about violence.
- Interventions focusing solely on facilitating exit from gangs are unlikely to reduce violence risk in all gang-affiliated offenders. They should also explore (and address) the full range of other factors linked with the offender's use of violence.
- Offenders' treatment needs and patterns of engagement might vary at different developmental points, which should be considered in treatment planning.
- Exploring personal motivations for joining and staying with street gangs might help to identify ways of engaging offenders in intervention, and motivating them towards pro-social change.
- Becoming a father and disillusionment with gang life may be significant events that support the process of exiting gangs and desisting from offending.
- Some offenders expressed a strong need for control over change, a mistrustful or anti-authority stance, and sensitivity to being labelled, stereotyped and/or judged. It is important that facilitators and managers of interventions find ways of constructively working with these issues.
- Potential barriers to successful resettlement include the absence of concrete and realistic future plans, and an over-reliance on leaving the 'home' area as a strategy for overcoming barriers to resettlement.

1   Introduction

This report presents the main findings from a research study that was commissioned by the Metropolitan Police Service, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Rehabilitation Services Group and the Home Office. It aims to develop an understanding of the psychological factors that contribute to violence carried out by prisoners identified as street-gang members. This is essentially an exploratory study. It aims to explore the link between street gangs and violence and the implications of this for current violence reduction practice in prison and the community.

2 Methodology

This project is an exploratory study that seeks to add to the understanding of violence carried out by prisoners identified as street-gang members. The over-arching aim is to identify potential implications for improving existing violence reduction interventions for this group of offenders. The primary end-users of the research are staff within the criminal justice system, particularly practitioners advising on and/or working directly with offenders convicted of gang-related violence. Current methods of practice within offender interventions are at the level of individual or group work, and mainly rely on psychological techniques. In consequence, this research must be able to identify implications for practice at the level of individual psychology. This research is viewed as an exploratory first step towards developing a psychological understanding of gangs at an individual level.

Sample

The selection of participants for the field research involved two steps.

The **first step** was to identify potential gang members. As noted above, this step focused on individuals who were detained in custody at the time of research. Evidence of gang affiliation was assessed against the Hallsworth and Young (2006) definition of gang membership. Hallsworth and Young define a gang "… *as a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves (and are recognised by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is intrinsic to identity and practice*". Candidates without substantiated evidence of gang membership or association were removed from the sample. This step involved reviewing information held on a number of specified databases related to violent gang-related offences in the Greater London area. The researchers noted that one of these databases prioritised gun crime, while another focused on so-called 'Black-on-Black' crime. They also acknowledged that the sample extracted reflects the bias in the original records, most notably on three variables:

- geography (London-based);
- index offence (gun-crime);
- ethnicity (Black).

Although the Hallsworth and Young criteria were used to define the sample, one of the issues the study aimed to explore was participants' own sense of their gang affiliation. This included considering their own definitions and orientation to what a gang is, and the extent that they saw themselves as a gang member. The Hallsworth and Young 'official' definition is seen as an important anchor point. This anchor provides an appropriate starting point for an explorative study because it clearly identifies the population being explored. At the time of the research, the Hallsworth and Young definition was the operational definition in use by the Metropolitan Police. Prison staff often consult police records in assessment of prisoners

and in planning interventions with convicted offenders. Hence the sample obtained closely corresponds to the intended end use of the research.

The **second step** screened candidates for violence history. This involved screening out candidates without either a violent index offence or evidence of prior violent offending. Violent offences included possession of a weapon. The study did not differentiate between gang-related violence and general violence. This reflected two considerations. First, this distinction can be tenuous and difficult to make. Second, a principal focus of the study was on improving violence interventions for gang-affiliated offenders. These interventions do not routinely distinguish between violence occurring in different contexts. Instead they aim to improve understanding and management of risk factors contributing to the range of violent acts committed by an individual.

The result of these two steps of sample selection produced a list of 150 convicted offenders who were considered for recruitment as participants in the study.

Design

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as the underpinning methodology. This is a qualitative approach developed within psychology by Smith (1996). It allows in-depth exploration at the individual level of the sense people make of their experiences, and is thus particularly suited to exploratory studies.

IPA advocates purposive sampling, which means that the sample is chosen on its relevance to the research aim (Smith and Osborn, 2008). In this case this is people in prison convicted of violent, gang-related offences, as it is these individuals for whom any implications for violence reduction interventions will be relevant.

There were two discrete phases to the field research.

- The first phase can be referred to as a full IPA study.
- The second phase can be considered an extension of the IPA method in keeping with qualitative psychological research principles.

Both phases incorporated the collection of qualitative data through one-to-one interviews.

The first phase of the field research involved conducting a series of open-ended interviews with male gang-affiliated violent offenders currently serving prison sentences. It is important to note that what was being sought was the participant's own view of their experience. Interviews ranged between one and two hours and were digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analysed following IPA principles (Smith and Osborn, 2008) and a set of four themes was produced.

- Self as protected & connected
- Self as feared, respected, & having status
- Self as money-maker: From survival to big business
- The changing self: Self as maturing, prison subject, and future self

Each theme had between 2 and 5 sub-themes, totalling 16 sub-themes. These themes were written up with substantial reference to interview extracts.

The first phase of the field work was conducted during January 2009. Researchers approached14 prisoners at three establishments, 1 adult and 2 juvenile prisons. Of these, seven declined, one was transferred, and six agreed to participate (an acceptance rate of 42%).

Three of the six participants self-classified as 'Black or Black British: Caribbean' and three were 'Black or Black British: African'. Age at the time of interview ranged from 18 to 22 and the mean age was 19.8. Five of the six were convicted for violent offences, ranging from attempted murder to robbery. One participant was convicted of a serious sexual offence. Convictions were from the period May 2007 to August 2008 and age at the time of offence ranged from 16 to 19 (mean age 17.4). The number of previous convictions ranged from one to ten (mean and median five). Offender Assessment System (OASys) scores were only available for one participant in this phase. At the time of interview, participants had been in custody between 5 and 20 months (mean 12.8 months).

The second phase of the field research used an identical design to the first phase in an attempt to test the first phase themes as a way of understanding, with more members of the group under study. The first phase themes were revised based on the qualitative data from the second phase, and the themes of violence and of the phenomenon of the gang were developed.

The second phase of the field work was conducted during March and April 2009. Of the remaining 136 potential participants from the original sample list, 17 (12%) were deemed to be impractical to reach due to single participants being in remote locations. A further 42 (31% of 136 potential participants) were unavailable for other reasons:

- 13 (10%) transferred during the field work;
- 12 (9%) could not be located;
- 9 (7%) were released during the field work;
- 5 (4%) posed staff safety concerns;
- access to the prison was an issue for 3 (2%) participants.

