



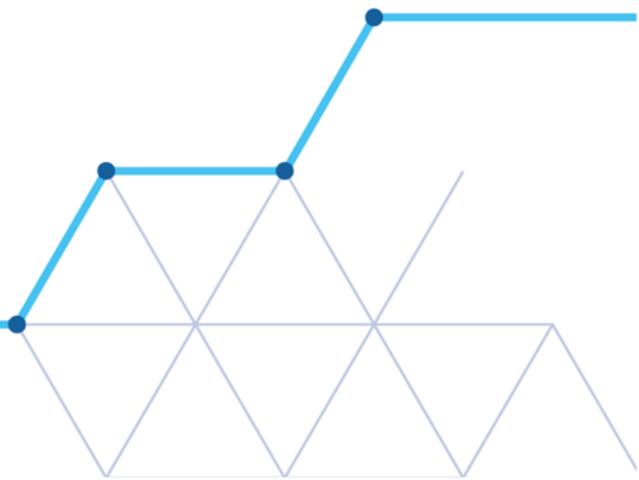
Ministry  
of Justice

# Identity Matters intervention for group and gang related offenders in custody and community: findings from a small-scale process study

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# 1. Summary

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has developed Identity Matters (IM), an intervention designed to be delivered to those whose offending is 'group/gang' related to address issues related to their offending. It is delivered to adults in both custody and community settings across England and Wales.

This small-scale process study explored the experience of the piloting of IM intervention for participants and staff in custody and community and examined preliminary short-term outcomes of the intervention.

## Approach and interpreting findings

A mixed methodology was used, which was both qualitative and quantitative and covered the four pilot sites (two in the community and two in custody). All fieldwork was conducted in 2016. Feedback forms were obtained from all 26 IM participants who took part in the programme, interviews were conducted with 10 key stakeholders and focus groups were carried out with 12 programme facilitators. In addition, short term improvements in confidence to desist from future offending and the therapeutic relationship were assessed by use of pre- and post-self-completion measures for 20 programme completers (14 in custody and 6 in community).

There were a number of limitations to the study that need to be considered when interpreting findings, including small sample sizes on the pre- and post-measures, the measures used have not yet been validated to be used with this population and that there was no control group. Therefore, any observed changes cannot be directly attributed to the IM intervention. Furthermore, as with all qualitative research, the views of those interviewed may not be representative of all staff and prisoners at the establishments. However, as both staff and prisoners were interviewed, a wide range of viewpoints were gathered, which allows for greater representation.

## Key findings

Overall, the feedback from participants, facilitators and key stakeholders on IM was positive and considered it a suitable intervention suitable to address group/gang related offending was positive. The programme's modules and sessions were considered to address the factors which motivated individuals to engage in offending and the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that enabled them to offend. A number of sessions were noted as being particularly effective, especially the sessions related to "push" and "pull" factors in group

offending. The structured and manualised format of IM was praised and considered by facilitators and stakeholders to be unique in the field.

Across all sites, the intervention was experienced by participants and facilitators more positively during the initial 1:1 sessions compared to the group sessions, with engagement and honesty being higher. Levels of motivation were reported to have an impact upon responsivity, with those who were more motivated to participate having a more positive experience. Participants who were less motivated also impacted upon the experience of other participants during group sessions. The timing of delivery was considered by the majority of respondents to be particularly important, with the perception being that IM in a prison setting had the greatest impact if delivered immediately prior to release. There was also consensus that IM would be most effective in the community once stability in participant's circumstances, including accommodation, substance misuse and employment, had been gained.

It was noted that using the terminology 'group' as opposed to 'gang' created some confusion in delivery and facilitators experienced a watershed once they had explicitly addressed the issue. Respondents thought this could be addressed by including an exercise on definitions.

Pre and post measures were used to explore initial short-term intervention impact. There were significant differences in the pre and post scale used to measure desistance suggesting that completion of IM could be associated with increased ability to stay crime free and an increase in perceived negative consequences of continuing with criminal activities. The therapeutic alliance between facilitator and participant was found to improve over the course of the intervention, particularly on the goal subscale, with participants moving to a greater agreement of intervention goals with the facilitators. However, the bond subscale of the working alliance did deteriorate over the course of the intervention. The working relationship or alliance between participant and facilitator has been established as an agent of change, and a significant predictor of outcomes. Overall the findings from the pre and post measures suggested some positive change albeit weak in some subscale's. However, these findings from the short-term measures should be considered within the context of the small sample size and also in the absence of an available control group which limits the ability to attribute the findings to participation in IM.

## **Conclusions**

This small-scale study provides preliminary evidence to suggest IM has utility as an intervention for gang affiliated offenders. Findings should be considered in light of the limitations set out above.

The study identified a number of suggestions for practitioners and developers that could be considered for future delivery. These included using 1:1 sessions rather than group sessions; a session to introduce and define concept of a gang; the timing of delivery within an individual's sentence; the continued use of pre and post programme measures to examine short-term change and longer term follow up of participants to explore the impact of the programme in promoting desistance and disengagement.

## 2. Introduction

While the issue of gang involvement in criminal activity is not new, there are difficulties in studying and understanding the problem as there is no consensus or agreement on how to define a gang. Many have tried to provide definitions and typologies over the years and there are now a number of different definitions across the growing literature (see for example, Klein et al., 2001; Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Hallsworth & Young, 2004; Gordon, 2000; Esbensen et al., 2001; Gatti et al., 2005). The definition provided by the Home Office and used for this study is as follows:

*“A group of three or more people who have a distinct identity (e.g. a name, /badge/emblem) and commit general crime or anti-social behaviour as part of their identity. This group uses (or is reasonably suspected of using) firearms, or the threat of firearms when carrying out these offences.”*

(Home Office, 2008, p.23).

