



A qualitative study gaining an insight into specialist's experiences of parenting styles and their beliefs surrounding the impact it has on childhood criminality

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to gain an insight into specialists' experiences of parenting styles and their beliefs surrounding the impact it has on whether a child turns to crime. This research used six specialists from a local youth offending service were previous research used parents or children as participants. The use of specialists allows for an alternative, less biased perspective to the research topic. A qualitative approach was employed as a means of collecting the data as it allowed participants to freely express their beliefs and experiences. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data with Braun and Clarkes (2006) framework acting as an aid throughout. Three themes were generated: parental influence, relationships, and boundaries which were all believed to be linked with childhood offending. The data gained supports previous research which suggests more needs to be done in terms of preventative interventions.

KEY WORDS:	Parents	offending	Children	Parenting behaviours	Thematic analysis
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Introduction

Over the past 25 years research into adolescence has increased immensely, a proportion of the research carried out has suggested that children who are having constant problems with offending have underlying issues at home or in school from an early age (Steinberg and Morris, 2001). As research into adolescence has expanded, the importance of a secure relationship between caregiver and child has emerged. This relationship comes as a result of not only emotional nurturing but also necessary monitoring and disciplinary strategies in accordance with the age of the child and their current stage of development (Cox and Harter, 2003 cited in Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2006).

One reason behind the influx in research into parenting styles in relation to delinquency may be due to harsher punishments parents are receiving for their children's delinquent behaviour (Hoeve et al. 2009); as an example over the past 10 years a massive 34% of research in the *child development* and *developmental psychology journals* have focused on the relationship between adolescents and their caregivers (Steinberg & Morris, 2001 cited in Steinberg 2001). This appears to coincide with the Anti-Social Behaviour Act that was made law in 2003. This punishes and penalises parents of those children who persistently offend rather than offering interventions and support (Arthur, 2005). Suggesting, associations between parental behaviours and childhood offending are becoming more noticeable. Various areas in relation to parenting have been assessed and behaviours such as; poor attachment, poor parental supervision and certain disciplinary strategies have been shown to be some of the key predictors of delinquency (Hoeve et al. 2011; Hoeve et al. 2009).

Although parenting styles have received a lot of attention over the past decade (Simons and Conger 2007) earlier theories concentrated on the significance of the relationship between parent and child.

Attachment theory

The importance of parent and child attachment is not a recent discovery, it can be dated back to early theorist such as Freud who claimed that a child's attachment to its mother can form the basis to the relationships developed in later life (Ireland and Power, 2004). The theory of attachment was created by John Bowlby (1951) to underline the importance of the relationship between a child and their primary caregiver within the early years of life and the significance of the bonds that are formed (Bretherton, 1992). The bonds that are formed between the caregiver and child provide foundations for future relationships, supporting Freuds earlier claims. This bond is formed by allowing the child the support and security to explore the world around them which ultimately allows for personal growth and maturity (Ireland and Power, 2004; Bretherton, 1992). Mary Ainsworth elaborated on Bowlby's findings and devised a test referred to as the 'strange situation experiment' to assess the levels of attachment a child has with its primary caregiver (Anbroso, 2008). Through observations three key patterns of attachment were highlighted; secure, anxious and avoidant. Secure attachment is the most ideal form of attachment and is said to be a result of parenting showing warmth, affection and consistency towards their child. Anxious attachment is associated with the

parent showing less affection and inconsistency towards the child and finally avoidant attachments are a result of the primary caregiver being detached and unresponsive showing no affection or warmth (Ireland and Power, 2004). The importance of parent and child attachment was highlighted by Gove and Cutchfield (1982 cited in Barnes and Farrell, 1992) who found that that attachments made between parent and child were the strongest inhibitors of delinquency.

The importance of the parent and child bond appears to be a flowing theme throughout research into adolescents. Studies have elaborated on the findings made by Bowlby and Ainsworth, focusing not only on attachment but also parenting behaviours and the implications they can have on childhood development if not implemented correctly.