This left 77 potential participants. Of these, 39 declined to take part (including 1 who initially agreed but withdrew on the day), this being 29% of the original 136 but 51% of those approached. There were thus 38 participants, giving an acceptance rate of 49%. The majority, 32 participants (84%) were in adult prisons, of which 4 (11%) were in high security prisons. The remaining six participants (16%) were in juvenile prisons.

As discussed earlier, the researchers expected that the composition of this sample would reflect the bias in the records from which it was drawn, particularly that it will predominantly comprise Black offenders convicted of gun crime. In the second phase sample:

- 31 participants (82%) self-classified as Black or Black British, comprising 17 (45%) of Caribbean origin, 10 (26%) of African origin, and 4 (11%) of other origins;
- 3 participants (8%) were 'White', comprising 2 (5%) from outside the British Isles;
- 2 participants (5%) were Asian;
- 1 (3%) self-classified as 'Mixed: White & Black Caribbean';
- ethnicity information was missing for 1 (3%) participant.

The majority, 36 participants (95%), were convicted for violent offences ranging from murder to robbery, of which 17 (45%) participants were convicted of possessing a weapon, and 4 (11%) of the violent offences were violent acquisition, such as robbery. One participant (3%) was convicted of drug offences and one other of possessing criminal property. Convictions were from the period October 2004 to November 2008. Age at first conviction ranged from 13 to 39 (mean age 18.4, median 16), and 30% of participants were adults (18 and over) at first conviction. The number of previous convictions per person ranged from 0 to 16, with 18% of participants having 1 or no previous convictions, and 52% having 4 or fewer. The mean number of convictions per person was 5.2 (median 4). OASys scores were missing for 14 (37%) of participants. Available scores ranged between 19 and 116 with mean of 66 and median of 67.

Age at the time of interview ranged from 20 to 56 with a mean age of 26.4 and a median of 23. More than two-thirds of participants were in the age bracket 20 to 25. At the time of interview, participants had been in custody between 4 and 53 months (the mean and median were 25 months).

Methodological limitations

The limitations of the methodology can be discussed under three main headings:

- sampling;
- acceptance rates (self-selection);
- barriers to disclosure and engagement.

The sample was drawn from existing records about violent gang-related offences. Bias in the records has been noted in terms of geography, index offence, and ethnicity. What is not known, however, is the extent that the original 150 prisoners on the list, and thus those who were interviewed, are representative of the wider population of convicted violent gang members in prison. For example, a sample drawn from another city is firstly likely to have a differing ethnic composition. The desk research discussed how the ethnic composition of gangs tends to reflect the ethnic composition of the areas where they are based. Secondly, it may be the case that gangs have different experiences in different cities and regions. The themes would need to be tested on a sample of convicted violent gang members from other cities.

The researchers also noted that the original sample excluded high-level organised criminals (as defined by Hallsworth and Young, 2006). As a result application of the findings of this study to organised crime should be approached with much caution.

Finally, the researchers acknowledged that all members of the sample were held in custody at the time of interviewing. This might impact on the generalisability of findings to gang-affiliated offenders 'on the street'. However, they noted that there was a high degree of overlap in the findings of this study and other studies of gang members not in custody.

Acceptance rates (the proportion of those asked who agreed to be interviewed) at the first and second stage were 42% and 49% respectively. This gives a self-selecting sample. This is common in qualitative research. Indeed, it can be argued that it is necessary that somebody chooses, without incitement or reward, to participate in a research interview, otherwise their engagement in the interview is seriously compromised. However, this means that the research does not have information about those prisoners who chose not to participate, apart from that they did not differ in age. It is possible that their experiences of being in a gang could differ from those who chose to be interviewed.

The extent to which a participant engages in the interview is important to the quality of the interview. This is something that the researcher conducting the interview is able to adequately judge based on professional experience. However, several barriers to participant engagement in the interviews should be noted.

The interviews were held within the prison environment and the research was being carried out on behalf of the NOMS. Although participants were informed that the research team were independent researchers and were provided with information concerning anonymity and confidentiality, it seems unlikely that all participants would speak as freely as they might to a friend in a home environment. As mentioned above participants self-selected to be interviewed, without coercion or reward, and the interview only covered events already known to the criminal justice authorities. This was seen to minimise one potential barrier to disclosure, that of incriminating self or others, including being seen as a 'grass'. It was also

made clear in interview that participants could skip questions without explanation, as well as choose not to be recorded. Furthermore, the IPA style of interviewing is open, curious, and supportive in facilitating participants to explore their own sense of experiences and events. These approaches combined were viewed to minimise barriers to engagement.

The research team comprised two White males and four White females. Given that the sample was predominantly Black, it may be possible that the ethnic difference was a barrier to engagement in the interviews.

From the debrief discussions after the interviews, the research team felt that disclosure and engagement had not presented a problem in the interviews, and that engagement was generally very good. It was felt that participants differed in terms of their willingness to discuss potentially uncomfortable aspects of their experiences, but this was felt to reflect an ordinary spread one would expect, rather than a systematic issue with this sample. The wide-ranging experiences of the research team with different offender populations, in both research and practice, was essential to being confident about adequate levels of engagement in interviews.

The research aims concern implications for violence reduction interventions with similar groups, primarily in a prison environment. It can be argued that interventions staff are likely to get a similar level of engagement in interviews or treatment sessions to that achieved by the research team. This suggests that any gains in engagement attained by, for example, peer-interviewing and/or interviewing in home locations, would be negligible for the intended end use of this research.

3   Main findings

The findings from this report are discussed under five main research questions:

1. What is a gang?
2. What factors motivate individuals to join a street gang?
3. What factors maintain gang membership in prison and the community?
4. What factors are associated with desistance from gang involvement/membership?
5. How does gang membership influence an individual's use of violence?

What is a gang?

Participants had differing views on what they believed a gang to be. For some individuals collective offending was experienced as occurring in a context of closed groups of stable, supportive and cohesive 'friendships'. These groups might or might not have a process of recruiting new members, and might or might not identify themselves as a 'gang'. Other participants described a sense of gangs as highly competitive, hierarchical structures that provide some level of exclusivity. For some participants affiliations were strongly tied to geographic territory, yet for others they were highly fluid and based on shifting geographical boundaries.

These themes overlap to a large extent with information from previous research, which suggests that gangs can be fluid, flat in structure, stem from ordinary friendships, and have a relatively strong identity (Aldridge and Medina, 2007; Youth Justice Board, 2007; Marshall, Webb and Tilley, 2005; Mares, 2001). However, the above also suggests that practitioners need to be careful about making assumptions about an offender's own sense of their gang affiliations. This includes being cautious about labelling offenders as gang members. One reason for this caution is that some of the participants in the field research actively resisted the label 'gang member'. Several of these participants refused to proceed until the interviewer acknowledged their rejection of this label.