Whilst definitions of a gang can vary depending on use, there is an agreement that there are ‘gangs’ who are engaging in illegal activities. It is therefore important to look at why and how people become part of ‘gang’ as this could inform policy makers and practitioners in how to support individuals to desist from joining and engaging in ‘group/gang’ related offending and leaving a gang.

There has been much research carried out on the motivations for joining gangs in the UK. For instance, research carried out by Marshall et al. (2005) focused on eleven projects covering three geographical areas of England and one international project, looking at gangs and the role of weapons. The research highlighted several themes around the risk factors for young people joining gangs. These included being surrounded by peers involved in delinquent behaviour, with those surrounded by pro-social peers being less likely to be involved, and the absence of male role models, such as a responsible father, with young males seeing the older criminal or gang leader as a substitute. It has been suggested that being part of a gang is likely to be for reasons over and above those underlying factors which trigger criminal activity, because involvement with a gang can offer individuals more in terms of feeling protected, experiencing excitement, feeling a sense of status, and the acquisition of power (Wood & Alleyne, 2010). Being gang involved also requires the need to adhere to rules and norms, providing a form of familial support, as well as opportunities to enhance criminal learning (Wood & Alleyne, 2010).

Harris et al. (2011) noted that many of the studies exploring motivating factors to join a gang typically focus upon societal and community factors. Decker and Van Winkel (1996) noted that these factors are often interpreted as 'pushing' young people towards gang affiliation. However, as Harris et al. (2011) emphasised, it is also important to recognise that gang membership can exert a strong 'pull'. Pull factors can include money; protection against victimisation; connectedness and status and respect (Harris et al, 2011). People may be *pulled* in to gangs because the group offers perceived benefits, such as safety, protection, love, support, excitement, financial opportunities, and a sense of belonging (Decker and Van Winkel 1996, Young and Gonzalez 2013).

Studies in the U.K show a clear link between gang membership and engaging in criminal behaviour (Bradshaw and Smith, 2005; Sharp, Aldridge and Medina, 2006), with gang members also being more likely to use violence (Bennett and Holloway, 2004, Centre for Social Justice, 2009, Melde & Esbensen, 2012). Klein et al. (2001) observed that 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, 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 (Klein et al, 2001). Alleyne and Wood (2010), in a study of UK based students aged between 12 and 18 years, found that youth gang members possessed more anti-authority attitudes and valued social status more highly in comparison to non-gang youth. Gang members were also found to displace responsibility onto more superior gang members. In a follow up study using data from the same sample Alleyne and Wood (2013) found that the gang members used graffiti to map out their territory and threats to intimidate others. Wood & Alleyne (2010) also suggest criminal behaviour can occur independently of gang membership, or indeed simultaneously to joining a gang.

Many of the factors associated with why people seem to commit violent offences as part of a gang, can be related directly or indirectly to identity issues (NOMS, 2016). Gang offenders may come to 'over-identify' with a specific group and consequently develop 'us and them' thinking because of whose side they choose to identify with, which can have a significant impact on their outlook on life and perception of the world around them. These are factors typically associated with why gang offenders engage in and are motivated to offend as part of or on behalf of a group. It is such factors which can also act as 'enablers' to offending (NOMS, 2016).

The fact that gang affiliated violence can be perpetrated by one group or person against another highlights the importance of understanding the strength of a person's identification with a particular group, and the impact that can have on behaviour. Turner (1982, p.18) described social identification as *"the process of locating oneself, or another person, within a system of social categorisations used by a person to define themselves and others"*. In this sense social or shared identity is understood to be important in how people perceive and define themselves and others. Understanding the processes which underlie social identification has been crucial for understanding discrimination, prejudice and conflict between groups (see Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986, Tajfel et al. (1971)). 'Social Identity Theory' asserts that group membership creates in-group self-categorization and enhancement in ways that favour the in-group at the expense of the out-group. They suggest that individuals need to maintain a positive sense of personal and social identity and that this is partly achieved by emphasizing the desirability of one's own group, focusing on distinctions between other "lesser" groups. Individuals who identify strongly and/or more or less exclusively with one aspect of their life can be described as becoming over-identified (Ashforth, 2001). The group's shared identity can take over; it soon comes to define who they are. As a consequence, individual behaviour can become increasingly influenced and controlled by group standards, norms and rules (See Turner, 1982; Hogg, 2004; Sageman, 2004; Porter & Kebbell, 2009).

Whilst identity is important to 'gang' related offending, how to disengage from 'gangs' and offending needs to be considered and taken into account when intervening with this population. Research indicates that offending is significantly reduced when individuals choose to disengage or exit a gang (Aldridge and Medina, 2007). However in reality this can be a difficult process. These are complex issues to overcome at both an individual and organisational level, especially when considering the challenges faced in custody or being on licence for example.

Scott's (2004) exploration of some of the resettlement challenges faced by American prisoners who wanted to leave behind their previous 'gang' lifestyle highlighted how individuals underestimated the challenge of leaving their home area, something which they had previously cited as an important part of the disengagement process. Prisoners who said they would disengage by avoiding their home area appeared to have given little thought to the consequences of moving away from family, friends, and their previous sources of money, status and respect (Scott, 2004). Participants identified risk factors such as being around people making 'easy money', owning symbols of success, and the problem of being connected to a gang or territory which could still result in them being targeted by other

gangs. A final concern for prisoners was that criminal justice workers may not acknowledge the positive changes they have made in their lives (Scott, 2004).