Emergence of parenting styles

The notion of parenting styles was first introduced by Diana Baumrind (1991) who suggested there were four types of parenting styles, she referred to these as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and rejection-neglecting and defined them through levels of response and demandingness: Authoritative parents are expected to be high in both response and demandingness, authoritarian parents are highly demanding but not responsive, permissive parents are highly responsive and not demanding and neglectful parents show neither responsiveness nor demand (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Kawabata et al., 2011). These parenting styles were also later reviewed by Maccoby and Martin (1983 cited in Hoeve, 2011). A clear pattern emerges throughout past research; children reared by parents who display authoritative parenting behaviours; display clear control over their children, respond to their children's needs, show love and high levels of support (Kawabata 2011; Hoeve, 2011) are more likely to flourish throughout life with forming friendships, performing well in school and abiding by rules (Kawabata et al., 2011; Hoeve et al., 2011; Simons and Conger, 2007; Baumrind 1991; Barnes and Farrell, 1992). Various conclusions have been drawn surrounding the outcomes of the different parenting styles. As explained, authoritative parenting has shown to be the most successful parenting style. However, research shows that having just one parent who is authoritative can be extremely beneficial even if the other parent displays a different parenting style (Fletcher et al., 1999). Results also show that children raised by neglectful parents are at the highest risk of delinquency, with children raised by authoritative parents being the lowest (Hoeve et al., 2011).

On the other hand, researchers have questioned the control parents have over a child during childhood and the decisions they choose to make, especially in relation to peers. Lewis (1981) found a critique in Baumrind's research when measuring control, suggesting that the observations that took place within the family home may have been measuring the child's obedience towards authority or other factors such as negotiation. These findings could hinder the results gained, raising questions surrounding the validity of Baumrind's findings.

Are parenting styles the main cause of delinquency?

The notion of certain parenting styles impacting childhood delinquency has been supported in the research explained earlier; however, is it possible for parents to always be in control of their children and know exactly what they are doing outside the home?

One clear statement made by Harris (2009) states that parental nurturing does not completely determine how a child matures. Harris (2009) suggested that the only way Baumrind's research on parenting styles could be feasible is if parents gave birth to children who show consistent behaviours, allowing the parents to then display consistent parenting styles, which unless only one child is born into the family, is highly unlikely. Harris (1995, cited in Wright and Cullen, 2001) also claimed that the results collated from research into parenting styles could be deemed as biased due to 'child effects'. 'Child effects' is a term used to describe parents behaviour as a reaction to the way their child is behaving; for example, if a child is being obedient and polite the parent is more likely to show support and warmth towards the child than to those children who are constantly disobedient. This is further supported by Kerr and Stattin (2003) who suggest that parental supervision may reduce as a reaction to the child's behaviour, such as; if the child displays delinquent behaviour, is disobedient at home or compulsively lies. Part of the framework used by Mccoby and Martin (1983 cited in Hoeve, 2011) to describe parenting styles was control, claiming the most successful parenting style; authoritative parenting, is a combination of both high control and high support with a lack of control being linked to delinquency. This statement has been challenged by Kerr and Stattin (2003) who claim that adolescents spend a large proportion of their life away from their parents, if this is the case, how is it possible for parents to keep direct supervision on them? This is a fair statement as Kerr and Stattin (2003) also suggest that people react badly to being controlled, if this is correct, and adolescents are over controlled by their parents, could this not also result in delinquency through rebellion?

One further claim is the level of influence peers have in relation to delinquent behaviour. Barnes and Farrell (1992) found that even when the effects of parental influence have been taken into account, peer influence has a large effect on socialisation during adolescent development. It is also suggested that when there is a lack of interaction between parent and child, peer influence becomes more influential. Research has shown that adolescence who rely more on peer opinions than their parents when making important life decisions are more likely to be involved with problematic behaviours (Barnes and Windle, 1987 cited in Barnes and Farrell, 1992). On the other hand, a large body of research has found that children's peer relationships are usually controlled by their parents (Steinburg, 2001). Similarly, positive parenting behaviours have been related to better peer relationships (Kawabata et al., 2011). In the light of parent effects on childhood delinquency, it appears that both parents and peers can play a part in whether or not a child chooses to turn to crime. Research supporting this claim suggests that it is the parents influence that determines whether a child turns to crime during childhood, however when children hit adolescence, peers become more influential than parents (Hoeve et al., 2011).

Gaps in the research

The uncertainty that is still apparent when examining past research into the reasons behind why children turn to crime, highlights the need for further exploration within this field (Hoeve et al., 2009; 2011). Further research will hopefully allow relevant interventions to be put into place or heightening the availability of those already created to try and prevent children being involved within the criminal justice system. Early

philosophers such as John Locke (1689) claimed all children are born a blank slate, meaning all they learn is either a result of parental nurturing or from the world around them. Similarly, Jacques Rousseau (1762) believed; everyone is born 'innately good' this suggests that part of the parental responsibility is to try and preserve this 'goodness' (Spera, 2005).