One other issue complicating the understanding of gangs is the difficulty of translating community definitions of a 'gang' to custodial contexts. In these settings gangs have been defined as "*a cohesive group of prisoners (with a leader), whose criminal activities have a negative impact on the prisons that hold them*" (Fong and Buentello, 1991; Huff, 1991), or as "*a group of three or more prisoners whose behaviour has an adverse impact on the prison that holds them*" (Wood, 2006).

Most participants in the field research reported a sense that gangs or groups inside prison were different to those in the community. Participants generally talked about prison collectives representing groups of 'ordinary' friends who would protect and support each other. However, some participants also reported experiencing more predatory prison groups/gangs.

Some interviewees suggested that gang-related disputes and rivalries might be carried over into custody. Other participants suggested these disputes might be put aside. This in part reflected the need to band together with people from the same or similar home area. This was seen as providing mutual protection, support, and the company of someone with a similar background and cultural reference points. This need was reported to be particularly strong when prisoners are held some distance from their home. For instance, members of two rival London gangs who may have been in conflict in the community might form an alliance if they were serving prison time in the north of England.

What factors motivate individuals to join a street gang?

Previous research suggests that the likelihood of gang affiliation is linked with the following variables:

- adolescence or young adulthood (Marshall, Webb and Tilley, 2005; Bennett and Holloway, 2004);
- being male (Marshall, Webb and Tilley, 2005; Bennett and Holloway, 2004);
- pro-criminal or absent role models (Aldridge and Medina, 2007; Sharp, Aldridge and Medina, 2006);
- having family members who belong to a gang (Youth Justice Board, 2007);
- having a perceived need for protection (Marshall, Webb and Tilley, 2005);
- being prone to sensation seeking and risk taking (Dawson, 2008);
- being part of a peer group that is characterised by strong territorial affiliations (Kintrea *et al.*, 2008), criminality (Dawson, 2008), and a heightened need for respect and status (Toy and Stanko, 2008; Youth Justice Board, 2007);
- alienation and stress within family, education, and community contexts (Marshall, Webb and Tilley, 2005; Smith and Bradshaw, 2005);
- living in a culture that strongly identifies success with material wealth (Toy and Stanko, 2008; Youth Justice Board, 2007) and that holds negative attitudes to youth and migrants (Building Bridges Project, 2008).

The researchers noted that many of the factors associated with gang affiliation overlap with factors that are predictive of general offending and violence. These include young age (Flood-Page *et al.*, 2000), being male (Blanchette and Brown, 2006), having family members (Richardson and Budd, 2003) and peers (Youth Justice Board, 2007) who are involved in offending, childhood experiences of neglect, inconsistent parenting or abuse (Farrington, 2002), and poor educational performance (Rodger, Palmer and Mahon, 2007).

Many of the studies reported above were sociological or criminological in focus. These studies typically explore societal and community variables (Dutton, 2006). Decker and Van Winkel (1996) note that these variables are often interpreted as 'pushing' young people towards gang affiliation. However, they note that it is also important to recognise that gang membership can exert a strong 'pull'.

The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in this study enabled detailed exploration of psychological motivations 'pulls' contributing to gang affiliation and the findings both support and extend previous research findings. Important psychological motivations contributing to gang affiliation included:

- money;
- protection against victimisation;
- connectedness;
- status and respect.

Money

The need and/or desire to make money were central to the experience of most participants. Interviews indicate that this need is linked with gang affiliation in several ways. First, some participants experienced gangs as assisting their **survival**. This was associated with descriptions of a general sense of hopelessness about the future and a sense of desperation. This in turn was linked with reports of the experience of living on the fringes of society.

Second, gang affiliation was seen by some participants as a way of helping them to make **quick and easy money**. For some of these participants this was not in response to social exclusion. Instead it reflected impatience, greed, and/or a reluctance to engage in legitimate work.

Third, some participants described a sense of seeing their illegal money-making activities as part of **big business**. These individuals typically presented a positive view of themselves and gangs as entrepreneurial. For some participants this was linked with a sense of 'vocational' competence and status.

Protection against victimisation

A number of interviewees indicated a sense that gang affiliation provided protection against victimisation. This sense was experienced as being likely to lead to gang affiliation when it was linked with the sense of being surrounded by danger. This in turn was exaggerated by a sense of being alienated from, the unavailability of, or ineffectiveness of, sources of support (for example, parents, teachers and the police). The combination of these factors is reported as a sense that gang affiliation was the only realistic source of protection.

Connectedness

The field work also highlights the need for a sense of connectedness as a significant psychological factor associated with gang affiliation. For some participants the need to belong was associated with a sense of living outside of mainstream society. Participants' comments suggest that this need can be realised in several ways. These included the experience of an affiliation to an **ordinary peer group**, and/or a sense of joining a **special family**.

Status and respect

Status and respect seemed to be other important psychological needs for most participants. Interviews suggest that the need for respect contributes to gang affiliation in several ways. First, a number of participants expressed the belief that "*if they are seen as being part of a gang or being associated with older gang members then they will be respected by their peers*".

Second, the peer system was seen as a context in which participants could (or had to) earn respect from their peers. This was particularly likely to be the case when participants experienced living within a context characterised by competition and conflict between gangs and peers representing different territories.

Third, conflict within the peer network was seen as a mechanism that could draw non-affiliated individuals into gang disputes involving their family members or peers. In these situations some participants reported a sense of needing to act 'with the gang' in order to maintain peer respect. This in turn was seen as a potential route to gang affiliation.

With respect to **prison gangs** much of the available research is from America, and is not methodologically strong (Wood and Adler, 2001). These two studies focused on offenders held in English Prisons. These studies suggest that the activity of prison gangs is greatest among younger offenders, and in male establishments. They also suggest that the activity of custodial gangs is linked with prisoner perceptions of prison control and order. This suggests that concerns about the balance of control within a prison might be one factor motivating individuals to band together.

The findings from the field research largely mirrored those of the desk research. First, compared with street gangs, interviews yielded relatively little information about custodial gangs. Second, interviewees gave a sense that there was less trust in prison than on the streets. As a result connections to the home area could bring prisoners together for support, familiarity, and mutual protection.

What factors maintain gang membership in prison and the community?