Criminal justice involvement and police harassment were cited by Pyrooz and Decker (2011) as influences on gang member's decisions to leave behind the gang, suggesting there is a limit to what members can tolerate in terms of ongoing negative experiences in their day to day lives. The gang members interviewed as part of their study *'talked about how things eventually built up for them and they had to find a new lifestyle – that the gang lifestyle and its attendant pressures (arrests, being stopped by the police, living under the threat of victimization) just got to be too much for them. These pressures, coupled with increasing family and job responsibilities, laid the groundwork for getting out of 'gang life' (Pyrooz and Decker, 2011 p.13).*

Disengaging in a custodial environment can be problematic, where there can be additional expectations that someone *must change* in order to reduce risk factors and evidence positive progress (Harris *et al.* 2011). Attending programmes within prison can, for some prisoners feel mandatory in order to complete an objective and achieve parole. If there is a sense that change is being 'imposed' on participants during the intervention this could limit its effectiveness, so discussing the content and setting expectations prior to starting is important so participants are clear about their responsibilities (Harris *et al.* 2011).

A rapid evidence review of interventions delivered in the UK found that there is no gang-specific programme that has robust evidence of efficacy of impact on gang involvement (Home Office, 2015). Whilst no specific UK studies were identified, a number of studies from the US on interventions were reviewed that provide useful learning and ideas for best practice. The review also found no specific interventions that focus on gang offenders in a custodial setting. However, a number of interventions outside of prisons for gang related offenders, which have aimed to prevent gang involvement, youth violence or associated problems such as youth offending, conduct disorder and delinquency were identified. Of the interventions reviewed by the Home Office, the most effective were found to include certain components including; skills practice, therapy and trained facilitators, who were often acting in their professional capacity, and had experience of working with children and/or families. It further found that programme integrity and high-quality implementation was crucial in terms of ensuring and/or maximising effectiveness. The review also highlighted a gap in our understanding about what works in preventing gang involvement and how to deal effectively with those that are involved in gangs (Home Office, 2015).

The research carried out to date examining gang related offending highlights the complexity of the issue and that there are no simple solutions to intervening with gang related offenders. There is also a paucity of evidence on effectiveness of interventions that target gang affiliated offenders, especially in a UK context. The research presented in this report aims to address this by describing the piloting of Identity Matters, an intervention for gang related offenders.

## 2.1 Identity Matters

In 2016 the Government in England and Wales published its strategy to reducing gang violence. The strategy "*Ending gang violence and exploitation*" (HM Government, 2016) acknowledged that a different approach to enforcement alone was necessary to tackle the root causes of the problem. Following publication of the strategy, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service developed an intervention for 'group/gang' affiliated adult offenders, Identity Matters (IM). The programme was piloted in a number of sites before being rolled out nationally.

The purpose of IM is to try and prevent individuals from committing offences associated with gang-affiliation in the future. Where there is evidence that an individual's relationship or identification with a gang has been a primary factor in their offending, the intervention aims to encourage and empower participants to disengage from the gang (NOMS, 2016).

The intervention focuses on identity as a key factor for an individual joining a gang and carrying out illegal activities as part of or for the gang. It seeks to engage 'gang/group' affiliated offenders in addressing their offending behaviour and develop a more positive sense of identity to enable them to move on and desist from group affiliated offending. The development of IM was informed by using multi-disciplinary evidence of effective approaches to gang related offending. It utilises both the empirical evidence from promising international studies and emerging evidence of approaches to gang related offending in the UK. It seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence. The intervention is suitable for adults whose offending and harmful behaviour is motivated by their affiliation and identification with a gang and can be delivered in custody and the community.

IM is delivered across the prison estate in England and Wales for 'group/gang' affiliated offenders and has currently been delivered at a number of establishments ranging from High Security prisons to a Local Category C prison. The intervention at the time of the pilot study

was delivered in either a group setting or 1:1, it is now only delivered 1:1. IM follows a structured and manualised format with 19 specific sessions, language and delivery being set out which practitioners follow after receiving training in its delivery. The schedule, focus and dosage of sessions are flexible in that facilitators can decide which sessions to deliver and when and which material to focus on for each individual. The session schedule selected by the facilitator is guided by a tailored assessment which identifies those sessions most relevant and responsive to target the risks, needs and circumstances of each participant.

In order to understand how IM has been implemented and piloted, a process study was carried out to determine whether it was feasible to deliver such an intervention within prison and probation settings and provide feedback on the intervention design and implementation to aid in subsequent development and implementation. The research was exploratory and addressed the following research questions;

- What has been the participants' and facilitators' experiences of the IM intervention?
- How are programme content and delivery being received and what improvements can be made?
- Does comparison of pre/post measures demonstrate any difference over time?

### **3. Methodology**

For the study a mixed methods approach of interviews/focus groups, feedback forms and quantitative analysis was used. The research was carried out over all four of the pilot sites, two prison establishments, HMYOI Isis and HMYOI Swinfen Hall and two community sites, Greater Manchester Probation Area and West Midlands Probation Area. All fieldwork was carried out in 2016.

#### **3.1 Participants**

All 26 participants who took part in the pilot for IM were asked to participate in the study by completing a feedback form. Feedback forms were completed by all participants that had started on IM. Participants were all male and aged between 19 – 32 years with the average age at start of intervention being 22 years. The main ethnicity recorded was Black British (13, 50%). There was a range of proven offences with the most prevalent being Murder (7, 27%) and Robbery (8, 31%). The majority of participants (20 out of the 26, 77%) who completed IM also completed pre- and post-measures.

The 12 facilitators who delivered IM were approached to take part in the study. All 12 facilitators returned feedback forms on the intervention. Three focus groups were also held with programme facilitators (5 facilitators in group one, 4 facilitators in group two, 3 facilitators in group three). The facilitators were all experienced in delivering interventions and included both forensic psychologists, trained facilitators and probation officers. All 12 facilitators also completed the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) for each participant with whom they delivered IM. Ten stakeholders from policy, commissioning and Offender Managers were approached and interviewed due to their insight and experience of working with gang affiliated offenders.