If there is any truth behind these claims, it will be interesting to see what went wrong for those children who offend and whether parental behaviours are a leading factor in the build up to this behaviour. Due to the vast research concentrating on results gained from parents and their children, this research sought to engage with specialists who have extensive knowledge of working with parents of children who offend. The researcher intends to fill a gap in the research by using specialists as an alternative to children or parents to see if the results gained support previous research claiming certain parental behaviours increase the likelihood of a child turning to crime.

This research aimed to explore specialists experiences of working with parents of children who offend to gain a better understanding of what is believed to be the key parenting behaviours in determining whether a child turns to crime, the main research questions are as followed:

What are the main parenting behaviours experienced when working with a child who offends?

From experience what impact do you believe parents have on whether or not a child turns to crime?

Methodology

Design

A qualitative approach was used as the chosen research method 'in an attempt to capture participants' perceptions, thoughts and experiences' (Porter, 2008:204) through the use of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method as they allow the researcher to gain in-depth answers from participants; it also allows participants the freedom to describe their thoughts and feelings surrounding the topic at hand (Horton et al., 2004). Six semi-structured interviews were carried out using a mixture of male and female specialists who work with parents of children who offend on a regular basis. Thematic analysis was chosen as the research method as Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is a flexible way of analysing data and enables access to a broad array of data allowing for more analytical options. Once the analysis was complete, it was reviewed and written up into a report.

Participants

Six participants were used in this study as Smith and Osborn (2008) implied that there is no specific sample size, however a smaller sample size for a 'newcomer' allows for a more in depth conversation with the participant as the sheer amount of data collected from a qualitative research study can be overwhelming. Therefore, six participants appeared to be a sufficient amount, especially due to the short time frame. Snowball sampling was used as a way of gaining participants as it allows the researcher to contact groups that are usually hard to reach (Noy, 2008). This seemed logical as the research focused on specialists experiences of working with parents of children who

offend meaning only a limited number of the population could participate. Snowball sampling enables the researcher to gain participants through certain persons who are able to locate people who they believe fit the correct criteria for the research at hand (Bailey, 1994 cited in Penrod et al. 2003) thus, gatekeepers were used to access participants.

Consent was gained from managers of the local Youth Offending Service (gatekeepers) (appendix 1), they were informed of the nature of the research and were asked to forward on contacts who they believed fell under the criteria needed for participation in the research. Participants were a mixture of male and female, had a great deal of experience working with parents of children who offend and were above the age of 18 years.

Invitation emails were sent to all forwarded contacts in which they were asked to reply if they were willing to participate, this also contained an information sheet, allowing potential participants the opportunity to read in detail what they were agreeing to participate in before signing up (appendix 2 & 3). This was to hopefully reduce the likelihood of participants withdrawing from the research and to avoid deception.

Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews are interviewee led; focusing around the interviewee being able to speak freely of their experiences and beliefs (Howitt et al. 2005) therefore it seemed to be the most logical way of collecting the in-depth data required for this research. An interview schedule containing open-ended questions was used as an aid throughout (appendix 4) with the interviewer ensuring participants had a clear understanding of the questions. This was important as any differences in answers should be because of the difference in the interviewee's beliefs rather than the wording of the question (Barriball, 1994). The interview schedule was also used to ensure all key areas were covered within the interview using probes to prompt more information if needed. The interviews were carried out at the interviewee's work place, in a meet out room which allowed privacy and to ensure participants felt relaxed and comfortable. All interviews lasted between 30-40 minutes, including both brief (information sheet) and de-briefs (appendix 5). All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone which participants were made aware of prior to the interview. A pilot study was conducted to check the interview schedule was adequate for the research and to make any changes if necessary. As no changes were required, the pilot study was included within the analysis.

Data analysis

Before any analysis was initiated it was vital that the interviews were typed up into transcripts to allow familiarity with the data (appendix 6). Having a hard copy of the data enabled easy referral back to certain areas when coding and creating themes. Although the transcription process was time consuming it required concentration and attention allowing a more in depth understanding. Thematic analysis was chosen as it allows for a rich, detailed analysis with the freedom to explore various sections of the data in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis requires codes to be retrieved which ultimately lead to overarching themes being drawn from the data (Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Codes were created during and after transcription, these were later condensed into themes and subthemes before being

thoroughly analysed. The framework illustrated by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used as an aid throughout the analysis process.