Compared with research into factors that lead to gang affiliation, there is relatively little published work on the maintenance of gang membership. In a notable exception, Aldridge and Medina (2007) provide some important insights into the processes involved in maintaining gang affiliation. Their interviews and observations of several gangs within one English city suggest a number of factors maintaining involvement. These include the following:

- gang affiliation providing a source of money;
- loyalty and ties of reciprocity;
- force of habit;
- being 'stuck';
- gang membership supporting the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Research from mainstream psychology highlights the importance of group processes in maintaining group affiliations. This research indicates that the mere act of an individual **categorising** themselves as a member of a group is sufficient to lead them to display 'in-group' favouritism (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Tajfel and Turner argue that individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their 'in-group' from a comparison 'out-group' on some valued dimension. Research from the US and Europe also highlights the importance of group processes in maintaining gang membership. This research suggests that these processes are tightly bound up with the criminal activity and territoriality.

Criminality and group processes maintaining gang affiliation

Moore (2002) in the US, and Lien (2002) in Oslo, highlight how delinquency serves to reinforce membership and increase the cohesiveness of gangs. Moore suggests that criminal acts lead to the emergence of patterns of 'criminal thinking'. These in turn influence and shape the motives and attitudes within a gang. Lien highlights how criminality gives gang members an additional reason to keep their activities secret. This leads to the development of a deep commitment to secrecy within the gang. This is associated with a perceived need to protect its members from authority figures, and from outsiders in general. This in turn reinforces a strong sense of loyalty and cohesion within the gang.

Moore and Vigil (1989) propose that gang cohesion can tip over into an 'oppositional culture'. This culture sets the gang against society's institutions, including the police, criminal justice agencies, schools, and the Government. This stance is reinforced by the perceived rejection of the gang by society figures. Lien (2002) makes a similar point, but goes further in noting that gang members come to see themselves as the victims of oppression and the unfair targets of racism, inequality, and oppression.

The findings from this research support the role of criminality in reinforcing gang affiliation and gang identity. Participants in the research reported that their individual and gang-related criminal activity was positively reinforced by others in the gang. This positive reinforcement included praise, being given nicknames (for example, 'killer'), being invited to take part in other criminal activities, enhanced status, greater inclusion, and financial reward. Criminality also reinforced gang affiliation by the avoidance of unwanted consequences (for instance, rejection from the gang, reduced victimisation by other gang members) and a sense that being feared reduced the risk of victimisation by other gangs.

Territoriality and group processes maintaining gang affiliation

Previous research suggests that conflict with rival gangs and territoriality also serve to increase gang cohesiveness. The former does this by creating a perceived need to stand together for mutual protection. Kintrea *et al.* (2008) note that gang disputes are often over territory. This aspect of disputes also serves to reinforce gang cohesion by producing a sense of pride in protecting the gang's territory. In addition, territorial disputes contribute to cohesiveness by forcing geographical divides that can reinforce a sense of specialness (Klein and Maxson, 2006).

Findings from this research also indicate the role of territorial disputes in maintaining gang cohesion and affiliation. Participants' comments indicate that in many cases these disputes justify the need to band together to protect the gang's territory. They also indicate that these disputes reduce freedom to visit other areas and/or provide a sense of entering 'enemy' areas, accompanied by feelings of needing to protect oneself, for example, weapon carrying. This in turn potentially decreases the availability of alternatives to gang activity. This is likely to have the knock-on effects of increasing cohesion and reducing the availability of exit points. Other studies have explored barriers to leaving gangs.

Barriers to leaving gangs

Aldridge and Medina (2007) highlight several potential barriers to leaving gangs.

- Rival gangs sometimes challenged the process of desistance by not acknowledging changes in an individual's status. These challenges might take the form of continued threats and violence.
- Statutory agencies also frequently challenged changes in gang status. These challenges often took the form of ongoing mistrust and labelling.
- The challenge of renegotiating relationships with extensive networks of relatives and friends. This issue is further complicated because gang members and their associates typically live in relatively small areas.
- Low take-up rates for community interventions and initiatives designed to reduce gang affiliation.
- Unpreparedness of schools, the health service, and the prison service to collaborate or respond adequately to the problems brought about by gangs.
- Tension and mistrust that undermines partnership work, community engagement, and effective practice.

Scott (2004) explored the resettlement challenges for American prisoners who want to leave gang life. This study included ethnographic interviews with 19 former and current gang affiliates. These were backed up by field observations and another 85 interviews. The challenges identified included difficulty in getting legitimate employment, spoiled family ties, the need to move away from their 'home' neighbourhood and the resulting isolation.

The findings from the present study suggested that many participants underestimated potential barriers to their return to mainstream society. Although many of them identified their home area as a potential problem, they said they would resolve this by keeping away. Few participants appeared to have considered in any detail the potential obstacles they might experience in doing this. For instance, they seemed to have given little consideration to the consequences of distancing themselves from family, friends, and previous sources of money, connectedness, respect and status.

In some cases participants expressed a sense that they would be unable to change without the positive support of others, or without avoiding the unhelpful influence of others. For example, some participants highlighted the risk posed by seeing friends making easy money, and/or having symbols of success. Participants also talked about the problem of their previous 'connectedness' to a gang or territory. They indicated that this might result in them still being targeted by other gangs. Finally, participants discussed how members of the criminal justice system might not acknowledge positive changes.

What factors are associated with desistance from gang involvement/membership?

There is little published UK research directly exploring the issue of desistance from gang involvement. However, a number of studies indicate that the average age of gang members is around 20 (Dawson, 2008), and that the upper age limit is typically around 25 years of age (Marshall, Webb and Tilley, 2005). These figures are broadly comparable with data from studies of the criminal careers of general offenders (Flood-Page *et al.*, 2000). This research has been influential in suggesting that there are maturational 'turning points' in the careers of young adult offenders.

Aldridge and Medina (2007) note that many of the gang members in their study saw their involvement in gangs as a transition stage before adulthood. Desistance was described as a gradual process involving a cognitive element (wanting to get out), turning points (for example, fatherhood), and opportunities (for example, good jobs). Further support for the view that many young adults mature out of gang membership is provided by evidence that compared with current gang members, ex-gang members tend to be older and more likely to be married. However, an apparently contradictory observation is that current gang members were less likely to be unemployed (Bennett and Holloway, 2004).

Some participants in the current study described themselves as having already moved on from gang life and offending. They tended to put this in terms of **maturation and critical reflection** on being young, impatient, and/or blinded by the culture or moment they were in. Talk of maturation often concerned taking a view from 'the outside'. This took the form of contrasting their sense of changed self with their view of their own old behaviours and values or those of others.

Contrasting with an 'other' seemed to be important in presenting a new identity of having 'matured' and 'moved on'. The notion of achieving status by being above others appeared to a key aspect of experience. Critically looking down on others, even by dismissing their own past behaviours as immature, allowed a person to retain a sense of being above or better than peers left behind. It also keeps a general sense of self as a good person.