#### **3.2 Quantitative Pre and Post measures**

Two pre- and post measures were used in the evaluation, The Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) and Desistance Scales. The Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) was selected because of the known importance of a good therapeutic relationship for positive rehabilitative outcomes (Tatman and Love, 2010). Having a good therapeutic relationship with the facilitator is a key agent of change for IM. The WAI measures both the facilitator/practitioners and participant's perception of the working alliance. The Desistance scales were used because they aim to measure the participant's beliefs regarding intention to desist from crime. IM aims to facilitate desistance from future crimes. The measures were administered

at the start of the intervention by the facilitators and again following completion of the intervention. Analysis of pre and post measures was carried out using SPSS software. With the absence of a control group, analysis was limited to exploratory statistical techniques. T-tests were therefore conducted on the data available within the Working Alliance Scales and Desistance to compare scores at the start and the end of the intervention.

*Working Alliance Inventory* (Tatman & Love, 2010): The offender version of the Working Alliance Inventory-Short Revised (WAI-SR) is a 12-item measure that assesses both the facilitator/practitioners and participant's perception of the working alliance. The measure is based on Bordin's (1979, 1994) notion of the alliance construct as consisting of the affective bond between patient and therapist, agreement on the goals of treatment, and agreement on treatment tasks/means of achieving treatment goals. In accordance with Bordin's view, the WAI-SR measures the subscales of tasks, goals, and bond between client and therapist, the subscale scores (ranging from 4 to 28) and a total /aggregate alliance score (ranging from 12 to 84). Low scores indicate less working alliance between therapist and client and chance of achieving treatment goals.

*Desistance Scales* (Lloyd & Serin, 2012): this is a 100 item self-report measure, developed to assess offender beliefs regarding intention to desist from crime. Its subscales relate to desistance-specific beliefs about the process of offender change. The subscales are:

- Crime and Desistance Attribution Style (CDAS) (15 items);
- the Personal Outcome Expectancies for Crime (POEC) which measure negative and positive expectations of crime (32 items);
- Personal Outcome Expectancies for Desistance (POED) which measure positive expectations and negative expectations of desistance (37 items)
- Agency for Desistance Questionnaire (ADQ) (16 items).

Emerging evidence suggests that the scales showed high internal consistency and evidence for concurrent and construct validity (Lloyd & Serin, 2012).

### **Qualitative interviews, feedback forms and focus groups**

Participant and facilitator feedback: Forms were designed specifically for the purpose of the study to obtain feedback on IM from both participants and facilitators and were distributed at the conclusion of the intervention as a hand-written document. Participants were provided with stamped and / or return envelopes in custodial sites. Some participants returned their forms during the final session and others completed the forms alone and returned their

feedback in the provided return envelope. Facilitators returned their feedback in both written form via the post and also by email.

Focus groups were arranged with facilitators and facilitated by HMPPS Intervention Services to obtain and discuss feedback on the intervention with programme facilitators. Interviews were also carried out with key stakeholders; either via telephone or arranged face to face. Topic guides were developed specifically for the purpose of the study. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and the qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. Following the approach advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006), a coding frame was developed to capture responses to key questions. These were reviewed and refined until all the data had been thoroughly interrogated. The coding was carried out by the lead researcher, to ensure a consistent approach was applied. However, a second member of the research team checked the coding when the initial coding frame had been developed and again once coding was completed to ensure agreement.

### **3.3 Interpreting findings**

There were a number of limitations to the study. The sample size used within the analysis of pre- and post-measures was small. For this reason, only basic statistical analysis was undertaken, along with parametric analysis and descriptive analysis. The measures used within the process evaluation were new and had not been previously used with this population. The measures were utilised as emerging evidence suggests that the scales showed high internal consistency and evidence for concurrent and construct validity. The scales construct validity also resonated with the aims of the intervention. They were considered a potentially useful exploration of their future feasibility and use in any future evaluation. It is important to note there was no control group so it cannot definitely be concluded that the observed changes are the result of completing the IM intervention. Instead, changes could be due factors such as completion of previous interventions (NOMS, 2016) and the environment in which treatment takes place (Beech and Fordham, 1997). However, it should be noted that it is difficult to identify a suitable control group. In addition, measures used were based on self-report. It has been suggested that the accuracy of the outcomes from self-report measures can be influenced by the honesty of participant's responses (Wakeling & Travers, 2010). However, although there are clear limitations to the use self-report measures, the findings do add to the limited literature around interventions for this population (McSweeney et al., 2008). The research was not intended as an outcome evaluation as the numbers were too small to facilitate robust impact evaluation.

Furthermore, as with all qualitative research, the views of those interviewed were subjective and may not be representative of all staff and prisoners at the establishments. However, as both staff and prisoners were interviewed, a wide range of viewpoints were gathered, which allows for greater representation.

## 4. Findings

The results presented in this section are grouped by themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis. Each theme is a combination of findings of interviews, focus groups and feedback from participants, staff and key stakeholders and are presented by key theme. The results of the short-term outcome measures are also presented.

### 4.1 Suitability Criteria

Feedback from facilitators and stakeholders supported the criteria of a participant with known gang affiliation, either within their index offence or that they acknowledge in their previous offending histories. A level of motivation to participate was also considered to be an important criterion for participation in the IM pilot.

