

# An Impact Study Of Youth Offending Practitioners Interactions an Interpretive Analysis

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**Abstract:** There is a tendency to concentrate solely on the offending behaviour rather than the individual's behaviour, which is portrayed mainly in negative ways, resulting in even less emphasis on the impacts and implications for practitioner and client relationship. A single participant case study utilising Interpretive Analysis, aimed to look into the experience of a practitioner within a youth offending team, to understand the psychological impacts both positive and negative that may occur, in work related situations. The study's main objective was to extract rich idiographic data, in order to give the researcher a clear and richer understanding of their experiences and coping mechanisms needed to efficiently manage their daily activities.

**Keywords –** Interpretive analysis, practitioners, Youth.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Described the young people as 'involuntary clients'. Involuntary clients by their nature are deemed as being not so forthcoming and do not choose the services of youth justice organisations, and could conceivably be opposed to receiving any interventional support, which in turn creates negative impacts for the practitioner.. in order to keep parity, and consistency, reference was made throughout the research to young people. In no way did this reflect nor have any relevance as to any personal views. Also the reference to young people is not gender specific and makes no reference to any particular ethnic group.

The aim of the research was to understand the experience of a youth offending practitioner in their occupational surrounding. Previous qualitative research has concentrated on youth offending teams as a collective whereby linking of results with quantitative data (triangulation) was carried out, although qualitative data was only seen as filling in the missing points. One such study was carried out by (Burnett & Appleton, 2004) although the study was more concerned with occupational culture and an 'ideology of unity'.

The literature regarding occupational culture by Burnett & Appleton (2004) proved to be informative and provided a useful insight into working practices.

Psychological impacts may affect individuals such as youth offending practitioners in the context of their job. Due to the nature of the role they are often described as being 'front stage' occupations, because of the fact that they are dealing face to face with young people for most of their working day. (Eadie and Canton, 2002).

Modern stress research have posited regarding the importance of everyday problems that may be regarded as

vital factors in development in life events both socially and in the workplace.

## II. METHOD

### Participants

The aim of the study was to see into the world of youth offending from the perspective of the practitioner, and to experience everyday occurrences that impact upon their wellbeing.

Consent for this research project was arranged initially by contacting the participant's immediate line manager in the youth offending team. Permission was requested for someone who would be interested in taking part in the qualitative study. The participant (N=1) was contacted after a letter was posted asking for a case worker/manager, who would be interested in taking part in research was put on the notice board, for all staff to see. Trevor expressed an interest to take part. He has been with the youth offending team since its inception in 1999, with previous experience working in children's homes and youth work. It should be clear at this stage that the participant agreed voluntarily to take part in the study, and that no incentives were offered to take part.

The primary method of data was collection is within the 1-1 semi-structured interview itself, and was conducted solely by the researcher. The interview was conducted in private, in one of the interview rooms and was digitally recorded, so as to enable the researcher to make sense of the interviewee making sense of their experiences. This process is commonly referred to as a 'double hermeneutic', whereby the participant is trying to make sense of their world, and at the same time, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2003: 51; Smith, 2004:40).

As is the nature of IPA, verbatim extracts from the transcripts were be used in the study, meaning that the data could not be described as being kept confidential. To comply with the School’s Research Ethics Committee, the data was described as ‘limit to confidentiality’, although there was full anonymising of data, and also the digital data was deleted permanently after the date agreed on the consent form.

Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenological method of interviewing is informal, interactive and uses questions designed to elicit descriptions of experiences, to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences of structures of the experience.

### III. ANALYSIS

This study utilised Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to make sense of and explore the personal accounts and lived experience of the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA in detail aims to explore participants’ personal lived experience, and how participants make sense of that personal experience (Smith, 2004:40). Central objective of IPA was to understand what personal and social experiences mean to people who experience them. Qualitative studies such as interpretive phenomenological analysis are being utilised more frequently because of the need to supplement statistical models and conclusions with experiential data, thus allowing for a clearer understanding of how to instigate possible interventions to reduce recidivism amongst offenders. This area qualitative research whereby qualitative data can fill the gaps to understand the social world as a starting point for commandeering social change.

### IV. RESULTS

The subordinate and superordinate themes that emanated from the interview are listed below in table 1.

Table 1- Superordinate and subordinate themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
1.Sense of Self	1.1 Beliefs, 1.2 Self-esteem, 1.3 Building Trust Through Interaction
2. Responsibility	2.1 Coping, 2.2 Frustration,

#### The superordinate theme 1- Sense of self

Beliefs, confidence, self-esteem, trust

#### Subordinate theme 1.1 beliefs and values

The question that was asked to Trevor was regarding his feelings of whether he was in favour of care or control in youth practice, to which the reader will unanimously sense

his desire for a welfare based approach regarding young people in the criminal justice system. The extract conveys to the reader that Trevor’s work history has always been from a welfare stance and the uneasiness he conveys when he talks of what control does to young people in the youth justice system. Historically youth justice has been guided from a welfare based approach, and gradually the shift has moved to a more punitive ‘culture of control’ (Garland, 2001), whereby this was epitomised by a zero tolerance policy incorporating more use of custodial sentences, naming and shaming of young people and a greater emphasis on risk assessments. This apparent uneasiness with control seems to impact on Trevor although the need to adhere to professional boundaries and his description of the young people having to ‘jump through hoops’ conveys that, the relationship building process and engagement has forged a mutual respect between Trevor and the young person whereas a firm approach may be adopted to comply with a court order, but not such a punitive stance whereby all of his work is undone by severe punishment of the young person. Although historically the debate over care or control has shifted between the two poles, critics from both spectrums have argued their case. Welfarism had been criticised for creating state dependency, creating a burden on the state agencies and deflecting the responsibilities away from the individual. Although Trevor’s beliefs are of a welfare viewpoint it could be argued that this approach creates a higher workload and pressure for frontline staff such as youth offending practitioners. However a more punitive approach may seem to appease public perceptions of the public, whereas it appears that ‘something is being done’ or the young person has received their ‘just desserts’. Punitive measures progress young people on the path of more serious crime and creates tensions between practitioner’s views over the care or control debate. This dilemma was a salient feature when Trevor mentioned previously the approach from some staff described as ‘stand offish’ in their approach to some of their clients and this only exacerbates impact upon the individual.