It is interesting to note that for some participants the position of maturity was experienced positively as an opportunity. For example, some had clear wishes to become positive mentors for younger gang members still on the streets, to help them out of gang culture.

The second way participants could talk about maturing was the role of a new focus or meaning in new life. Often this was a new relationship, such as becoming a father. There was a sense of having something else to live for, suggesting that gang life was all they had prior to becoming a father. Some participants also conveyed that the desire to be a good role model for their child was motivation enough to cease criminal activity.

The third way participants critically reflected was in terms of a forced re-evaluation. This was where they felt let down or abandoned by the group to which they belonged. For example, some participants felt that perceived strong bonds and trust had proved to be weak or non-existent by members not being there when they were needed.

Reports from gang members and ex-gang members suggest that leaving a gang could require significant changes in ways of thinking, socialising, money-making and behaving. Similar changes are described in the literature on desistance from general offending. For example, Maruna (2000) interviewed 55 men and 10 women with a history of offending. Of these 30 were classified as desisting, and 20 were considered to be persisting with offending behaviour. He found that changes in ways of thinking about self (personal identity) were a major factor differentiating between the two groups. Qualitative research suggests that access to employment and reconfiguration of relationships are important factors in facilitating identity change (Farrell and Calverley, 2006; Farrell, 2002). This research suggests that gaining employment or changes in family, intimate or social relationships provide a sense that things can be different in the future. Farrell and Calverley suggest that the capacity to see a 'future me' is central to the process of desistance.

For some participants it was also important to emphasise the role of **personal control and choice** (for example, the individual was the master of this change, or it was their decision to move on). One interpretation of this is that it fits with previous ways of evaluating self and peers. For example, personal choice and strength were discussed as valued characteristics under previous themes.

Being in prison places an expectation on the person to change. This was experienced either as a subject of change programmes, or as a perception of a general sense of the system requiring change/evidence of change, for example, for parole purposes. Most participants expressed some ambivalence towards being a subject of prison change. This concerned the extent that they were the agents of change and how they could control, or not be affected by, surrounding influences.

Some participants expressed a tension between being the subject of change interventions and being the agent or actively in control of this change. There was a sense of wanting to be in control of change. However, for some participants this was linked with doubt about being able to change without positive support or avoiding the unhelpful influence of others. For example, in some cases this was linked to people in the criminal justice system not acknowledging positive changes. However, for some participants there was a sense that despite wanting to change, to attend offending behaviour programmes and so on, they felt that that this would be hard due to negative influences from other prisoners on the wing. This suggests that for some participants there was a conflict between their need for control, and the continued influence of other people.

Most participants gave an impression of needing to move through the system when talking about their experience of prison interventions. Generally, accounts of these experiences were very thin, compared with the richness of accounts of life before prison. Thin accounts of prison change programmes corresponded to the research team's experiences from clinical practice and other prison research projects, and thus may not be specific to this sample. For these participants there was a sense that this was not their life and they were not engaged in living it to the same degree as their life in the community. For example, participants would talk about moving through the system purely as a means to an end; their focus was on release when life could then begin again.

Within this sense of passing the time, some participants said they were keen to do courses. A few participants expressed the desire to attend accredited offending behaviour programmes but were turned down on the basis of not meeting the minimum criteria. Others had who completed accredited offending behaviour programmes reported personally benefiting from them. Some participants provided examples of applying learning points on prison wings to avoid disputes escalating to violence. This suggests genuine engagement with the course material.

Most participants viewed their return to society as a fairly unproblematic. Possible barriers seemed to be presented in a simplified way. This suggests an overestimation of the ease of return. This can be understood under two themes:

- having simplified plans;
- escaping the influence of others.

Participants often had positive plans for the future. However, these tended to sound like general, simplified hopes (for example, start a family, get a job, stay out of crime). This was felt to be something common to most prisoners, and not specific to this sample. The prison environment and the interview situation are likely to promote pro-social responses to future plans. Indeed, these answers have probably been rehearsed a number of times in sentence planning meetings, parole board reviews, and so on. Nevertheless, it suggests that these participants at best view their return as fairly unproblematic. This was shown in sharp relief by those participants who did have clear plans. It is worth noting that few participants referred to gang involvement as having disrupted hopes or dreams held as a teenager.

Many participants identified their home area as a potential problem. These individuals typically said that they just needed to keep away from that area. Again, ideas of how to achieve this were in the main quite simple or non-existent (for example, "*just go and live in another town*"). The need to see one as being in control seemed to obscure acknowledgement of psychological needs. Many participants emphasised the ease of leaving the gang. This was seen as a matter of personal choice. This was linked with the belief that no one in the gang would force them to stay. Moreover, some participants reported that other gang members would be happy for them if they were moving on to better things.

Few participants verbalised that simply moving to another town would involve leaving behind familiarity of context and relationships, and the sense of self connected to these things. It may be the case that some participants felt they had matured and moved on. This might have made starting up a new life in a new place seem realistic. However, the account of just moving to another area raises questions about how participants would manage without the personally-valued sense of self they left behind.

Some participants referred, however, to being drawn back into 'things' again if they returned to the area. This was put in terms of being influenced by seeing friends making money, and/or having symbols of success. There was a sense that being back in this environment, having been successful at making money, having status and so on, it would be difficult to resist. Friends were perceived as not trying to influence you, but that the personal choice to join them would be the problem.

Another important divergence to the theme of escaping the influence of others relates to the idea of 'connection by others'. Some participants talked about the problem of rival gangs still connecting them to the group or gang with which they were affiliated. For example, one participant felt that he had to go and live in a completely different area, less because of being drawn back into old friendship connections, but because he would be a target for other gangs. The underlying belief was that younger members in rival gangs looking to prove themselves would target a 'higher' member of a rival gang being released from prison. This was because they are less likely to be carrying a gun. This belief meant that this

participant felt he could not return to his home area. If other participants shared this belief, it raises questions about other ways (ex-)gang members might protect themselves on release from custody.

The significance of changes in thinking have also been highlighted in the broader literature on the process of exiting personally meaningful roles. Ebaugh (1988) argues that role exits (and entrances) are closely linked with self identity. She suggests that this is because the roles an individual 'plays' become important parts of the way a person defines themself, and how they are defined by others. Each time a person enters or exits a role self-identity is threatened. Elements of the new or previous role have to be negotiated and reintegrated into one's self concept before stability and security can be re-established.