It was also felt that the intervention could be delivered where there was intelligence that the individual was involved in gang affiliated offending. *“Making sure the right offenders get the intervention according to their intelligence rather than just offence.”* Many respondents voiced concern that participants who especially needed the intervention may miss out because they were not selected. For example, *“if we know they are big players, the police, all agencies confirm it but he hasn’t got the index offence, I think he should still be able to do IM, maybe he’d get more out of it than others.”* Stakeholders suggested the routine sharing of intelligence with examples of the *“Trident matrix (Metropolitan Police Matrix) input into referrals, especially in secure estate, idea of sharing matrices would enable a better referral and assessment should include the matrix.”*

A factor that all respondents considered crucial in suitability decisions was the existence of a functional link between a participant’s identification with a gang and their offending behaviour. Individuals who associated themselves with a gang for personal, individual gains rather than associating and offending on behalf of the gang were felt to be unsuitable for the intervention. A useful perspective was provided by one stakeholder: *“a different identity is aligned to violence and another to criminal enterprise.”* No participant was deemed unsuitable for such a reason, but facilitators reflected on this post-completion. For example, feedback included *“I don’t think IM would be relevant for someone who just uses the gang to get what he wants, not what the gang wants”* and *“it’s for the guys who are invested in the gang, who offend because of the gang”*.

Other considerations of suitability related to the participant’s level of motivation, which facilitators thought should be considered when selecting suitable participants. Facilitators fed

back about how well the intervention worked with some but not all participants because of differing levels of motivation. It was felt that those who were motivated and engaged got more from the intervention than those who were less motivated to engage. Examples included *“one guy self-referred himself, he wanted to do it and you could see the difference in the group between him and the other guy who just wanted to get out of his pad. The guy that self-referred wanted to do it and get something out of it for himself. The other guy just wanted time out of his cell”*. Similar views were captured amongst other respondents. *“Those that want to do it will do better”* and *“it’s not something you can coerce someone to do, it takes commitment and buy in from the offender, they can’t just go along for the ride on IM.”*

## 4.2 Terminology

There was a large amount of participant feedback that concerned terminology, particularly the word ‘gang’. Discussions across sites centred on the definitions of a ‘group’ and ‘gang member’ which need to be explicitly addressed in the intervention. Participants commonly felt that IM *“tries to say that all groups are gangs when they are not”*. This feedback was received from both group and 1:1 participants.

Facilitators felt that discussion of terminology was a *“blockage in early sessions”* and *“a big issue to overcome to engage participants”*. The use of the term ‘group’ as opposed to ‘gang’ was commonly felt to be unclear and in some respondent’s view, hid the topic of the intervention. For example, *“by saying group rather than gang we are dodging the issue”* and participants similarly noted *“why say group when what you mean is gang”*.

After discussions around definitional clarity had taken place a watershed moment in the progress of IM was universally considered to have happened, as noted by one facilitator who felt that the *“intervention was able to move on”*.

## 4.3 Content of IM

When asked about IM and the relevance of its content, the vast majority of respondents praised the intervention and said they *“would change nothing”*, and *“would recommend all of it”*. Stakeholders reported they had received similar feedback from participants: *“I certainly spoke to offenders during the course of the programme and they talked very positively about it.”*

The central notion of identity as set out in the IM programme and its role in gang affiliated offending, disengagement and desistance was positively received.

The modules and sessions within IM were considered to address the factors and circumstances which motivate individuals to engage in offending and also those attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that enable them to offend. An Offender Supervisor noted that *“IM helps break the cycle and breakdown what issues are, it informs a risk assessment.... they are issues you may not have thought about without IM.”* It was felt that the intervention’s exploration and orientation around desistance was also particularly relevant. The sessions most frequently referenced were those that explored identity and commitment to change. Participants also fed back about their re-examination and refreshment of commitments to change, for example *“moving on was most important, it helped me to look at carefully what I want to achieve in life and the things that affected me before. It helped me leave it in the past and move on.”*

Whilst some elements of IM’s content were currently relevant, for example “Joint Enterprise”<sup>1</sup>, it was highlighted that the intervention should be flexible and adapt to changing issues: *“things do change and it’s whether this has the ability to evolve and develop with some of that at the same time.”*

A strength of IM was that it could be delivered in combination with other interventions or as a standalone intervention. A number of stakeholders made reference to this: *“other programmes don’t look at identity like IM does. That’s why we used HII [Healthy Identity Intervention]<sup>2</sup> for gang members initially. It felt that gang members needed something different, over and above the other programmes we have.”* *“IM is a stand-alone intervention that should be done after the others, it could be a bolt-on but the whole lot should be delivered. Other interventions you can merge, make sure you get the core elements like SCP [Self Change Programme] or Resolve<sup>3</sup>, but do IM separately.”* Others made reference to its approach *“other programmes target specific things that relate to offences rather than patterns of behaviour, the criminogenic reasons why someone might have committed a violent offence, could have been because they were part of a gang and a programme wasn’t*

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Enterprise is a law that was introduced by the Criminal Justice System where two or more people join in committing a single crime, for example two people agree to commit a robbery. Each plays a part in carrying out the conduct element: together they attack and take money off security men making a cash delivery. Both are liable for robbery as joint principals.

<sup>2</sup> HII – is a one to one programme that targets the social and psychological drivers of extremist offending. It seeks to facilitate desistance from future offending, and disengagement from an extremist group, cause and/or ideology.

<sup>3</sup> SCP is a high intensity cognitive behavioural intervention that aims to reduce violence in high risk adult males whose repetitive use of violence is part of a general pattern of antisocial behaviour and criminality.

Resolve is a moderate intensity cognitive behavioural group work intervention that aims to reduce violence in medium to high risk adult and young male individuals. Resolve is suitable for male individuals with a history of reactive and/or instrumental violence. It provides an up to date evidence based treatment approach for medium risk/need individuals who have a history of violent offending/behaviour.