#### Subordinate theme 1.2 self esteem

This extract conveys to the reader of a positive impact for both Trevor and the young person attending in the engagement and relationship building process, whereby a realisation of damage and harm is spoken, allowing the young person to have the chance to verbalise their feelings and to try and put right the damage done. The concept of self-mastery can be traced back to Bandura (1982) in which it was stated that internal beliefs can be used in situations whereby a sense of how well the situations were handled and dealt with, and certainly the extract shows progress and positive impacts. As Trevor mentioned previously that he was a specialist in restorative justice, the personal achievement of all the challenging work he had committed to the young person appeared to pay dividends in the final outcome of what he strives for within his remit as a case

manager. From a positive psychological aspect this outcome of success and jubilation of what he described as 'a life changing moment' promoted what (Deiner, 2000) referred to as work happiness, encompassing positive cognitions and emotions that have resulted in a subjective sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction.

### **Subordinate theme 1.3 Building Trust through interaction**

Trevor has previously stressed the importance of relationship building as a key element in effective practice to which all YOT staff adhere to the same rules and principles as all other practitioners, building upon trust within an organization. Trust has been defined as a psychological state that comprises of the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations (Rosseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998: 395).

### **The superordinate theme 2- Accepting Responsibility**

Coping, Frustration,

#### **Subordinate theme 2.1 Coping/getting through**

Trevor's account of his particular frustrations with his daily routine whereby his day does not seem to be going according to plan highlights the unpredictable environment he faces within his working environment. There are negative behavioural issues evident and Trevor's description of 'carrying' issues such as child protection and mental health issues exposes himself to potentially stressful situations.

Trevor conveys in his narrative, a sensible and level headed approach to dealing with a bad day where he may feel stressed, but as he states, he is not a drinker, so that he would not find comfort in alcohol. In this working environment social support from other colleagues doing the same duties would act as a buffer (moderator) of the increased risk associated with high levels of stress and coping mechanisms are important to be an effective practitioner. From this to reduce the effects of stress it was posited that a degree of interaction with co-workers buffered the effects of work stress. Johnson (1986). To further understand stress and its effects on the body, there becomes a point whereby some form of coping mechanism for stress comes into play. Posited that one of the scales of positive reinterpretation is a tendency that they termed positive reappraisal which is a type of emotional focused coping mechanism in stressful situations and how to manage stress, perhaps where he states that he may go and see his partner would be a way of seeking social support as an emotional focused coping mechanism.

#### **Subordinate theme 2.2 Frustration**

From this extract it is clear to the reader that Trevor is frustrated and has reservations regarding the use of restorative justice by other agencies, with which he feels are not properly trained and are using RJ as Trevor

describes as a 'quick fix'. (Jehn, 1995) stated that at any time people work together their difference in opinions and working styles can lead to workplace or task conflict, and if not resolved may lead to frustration and anger. Engstrom stated that where practitioners from agencies such as youth offending are engaged in shared activities, their professional learning is expanded as they negotiate working practices that cross professional boundaries. The Youth Justice Board set out guidelines for YOT, and police collaboration in the RJ process whereby it was stated that the police and youth offending team should work closely together for the out of court disposal to work effectively. Differences in working styles and agency agendas for closer working relations would reduce the impact and ensure RJ is consistently applied to young people.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Most of the cases young offenders are unaware of consequence of the act. So ignorance of law and of law and blindly emerging personality wants to show up heroism in society. So then ultimately they will be in legal problem which they need to make corrections with sending into them for prison.

The findings of the study, it may be suggested that although young people pass through the youth justice system, they are still young people and a clearer and better understanding of their complex needs in their transition into adulthood have resonated throughout the transcripts intertwined with the theme of the journey of Trevor and the impacts both positive and some negatives. Building on the positives within practitioners and service users, as early as 1970's work with probation officers (Andrews, Keissling, Russell & Grant, 1979) stated that pro- social modelling had become recognised as a key skill in the supervision of offenders and other service users working with involuntary clients Trotter (1999). Practitioners can reinforce pro social modelling simply by smiling, attentive listening and the use of praise when positive actions are carried out. Trotter (2004) found that child protection workers working with young people in the criminal justice system reported better practitioner and client satisfaction and positive outcomes.

A single case study was carried out, in no way would it be wise to generalise the findings from this case study, however a brief insight into Trevor's world as a case manager has given a greater awareness of the relationship between practitioner and young offender. As is often the case, certain occupations like youth offending practitioners are only perceived and occasionally perceptions are misguided and taken out of context in this area of ambivalence towards youth offending practitioners, and not the portrayal of an exciting job within the criminal justice field.

Although a single case study was adopted in favour of other qualitative methods, it may be argued that a bias effect may

occur with the transcripts, however this was not the case, so replication of this method would highlight possible problems, or as a precaution, a small pilot study could be utilised to check this.

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