The process of disentangling oneself from a previous role requires an individual to establish a new set of values and attitudes. It also needs them to find a way of 'squaring' new values with their former belief system. With respect to general offending this process is explored in detail by research undertaken by Maruna (2000). This research explored differences in the way that recidivists and ex-offenders thought and talked about their past offending. It found that ex-offenders were far more likely to have found 'face saving' ways of reconciling their past. These included turning their past into something positive. This might be by seeing their life as a series of lessons that have led them to a new way of being. This new way of being may even lead to a sense of having much to offer other people. In particular, those who are at risk of following, or who have already followed, the same path. Maruna's research strongly suggests that ex-gang members will also need to find a way of explaining their previous behaviour.

Ebaugh (1988) highlights that another challenge an individual faces in creating 'the ex-role' is to manage other people's expectation that they will still behave in accordance with their old role. It has already been noted that gang members report that failure of peers, adversaries, family, and criminal justice staff to recognise their 'ex' status is a barrier to change.

How does gang membership influence an individual's use of violence?

A number of studies suggest that gang membership is linked with high crime rates (Communities that Care, 2005; Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Bullock and Tilley, 2002). Other studies have looked specifically at the links between gang membership and violence. These studies suggest that gang members do not typically specialise in violence. However, violence plays an important role within gangs, particularly in symbolism and rhetoric (Aldridge and Medina, 2007). Triggers for gang-related violence were typically found to involve interpersonal disputes. These commonly included inter-group rivalries, turf wars, and retaliation (Aldridge and Medina, 2007; Youth Justice Board, 2007), disputes within gangs linked with jealousy and debt, and disputes regarding friends, family, and romantic relationships (Aldridge and Medina, 2007).

The literature suggests that gang members are much more likely than non-gang members to carry **weapons** (Communities that Care, 2005; Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Bullock and Tilley, 2002). With respect to **knives**, research indicates that gang members were significantly more likely to claim to have carried a knife in the past year than young people claiming not to be involved with a gang (Youth Justice Board, 2007; Communities that Care, 2005). There is also evidence of a link between gang membership and possession of **firearms** (Communities that Care, 2005; Bennett and Holloway, 2004; Stelfox, 1998).

The present study attempted to draw out an understanding of participants' experiences of being violent. Findings from the interviews suggest the meaning of violence for participants can be understood under six sub-themes, which overlap to some degree with the factors motivating individuals to join street gangs:

- pre-emptive protective violence;
- approval for inclusion;
- violence as exciting;
- pre-gang propensity/experience;
- violence for status and respect;
- violence for money and business.

Different participants orientate towards these sub-themes in differing degrees. Some showed aspects of all the sub-themes. Others clearly showed just one approach to violence. As a result the sub-themes should not be viewed or used as a typology of gang violence. Instead, they represent means of understanding different psychological approaches to it.

Pre-emptive protective violence is related to a sense of risk of being attacked. Participants talked about using violence for protection in three ways.

- Some participants presented a sense of needing to group together for safety in numbers. The key thing here is that the group produces a sense of, or actual threat of, violence to potential aggressors. The individual joins the group to 'passively' receive the protection this threat offers.

- Some participants described the experience of reacting violently as a pre-emptive way of managing their expectations about future risk of victimisation.

- Carrying a weapon was felt to be protective. Some participants expressed the view that if others knew you carried a weapon then they would be less likely to attack you. Some participants referred to the general sense of the streets being dangerous. This was coupled with a view that fistfights and other non-weapon forms of physical violence were something from a bygone era. Hence there was the feeling of needing to carry a weapon around for real protection.

Some participants actively displayed to the gang their willingness to join in with violence in order gain **approval for inclusion** in the group. Other participants talked about needing to be violent in order to be not excluded from the group. For example, running away from a fight was viewed to be an invitation to the entire group, younger and older members, to physically attack them. Violence was also seen as a way of confirming a sense of self as located or connected and belonging to a particular group. Additionally, knowing that someone in their area had been attacked by a rival gang consolidates the sense of belonging to a 'side' or group.

Some participants described **violence as exciting**. This was linked to being bored and needing stimulation. It also sat in a wider context of having fun with the group. It is hard not to interpret these comments in the light of other themes about violence earning inclusion and status, and that the excitement is in fact a product of joint venture as a group and the social weight of the act. However, it may be the case that some of these participants genuinely enjoyed the perpetration of violence purely for the act itself.

For some individuals there was a sense of enjoying being feared by others, which was coupled with extreme violence being perceived as inevitable in many situations. This was irrespective of whether or not these situations were connected to gangs and groups. Being suddenly and extremely violent had a personal tone, and the identity of being feared appeared personally valued. This was linked to early experiences of violence, either witnessed or received as a victim. This approach to violence suggests a propensity for violence that existed before joining a gang. It was discussed that the social value of violence within some gangs meant such a **pre-gang propensity** is likely to help someone with this disposition thrive, in that they can earn status. Other participants talked about their experience of violence during childhood as something that 'toughened them up'. The violence they now used or witnessed was felt to be not as bad in comparison. This suggests that the impact of violent acts on victims has been devalued by early experiences. This may also suggest an instrumental use of, rather than a propensity to, violence, which underestimates the impact of the severity used.

Violence was deemed a normal and necessary part of having or achieving status for some participants. It was also interwoven with the triangle of money, 'business', and guns. This meant that the lure of the perceived end goal of a comfortable, luxury life with people looking up to you, casts violence as a prerequisite. Any discomfort about the use of violence seems of negligible significance in the participants' grand schemes and fantasies.

The public rating of **status and respect** (what other members are believed to think about one's status) was presented as crucial for some participants. Perceived slights or attempts to undermine someone's sense of status could only be dealt with by violence. Not reacting with often extreme violence was experienced as tantamount to abject failure. There was a sense of being worse than nothing if a once-held status is lost. This was not only due to loss of respect, but also a sense of inevitable attacks and victimisation from others. This highlights the 'forced-choice' of violence for status and respect.

For some participants the relaying to the gang of individual acts of violence was seen as just as powerful as being violent in front of, or with, the gang. For example, the telling of the act would serve to cement the person as part of the group while raising their status.

Many participants held the view that violence is a necessary and acceptable means of **making money and/or protecting business interests**. This primarily concerned drug dealing at various levels. However, it also included the use of violence to commit robberies. Some participants gave a sense of 'legitimate' violence. This was about being armed to protect yourself against being robbed, using intimidation with weapons and, if necessary, violence to prevent competitors taking away business. This kind of violence was contrasted with 'stupid' violence, which was linked to younger members looking to achieve status. Some participants distanced themselves from such 'illegitimate' violence. These individuals promoted themselves as essentially good people interested in working to provide for their family. Some participants would refer to 'petty crimes' as being those of small financial gain, such as stealing a handbag or wallet, but still using serious levels of violence including weapons. This suggests a normalised use of serious violence, whether for small financial gains or for 'protecting' big business.