*available to do that.*” However, some respondents also suggested that IM’s approach was not overly clear and its distinction from other interventions could be better defined. For example, *“IM needs to be clearer why it is distinct from other interventions, what makes it unique? I know it is, but others may not, be clearer.”*

The intervention was viewed by a minority of participants and facilitators, in places, to be repetitive, lengthy and complex. Worksheets were considered complex and the language and pitch of the intervention was considered too difficult in parts. One facilitator commented that *“the manual was very wordy and questions to group members had lots of double negatives and this made following it difficult.”* One Participant fed back that *“I gave up doing out of session work, those writings were too hard to understand”, this was a common view among participants.*

Some respondents viewed IM to have a more negative orientation in places. One example given by a participant was how *“I find myself talking about the bad things I’ve done in the past, without talking about the good things”.* The language later in the manual was suggested by facilitators/practitioners to be inconsistent with the Good Lives Model<sup>4</sup> presented and explored in early sessions of IM. An increased emphasis on strengths building approaches, particularly in later sessions was also suggested by those delivering the programme.

Overall, concluding remarks from one site provided a good summary of views of the content of IM and how they facilitated some important but challenging conversations about their offending; *“although these guys were p’ed off with the content at times, these are important conversations that they need to have.”*

#### **4.4 Perceived Outcomes**

Amongst those who had participated or facilitated IM it was universally believed to achieve positive outcomes. *“It helped me become more aware of my thoughts and how to deal with negative ones”*

Feedback revealed how participants may make changes in the future for example *“it showed me that I don’t have to be anyone else but me”* and *“makes you look at things at a different view”.* Another participant summed up his experience of IM by saying *“it has been very*

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<sup>4</sup> The Good Lives Model (GLM) is a strengths based approach to offender rehabilitation which aims to promote an individual’s aspirations and plans for a more meaningful and personally fulfilling life.

*helpful as I have had a chance to see where things had gone wrong in my life and the future I can have if I work hard and keep a positive attitude.”*

#### **4.5 Group versus 1:1 Delivery**

The piloting of IM included a mix of group and 1:1 delivery. General consensus among respondents was that IM was more effective and safe if delivered 1:1. This was especially so because of the challenges in managing group dynamics. Those who had delivered as a group felt that whilst they could navigate initial associations and dynamics it would be difficult to manage risk through the intervention as “dynamics moved”. Opposing gangs coming together in a group was exacerbated by *“within-gang and in-fighting issues, gangs have evolved.”* One stakeholder reflected a common view in preparing a group delivery format: *“I really needed to be assured that we could select the right people to attend so that we wouldn’t have any conflict but then that had the potential to undermine who we put on the course because someone who most really ought to attend the course you might say based on a security or conflict concern they shouldn’t attend.”*

In fact group dynamics were identified; hierarchies developed quickly within the groups. *“One dominant character can upset everything that can happen in any group but it’s going to massively affect this particular intervention because it’s a gang intervention.”* Some issues were overt but others were covert and were fed back by participants only after the groups had ended. It was felt that *“participants were worried about what the other guys would think of their responses”* and participants themselves reflected *“I didn’t really say what I thought because of some of the other guys”*.

Across all sites, engagement and participation was reported to be higher during the 1:1 sessions compared to group sessions. Nearly all participants indicated that IM should be delivered 1:1 to have the best outcomes and engage participants. All of the participants fed back that the 1:1 sessions *“were better”* and *“I engaged and listened more than I did in the group because I could be more honest.”* 1:1 delivery also meant that sessions could be tailored for the individual and so be more responsive to their needs. This common view was exemplified by one stakeholder: *“Not one size fits all. Different drivers for each individual so it should be an individual programme for that reason.”*

A small number of participants did however find the group format useful because it had brought together opposing gang members. Participants felt that IM had enabled this association and it would not have occurred without IM. For example, one participant fed back how he *“realised that I could sit in a room with [certain] rival gang members.”*

## 4.6 Working Alliance

The importance of the working alliance, a collaborative relationship between the participant and facilitator, was included across all feedback and deemed an important factor *“I think my facilitators approach to this work was very helpful because I found her to be patient and understand.”* IM was felt to have a clear focus on developing and building a strong therapeutic relationship it during its early preparation sessions, which was considered by respondents as central to the impact and effectiveness of IM.

## 4.7 Timing of Intervention

The timing of IM’s delivery was considered by the majority of respondents to be particularly important, with the prison programme considered to have the greatest impact if delivered immediately prior to release. One stakeholder noted for example *“the pre-release intervention of IM was massively valuable to see the positive change in the offender. In anticipation of his release, his prognosis was poor. We were able to work it, I believe because of IM, his whole attitude was far better. He reached and achieved meaningful things.”*

Other respondents fed back that those on longer sentences such as IPP and life sentences who participated in the pilot intervention also benefited. It was noted for example that *“they can begin to make changes, start thinking about the things they need to think about”* and how it *“can impact those on longer sentences in different ways – it begins a process and maybe makes it a stronger process of change by starting it early.”* A participant with a life sentence also noted *“it is useful, it’s as much a big change for me my de-categorisation as it will be my eventual release and IM has helped me think about me, and things I can do differently in thinking about my move.”* Another participant coming towards the end of his community order noted its use *“as I think about the future from here.”*

## 4.8 Location of Delivery

Both custody and community sites fed back that each were suitable options of delivery. Prison was seen as a stable environment and commonly viewed as an effective place where IM could be delivered *“Prison is a great place to do it. A place where they are under control. It’s not chaotic. Got to have everything in place before you march into someone’s head with IM.”* Community delivery was also seen positively because *“it’s the real world, they’re out there and doing it, they need IM to support it.”*

Delivery in the community did present some challenges such as changes in participant's accommodation, employment and other factors. These factors impacted upon the intervention scheduling with some participants seeing up to three week gaps in intervention. Facilitators at these sites noted that a level of stability was necessary for participants undertaking the intervention within the community, for example *"certain things need to be sorted first, accommodation, substance misuse, whatever it is before they can start IM so those things don't interfere with the intervention."* Similar views were reported amongst participants.