As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), the research epistemology chosen is an important part of the analysis process as it governs how you theorise meaning from a piece of data. The chosen paradigm for this research was the essentialist/realist paradigm as the aim of the research was to assess the direct meaning of participants' experiences. When deciding on the themes, an inductive approach was applied. The themes were created without using a pre-existing coding frame meaning all the themes identified were linked solely to the data collected through the interviews for this specific area of research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Finally a Semantic approach to analysing the themes was preferred as the themes were identified literally rather than attempting to interpret meaning from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from a dissertation supervisor before any research was conducted (appendix 7). The Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) created by the British Psychological Society (BPS) was followed throughout the research to ensure the safety of the participant and researcher. As explained earlier, participants received an invitation email, consent form (appendix 8), information sheet and were briefed and debriefed, meaning participants were fully aware of the research content and how to withdraw if required. Prior to giving consent, participants were made aware that the data collected was unable to be kept confidential as it was being written up into a report which would be read by others and discussed with a tutor, however; anonymity was of upmost importance. Any information collated was stored securely following the data protection act (1998) and was destroyed once the analysis was complete. All participants were over the age of 18 meaning they were able to give their own informed consent. All interviews were carried out at the participants' workplace during the day, ensuring the comfort and safety of both participant and researcher.

Analysis

Thematic analysis requires the data collected to be filtered into themes and sub-themes. Three themes were created as these areas were felt to be the most widespread throughout the data; parental influences, relationships and boundaries.

Theme 1: Parental Influences

This first theme was chosen as it was a key area of discussion throughout all interviews. It refers to the long lasting influences a parent has on a child and the impact this can have on whether a child turns to crime.

Throughout the interviews the importance of parenting behaviours was accentuated, as parents have been referred to as the first teachers in a child's life (P6, L30-31). It is also important to re-emphasize the large body of research highlighting the impact that parents have on whether or not their child turns to crime.

"I feel quite strongly that parenting is a massive issue with every family." (P2, L40)

This statement highlights the beliefs of a specialist and the experiences they have gained, clearly stating the huge impact parenting has on the children they work with.

The 2 sub-themes; past experiences and conflict explain some of the reasons behind why some parents may demonstrate certain parenting styles/behaviours and how this could influence their child's behaviours.

Past parental experiences

Past parental experiences as a sub-theme refers to the experiences parents had of being parented themselves and the impact of this on their skills and knowledge surrounding how to nurture their children effectively.

.."the parent doesn't know how to parent because of their own parenting, because you usually find it's chronic, it's a massive cycle.."(P1, L51-52)

One theory supporting this is by Mary Ainsworth who created the 'adult attachment inventory' model which assesses adults attachment styles. It was found that adults attachment reflects that which they received as a child (Van Ijzendoorn, 1994 cited in Anbroso, 2008). This suggests that incorrect attachments made with parents in childhood have an effect on attachments made during adulthood. These attachments could be reflected in the upbringing of their own children through parenting styles and behaviours; "...If you get parented poorly you're either going to have to actively change and do things completely different or you're going to have to have an awful lot of other factors changing around you... otherwise it will just replicate." (P4, L111-114). Ultimately behaviours picked up from parents could be passed along through generations. This could suggest that the parenting styles displayed are typical of how they were parented themselves:

"We come across a lot of parents that are trying really hard to be good parents but they have no skills to be strong parents because they've never been particularly well parented themselves in their histories.." (P4, L89-91)

The lack of parental skills and knowledge that could derive from parents having negative upbringings is seen as contributory factor towards why a child turns to crime. When asked about the types of parenting behaviours they encounter similar answers were given such as; "Lack of knowledge, lack of skills, sometimes lack of motivation.." (P4, L188). For example; "parents telling their youngster about something they got up to when they were young and they laugh about it and think it's ok and acceptable to laugh about it.." (P6, L198-200). This is positively reinforcing negative behaviours with the child thinking that behaving badly is acceptable, which could potentially lead to the child displaying criminal behaviour without considering the consequences; "so, again it's about the skills and the lack of knowledge from the parents.." (P6, L201).

Conflict

Both physical and verbal conflicts within the family home can have adverse effects on the child. Not only does it display negative behaviours that may be copied but also inconsistency and confusion. When asked whether "certain types of parenting behaviours have an effect on the type of crime committed?" Over half of the answers related to domestic violence within the home leading to criminal acts:

"If it's a relationship where there is fringes of domestic violence where there's shouting, conflict, aggression, threats of even physical violence. That sends completely the wrong messages to the child." (P3, L273-275).

"Domestic abuse within the families within the family interventions team, you might get young people who might assault because they're angry and they can see what's going on.." (P2, L221-222).