Use of violence for some participants was set in the context of 'honest survivalism/steady employment' in that it was a normal part of everyday business. They conveyed a view that it was expected that they would protect business interests they had been working hard for, particularly where it concerned being able to provide for their family. Bound up with this was the belief that if other drug dealers are carrying guns, then the 'safest' and proper option is to carry a gun. For some participants this was coupled with a sense of being prepared to use guns if the opposition use theirs.

A number of authors propose that an individual's interpretations of the world are underpinned by interconnected networks of beliefs that are organised around underlying dominant themes, or theories (Polaschek, Calvert and Gannon, 2009; Ward, 2000). These networks are referred to as implicit theories (Ward, 2000). The above findings suggest some similarities between the way participants made sense of gang violence and the implicit theories that have been identified in studies of other violent offenders. For example, participants in the field research indicated a sense that violence was a necessary and normal part of achieving and protecting status, and of making money and protecting business interests. This can be seen as providing some support to the **violence as normal and acceptable** implicit theory. Violence is seen as an acceptable way of exacting revenge, having fun, increasing social status, and obtaining material needs or wants (Polaschek and Donovan, 2006).

4 Practical implications

Implications and recommendations are grouped under key tasks undertaken with offenders and/or by the staff groups likely to perform these tasks. Recommendations are presented as suggestions for improving current practice. They are not intended as evidence-based statements of proven best practice.

The sample used in the field research was a geographically-based sub-set of violent offenders. This potentially has consequences for the generalisability of findings to other gang-affiliated offenders, violent offenders, and offenders from other geographical areas. However, the research team noted that a high level of consistency was typically observed between the field and desk research. This suggests that with appropriate caution the implications of the research could be applicable to other populations of gang-affiliated offenders.

Assessment

The research highlighted a number of issues relevant to the assessment of gang-affiliated offenders. These include the following.

- There was considerable heterogeneity among offenders meeting the recognised criteria for gang affiliation. For instance, they differed in the extent to which they agree with the label of gang member, and the way they experienced their affiliations with others. Several participants in the field research actively resisted any implication from the researcher about them being gang members. This highlights the importance of exploring an offender's own sense of involvement in collective offending. This includes avoiding labelling and simplistic assumptions about gangs.

- The desk research identified a broad range of factors linked with gang affiliation. This suggests the importance of assessing (and intervening in) the full range of domains linked with gang affiliation.

- The field research suggested that the personal motivations for affiliation may be closely linked to a gang member's use of violence. Exploring these links may help to inform intervention. For instance, it might help to identify values, rules (beliefs), and expectations linked with violence.

- All participants in the field research were high-priority gang offenders according to police intelligence. However, a number of participants had few or no previous convictions. This variable is an important anchor point in actuarial assessments of risk. In addition, a number of participants obtained low scores on formal assessments of treatment need. This suggests that there may be some differences in the criteria (and information) used across agencies to prioritise offenders. This may have implications for inter-agency working (for example, multi-agency public protection arrangements). This in turn reinforces the importance of information sharing and collaboration in assessment and management of risk.

Intervention

This section adopts a broad definition of intervention. This includes enforcement, prevention and rehabilitation. Some of the following recommendations are particularly applicable to the offending behaviour programmes delivered in criminal justice settings. However, many are equally relevant to other contexts and forms of intervention. The implications for intervention are divided into three sub-sections:

- allocation;
- treatment need;
- factors influencing the likelihood of a positive response.

Interventions: allocation

- The desk and field research suggested that there can be significant rivalry and conflict both between and within gangs. This has obvious implications for allocation of offenders to intervention groups.

- The field research found considerable variation between different participants' experience and sense of gang affiliation. For instance, some participants expressed a sense that their associates were supportive and would not get in the way of them leaving the gang. Others suggested that their associates were highly competitive and would prevent them from leaving the gang. Exploring and understanding these differences may help to inform and refine decisions about appropriate allocation.

Interventions: treatment need

- The field research indicated that the motivations for the use of violence by gang-affiliated offenders include protection, turf wars, achieving and protecting status and respect, making and protecting money, and obtaining excitement. These motives overlap considerably with patterns of thinking linked with the use of violence in other violent offenders (for example, seeing violence as a normal and acceptable way of exacting revenge, having fun, increasing social status, and obtaining material needs or wants). This suggests that many gang members could benefit from the same interventions as those designed for generally violent offenders.

- The desk and field research highlighted the role of underlying values, beliefs, and expectations in the violence carried out by gang-affiliated offenders. This suggests that these offenders might benefit from interventions focusing on these 'deeper' levels of thinking.

- The desk and field research found evidence for the selection (and self-selection) of violent individuals into gangs. For instance, the desk research observed a considerable overlap between the factors that linked gang affiliation, and the risk factors for offending and violence. This process of selection partly explains the link between gangs and violence. This strongly suggests that interventions focusing solely on facilitating exit

from gangs are unlikely to reduce violence risk in all gang-affiliated offenders. Instead facilitators should carefully explore the impact of gang affiliation on an offender's violence. They should also explore (and address) the full range of other factors linked with the offender's use of violence.

- The desk research indicated that gang affiliation is strongest during adolescence and early adulthood. These are times of considerable development and maturation. The field research suggested that treatment needs and patterns of engagement might vary at different developmental points. For instance, a number of participants made comments critically reflecting on their younger, less mature, selves. This point should be considered in treatment planning.

Interventions: factors influencing the likelihood of a positive response

- The field research highlighted a range of personal motivations for joining and staying with street gangs (protection/connection, status and respect, money). Exploring these motivations might help to identify ways of engaging an offender in intervention, and motivating them towards pro-social change.

- The desk and field research highlighted some significant events that acted as 'motivational hooks' supporting the process of exiting gangs and desisting from offending. These included becoming a father and disillusionment with gang life. It is important that facilitators look out for, and work constructively with, these and other potential motivators for moving through the steps of leaving a gang.

- The desk and field research identified several factors contributing to resistance to engagement in interventions. These included a strong need for control over change, a mistrustful or anti-authority stance, and sensitivity to being labelled, stereotyped and/ or judged. It is important that facilitators and managers of interventions find ways of constructively working with these issues. It has already been noted that this should include caution with labelling participants as gang members.

Resettlement/throughcare

The desk and field research highlight several important considerations linked with the resettlement needs of (ex-)gang members. These include the following points:

- The desk research suggested that potential barriers to successful resettlement include a difficulty in renegotiating relationships with gang-affiliated friends and relatives, and convincing professionals and other gang members that they have made meaningful changes in their lives.