## 4.9 Responsivity

The intervention was viewed as *"responsive"*, *"rich in source material"* and *"a learning opportunity for facilitators"*. It was felt that it responded well to participant's needs with frequent reference made to it *"meeting the needs of each individual person undertaking it."* Participants frequently concurred with this view of the intervention's responsivity: *"work was sometimes aligned to fit my personal needs."* Specific aspects were particularly welcomed, which included the early 'responsivity exercise' to establish preferred style and modes of delivery. IM was reported to be especially responsive when delivered 1:1 (see section 4.5 above for further description).

Whilst the intervention was seen to be responsive overall, some constructive suggestions were made to improve this. Feedback was received *"that the ethnic representation of the team impacts the way the programme is received and how it is delivered, particularly talking about lifestyles and examples from facilitators don't relate."*

Some participants also fed back issues with the language used. For example, the use of the word 'threat'; participants fed back that this was not applicable to them as *they "did not feel threatened"*. Interestingly this view was articulated by group participants and not those experiencing the intervention on a 1:1 basis. Similar issues were found with sessions exploring emotions, particularly the 'managing difficult feelings' content as the participants again did not feel it was applicable to them and were particularly resistant to this content.

## 4.10 Pre and Post measures to assess short term change

Pre to post Desistance Scales and Working Alliance Inventory were analysed using a paired (samples) t-test to explore any change over time. The results of the analysis of each scale and relevant subscales are presented in Table one.

Across a range of measured assessed, statistically significant differences were found in the Positive Expectations of Desistance and the Negative Expectations of Desistance subscales of the Personal Outcome Expectancies for Desistance Questionnaire. There were no significant differences found on the Crime and Desistance Attribution Style Questionnaire or the Agency for Desistance questionnaire. For the Working Alliance Inventory – Offender Version there was significant difference on Goal subscale but not for the Bond or Task subscales.

### **Desistance Scales**

Positive expectations of desistance: High scores indicate individuals believe that positive consequences will occur if they attempt to stay crime-free and low scores indicate they do not perceive many positive consequences to trying to stay crime-free (range 0-102). An increase in participant's scores on the subscale after programme completion was found. Participants appeared to have increased from views of not perceiving many positive consequences to trying to stay crime free (M=70.96, SD=20.92), towards views of more positive consequences occurring if they attempt to stay crime free (M=77.4, SD=13.95). While the increase was statistically significant participants still remained at the lower end of the scale ( $t(19) = -2.1, p < .05$ ).

Negative expectations of desistance: Lower scores mean individuals believe that negative consequences will occur if they stay crime free and high scores indicate they do not perceive many negative consequences to attempting to stay crime free (range 0-36). Analysis found and increase in participant's scores on this subscale. After completing IM, participants appeared to have increased from views of believing that negative consequences will occur if they attempt to stay crime free (M=10.6, SD=4.85), towards more positive views of the benefits of staying crime free (M=14.55, SD=6.21). Although this was statistically significant, participants again remained at the lower end of the scale ( $t(19) = -2.61, p < .05$ ).

### **Working Alliance Inventory**

Working Alliance Inventory, Goal Subscales: refers to agreement on intervention goals. High scores indicate a participant's belief of greater agreement between themselves and the facilitator/practitioner on intervention goals and low scores indicate a participant's belief of lesser agreement between themselves and the facilitator/practitioner on intervention goals. Analysis found that participants had increased from a view of believing that there was less agreement of intervention goals (M=16.11, SD=4.5) towards a greater agreement of intervention goals (M=20, SD=2.38). Although again, while this was statistically significant, participants still remained toward the lower end of the scale, ( $t(17) = -4.11, p < .05$ ).

It is worth noting that on the Bond Scale of the Working Alliance (which refers to the bond between facilitator and participant) the score deteriorated pre to post (M=9.83, SD =6.86 to M=5.56, SD=2.20), indicating less of a bond at the end of the intervention, although this was not statistically significant.

**Table 1: Data Analysis of Pre and Post measures**

| Measure  | Subscale                            | Pre Intervention |                    | Post Intervention |                    | Number | t-test        |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------|---------------|
|  |                                     | Mean             | Standard Deviation | Mean              | Standard Deviation |        |               |
| Agency for Desistance                                      | Total Score                         | 40.7             | 11.91              | 40.2              | 10.67              | 20     | .24           |
| Crime and Desistance Attribution Style Questionnaire       | Internal                            | 19.2             | 4.29               | 20.45             | 3.75               | 20     | -1.62         |
|  | Stable                              | 15.3             | 3.39               | 15.0              | 4.87               | 20     | .29           |
|  | Global                              | 16.5             | 4.42               | 16.2              | 4.65               | 20     | .30           |
| Personal Outcome Expectancies for Crime Questionnaire      | Negative Expectations of Crime      | 63.6             | 27.15              | 66.05             | 28.27              | 20     | -.49          |
|  | Positive Expectations of Crime      | 22.7             | 15.15              | 20.0              | 17.86              | 20     | .86           |
| Personal Outcome Expectancies for Desistance Questionnaire | Positive Expectations of Desistance | 70.6             | 20.92              | 77.4              | 13.95              | 20     | <b>-2.1*</b>  |
|  | Negative Expectations of Desistance | 10.6             | 4.85               | 14.55             | 6.21               | 20     | <b>-2.61*</b> |
|  | Expecting Desistance to Take Effort | 57.05            | 17.04              | 60.0              | 13.29              | 20     | -.94          |
| Agency for Desistance Questionnaire                        | Total Score                         | 79.4             | 11.57              | 76.2              | 23.01              | 20     | .56           |
| Working Alliance Inventory – Offender Version              | Goal                                | 16.11            | 4.5                | 20.0              | 2.38               | 18     | <b>-4.11*</b> |
|  | Bond                                | 9.83             | 6.86               | 5.56              | 2.20               | 18     | 2.77          |
|  | Task                                | 17.78            | 4.7                | 20.22             | 2.49               | 18     | -2.6          |
|  | Total Score                         | 43.72            | 1.56               | 45.78             | 1.0                | 18     | -1.38         |

\* Statistically significant at the .05 level

## 5. Discussion

The study found that overall the piloting of the IM intervention was positively experienced by participants, facilitators and stakeholders interviewed. In particular, the central notion of identity and its role in gang affiliated offending, disengagement and desistance was considered relevant in intervening with gang affiliated offenders.