- The field research suggested that other barriers to resettlement include the absence of concrete and realistic future plans, and an over-reliance on leaving the 'home' area as a strategy for overcoming barriers to resettlement.

References

Aldridge, J. and Medina, J. (2007) *Youth Gangs in an English City: Social Exclusion, Drugs and Violence*. Swindon: ESRC.

Bennett, T. and Holloway, K. (2004) 'Gang membership, drugs and crime in the UK', *British Journal of Criminology,* 44, pp 305–23.

Blanchette, K. and Brown, S. L. (2006) *The Assessment and Treatment of Women Offenders: An Integrative Perspective.* West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

Building Bridges Project (2008) A report by the young people of London, facilitated by Race on the Agenda (ROTA) providing evidence based recommendations to tackle gangs and the use of weapons. www.rota.org.uk

Bullock, K. and Tilley, N. (2002) *Shootings, Gangs and Violent Incidents in Manchester: Developing a Crime Reduction Strategy.* Crime Reduction Research Series, Paper 13. London: Home Office.

Communities that Care (2005). *Findings from the Safer London Youth Survey 2004.* London: Metropolitan Police Service.

Dawson, P. (2008) Monitoring data from the Tackling Gangs Action Programme.Home Office Crime Reduction Website. London: Home Office.

Decker, S. H. and Van Winkle, B. (1996) *Life in the Gang: Family, Friends, and Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dutton, D. G. (2006) *Re Thinking Domestic Violence.* UBC Press.

Ebaugh, H. (1988) *Becoming an ex.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Farrell, S. (2002) *Rethinking What Works with Offenders*. Cullumpton, Devon: Willan Publishing.

Farrell, S. and Calverley, A. (2006) *Understanding desistance from crime: Theoretical directions in resettlement and rehabilitation.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Farrington, D. P. (2002) 'Developmental criminology and risk focused prevention'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (3rd edition), Maguire, M., Morgan, R. and Reiner, R. (eds). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flood-Page, C., Campbell, S., Harrington, V. and Miller, J. (2000) *Youth Crime, Findings from the 1998/1999 Youth Lifestyle Survey.* Home Office Research Study 209. London: Home Office.

Fong, R. S. and Buentello, S. (1991) 'The detection of prison gang development', *Federal Probation,* 55(1), pp 66–9.

Hallsworth, S. and Young, T. (2006) *Urban Collectives: Gangs and Other Groups.* London: Metropolitan Police Service.

Huff, C. R. (1991) *Gangs in America.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kintrea, K., Bannister, J., Pickering, J., Reid, M. and Suzuki, N. (2008) *Young People and Territoriality in British Cities.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Klein, M. and Maxson, C. (2006) *Street gang patterns and policies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lien, I. (2002) *The pain of crime and gang mentality.* Unpublished paper.

Mares, D. (2001) 'Gangstas or Lager Louts? Working Class Street Gangs in Manchester'. In *The Eurogang Paradox: Street Gangs and Youth Groups in the U.S. and Europe,* Klein, M. W., Kerner, H. J., Maxson, C. L. and Weitekamp, E. G. M. (eds). London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Marshall, B., Webb, B. and Tilley, N. (2005) *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1.* London: University College London Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science.

Maruna, S. (2000) *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives.* Washington D.C.: American Psychological Society.

Moore, J. (2002) 'Forward'. In *A rainbow of gangs: Street cultures in the mega city,* Vigil, J. D. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Moore, J. and Vigil, J. D. (1989) 'Chicano gangs: Group norms and individual factors related to adult criminality', *Aztlan* 18, pp 31–42.

Polaschek, D. L. L., Calvert, S. W. and Gannon, T. A. (2009) 'Linking Violent Thinking: Implicit Theory-Based Research with Violent Offenders', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24(1), pp 75–96.

Polaschek, D. L. L. and Donovan, K. F. (2006) *Offending-related cognition in violent offenders: A grounded theory investigation.* Unpublished manuscript.

Richardson, A. and Budd, T. (2003) *Alcohol, crime and disorder: a study of young adults (ages 18–24).* Home Office Research Study 263. London: Home Office.

Rodger, J., Palmer, H. and Mahon, J. (2007) *Evaluation of the Targeted Youth Support Pathfinders: Interim Report*. Leeds: York Consulting.

Scott, G. (2004) 'It's a sucker outfit: How urban gangs enable and impede the integration of ex-convicts', *Ethnography*, 5(1), pp 107–40.

Sharp, C., Aldridge, J. and Medina, J. (2006) *Delinquent Youth Groups and Offending Behaviour: Findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey*. Home Office Online Report 14/06. http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/rdsolr1406.pdf

Smith, D. J. and Bradshaw, P. (2005) *Gang Membership and Teenage Offending*. The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, Number 8. Edinburgh School of Law, University of Edinburgh.

Smith, J. A. (1996) 'Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology', *Psychology & Health*, 11, pp 261–71.

Smith, J. A. and Osborn, M. (2008) 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis'. In *Qualitative Psychology* (2nd edition), Smith, J. A. (ed). London: Sage.

Stelfox, P. (1998) 'Policing Lower Levels of Organised Crime in England and Wales', *The Howard Journal,* 37(4), pp 393–406.

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. C. (1986) 'The social identity theory of inter-group behavior'. In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Worchel, S. and Austin, L. W. (eds). Chigago: Nelson-Hall.

Toy, J. and Stanko, B. (2008) *Die Another Day: A Practitioners review with recommendations for preventing gang and weapon violence in London in 2008*. www.csas.org.uk.

Ward, T. (2000) 'Sexual offenders' cognitive distortions as implicit theories', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 5, pp 491–507.

Wood, J. (2006) 'Gang Activity in English prisons: The prisoners' perspective', *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 12, pp 605–17.

Wood, J. and Adler, J. (2001) 'Gang Activity in English prisons: The staff perspective'. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 7, pp 167–92.

Youth Justice Board (2007) *Groups, gangs and weapons*. Youth Justice Board.

Ministry of Justice Research Series 2/11
Understanding the psychology of gang violence:
implications for designing effective violence interventions
The study employed a qualitative approach in which 44 male gang-affiliated prisoners convicted of violent offences were interviewed about their experiences of gang affiliation. The analysis suggested that participants held different views about the nature of gangs and there was a lack of consensus about what constituted a gang. This study identified several important psychological motivations contributing to gang affiliation and highlighted ways in which criminality reinforces gang affiliation and identity. The meaning of violence for participants was explored and the authors identify practical implications relating to assessment and intervention with gang affiliated offenders.