The modules and sessions of IM were considered to address the factors and circumstances which motivate individuals to engage in offending and also those attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that enable them to offend. A number of sessions were perceived to be particularly effective, especially those that addressed the push and pull factors that are important in gang disengagement (Young and Gonzalez; 2013). The intervention's exploration and orientation towards desistance as opposed to reoffending was noted as being relevant for this group.

The structured and manualised format of IM was considered by facilitators and stakeholders interviewed to be unique in the field. They saw no other manualised interventions available for gang affiliated offenders that were based on emerging or international evidence of effective practice. The intervention was also reported to have strong integrity and was responsive to participant's needs.

Levels of motivation were found to have an impact upon responsivity of participants. Previous research has suggested that levels of motivation to engage and participate in interventions should be considered when determining suitability (Weed et al, 2001). Those participants who were more motivated to engage and participate were felt to have gained more from the intervention than those who did not engage as well. In addition, in the group sessions, those participants who were less motivated to engage impacted upon the experience of other participants, which is supported by research Harris et al, (2011).

Using the terminology 'group' as opposed to 'gang' created some difficulties in delivery and facilitators of the pilot experienced a watershed once they had explicitly addressed the issue. In addition, using the term 'group' caused confusion for participants and masked the interventions purpose. A discussion exercise on definitions of 'groups' and 'gangs' was felt to be a necessary exercise to dispel myths and make it clear of the interventions purpose, content and relevance.

Across all pilot sites, the intervention was experienced by participants and facilitators more positively during its 1:1 initial sessions compared to the group sessions. Engagement and participation by participants was generally reported by both facilitators and participants as being higher during 1:1 sessions. This led to the suggestion that the intervention should be delivered entirely on a 1:1 basis.

The use of pre and post measures were used for an initial exploratory analysis of short-term intervention impact. A number of statistically significant differences were found on some of the subscales of the measures. For example, the analysis found an increase in participant's scores on the positive and negative expectations of desistance subscales, suggesting participants feel there are more positive consequences to staying crime free and more negative consequences if they do not upon programme completion. In addition, participants moved to a greater agreement of intervention goals with the facilitators after they had completed IM. Factors associated with the working alliance have been found to correlate with custodial based treatment outcomes and rates of recidivism. Tatman and Love (2010) report that the working relationship or alliance between client and therapist is a significant agent of change and a predictor of outcomes. However, the findings from the pre and post intervention measures should be considered within the context of a small sample size and also in the absence of an available control group which limits the ability to attribute the findings to participation in IM. It should also be noted that while significant improvements were observed, participants remained at the lower end of the scales.

The timing of the intervention delivery was considered by the majority of respondents to be particularly impacting and relevant at pre-release points. There was also consensus that IM would be most effective in the community once stability in participant's circumstances, including accommodation, substance misuse and employment, had been gained.

Despite a number of limitations to the methodological approach (see Approach section for details), the study was able to identify a number of suggestions for practitioners and developers that could be considered for future delivery of IM.

- *One to one sessions* – The findings suggest delivering all the sessions of IM in a 1:1 format is more beneficial than group delivery.
- *Session to introduce and define concept of gang* - It is suggested that an early exercise should be incorporated into module one of the intervention around terminology and discussion of phrases. It was suggested that the word 'gang' should be used in preference to the word 'group' to provide clarity to both participants and facilitators.

- *Timing of delivery* – The findings suggest there could be benefit in delivering IM close to release point in custody, while in the community it should be delivered once some stability has been reached.

## 5.1 Conclusions

Identity Matters has been positively experienced, by those interviewed, as a relevant intervention for gang affiliated offenders. The quantitative findings of this process evaluation suggest likely positive impacts of the intervention. Findings should, however, be considered in light of the limitations set out earlier in the report.

Many aspects of the intervention have been highlighted as strengths and are recommended to be included in any future versions. Other elements of the intervention have been identified through the study that would benefit from some amendment and refinement. Overall, it is concluded that, with the suggested adjustments, the intervention has likely utility as an intervention for gang affiliated offenders and should be made available for delivery across custody and community.

Whilst this study suggests some positive impact of the IM intervention in the short term, it is important to review the longer term impact. Recidivism data could be obtained to assess if those participants who show short-term change are less likely to re-offend than those participants who do not. However this analysis may be challenging given that gang related offending is not always identified in recidivism data, so examining whether gang related offending has reduced may be problematic.

It may also be useful to examine further the role of the *Working Alliance* in facilitating a process of change. It would be interesting to further explore whether the absence of a working alliance and/or improvement correlated with any other outcome measures. A clinical change study could also be carried out to measure any changes at an individual level using the pre and post measures. Maintaining the integrity of IM is also crucial and processes should be put in place to monitor this.

Since this process study was completed, the changes suggested by the research have been made to the intervention and IM has been rolled out nationally across prison and probation in England and Wales. In addition, IM has received Accreditation by the Correctional Services

Advice and Accreditation Panel (CSAAP)<sup>5</sup> and this study formed part of the evidence presented to CSAAP.

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<sup>5</sup> Accreditation is the process of reviewing, validating and approving offender interventions which have been designed to reduce reoffending. CSAAP consists of specialist sub-panels comprising three to five experts, who review each programme according to published evidence-based criteria. See the following website for further information about accredited programmes and CSAAP: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/offending-behaviour-programmes-and-interventions>

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