This relates to the social learning theory created by Bandura (1978) stating that aggressive acts are learnt through observation. It has also been proven that children imitate the acts witnessed by aggressive models;

..'Studies of familial determinants of aggression show that parents who favour aggressive solutions to problems have children who tend to use similar aggressive tactics in dealing with others.' (Bandura, 1978: 15)

This suggests that the behaviours do not always have to be physical, they can also be negative verbal behaviours towards the child;

".. shouting and screaming at them and the next minute they can't work out why their son or daughter when they want something will scream and bang.." (P5, L150-151)

".. behaviours towards young people is learnt behaviour and they'll do it as well." (P5, L152-153)

This assumes that negative parental behaviours witnessed by the child or aimed at the child can impact on the behaviours the child chooses to display which can ultimately result in criminal acts such as violence towards others.

Theme 2: Relationships

This theme refers to the importance of relationships during childhood and the impact they have on whether or not a child turns to crime. This is made up of 2 sub-themes; parent-child bond and role models within the family as these were prevalent areas of discussion through the interviews.

Parent-child bond

'A number of studies have concluded that delinquency in a wider sense is related to problematic relationships with parents' (Pederson, 1994: 976). The importance of a strong parent-child bond is an ongoing area of research and has been for many years. McCord (1983 cited in McCord, 1991:400) stated; 'parental affection acts as a protective factor against crime'. Suggesting the relationship between a parent and child is an important factor in predicting childhood delinquency.

"Communication is massive within a relationship between young people and their parents." (P5, L31)

This claim was supported by Stattin and Kerr (2000) who found that children who display criminal behaviours tend to have a lack of communication with their parents. "They need that network where they can speak to their parents if they've got problems." (P5, L33) This suggests that good communication between parent and child could result in a better relationship. This is supported by Rankin and Kern (1994) who state that positive relationships reduce the likelihood of a child turning to crime because they don't want to jeopardize the relationship they have.

Another factor influencing the relationship between parent and child is the level of attachment. It was explained that one of the reasons behind childhood offending may be because “.. they don’t have this ability to soak up praise, love, affection, because they’ve not been nurtured with it so they tend to go on and think everything is hard work..”(P6, L129-131). The importance of a strong childhood attachment; parental warmth, affection and consistency was first introduced by Mary Ainsworth, this has been further strengthened by a large number of researchers who have found a strong parent-child attachment can positively impact the child in various ways such as forming positive peer relationships, resulting in less negative behaviour (Kawabata et al., 2011; Ireland and Power, 2004; Bretherton, 1992). If there is a weak parent-child attachment and the child isn’t having their basic needs met by their parents, “what you find is they go out and they meet a group of youths, they could be younger than the youths and quite easily get exploited.”(P5, L41-42) Kandal and Andrews (1987 cited in Barnes and Farrell, 1992) found that the level of closeness between parent and child can have an effect on whether the child is involved in criminality as it impacts on the child’s choice of peers: The child is having their basic needs met by these peers such as love, affection, belonging, which they aren’t getting at home, that’s often why they start offending. (P5, L43-45). One participant explained; “I’ve sat in meetings in the prison of young people who have been in gangs and they’ve actually valued the gang more than their family, more than their parents”(P5, L50-52). This suggests that a weak relationship between parent and child could result in the child withdrawing themselves and relying on peers, which could ultimately lead them into criminality (Barnes and Farrell, 1992).

Role Models within the family

“Having a positive role model can definitely have an effect; stop them from turning to crime” (P5, L162). The majority of participants stressed the importance of a child having a positive role model in their life. The definition of a role model is; ‘A person looked to by others as an example to be imitated’ (Oxford Dictionaries, no date: Online). When asked about role models, the majority of participants began to mention the positive effects of extended family “it’s quite often a nan or a grandad who’s a positive role model” (P5, L159-160). The lack of positive role models within the home raises concern and could be seen as a motive from criminal behaviour due to the lack of positive influences from parents.

“..a lot of them are young males, and for a lot of them their father figure is missing, so there’s not been any male role model” (P3, L201-202).

From the results gained, the lack of a male role model appears to be seen by the participants as a factor that effects criminal behaviour in males; “.. a lot of the lads we work with would definitely benefit from having a male role model, a positive male role model within their lives”(P4, L164-165). This suggests that the lack of a positive father figure could have an impact on whether a child turns to crime. However, research has suggested that the lack of a father figure within the family does not have a significant impact on childhood delinquency (Farrington, 2007). Thus, adolescent males whose fathers are involved in crime were more likely to have criminal tendencies than those whose fathers were not involved in crime (Farrington, 2011). This proves that although an absent father figure is not seen as a significant factor in why children turn to crime, a father figure who is a negative role model can have a significant impact: Dad has a

criminal background, unfortunately, because dad tells him he's been in trouble with the police, he now wants to be like his dad and at the age of 10 he's pretty much following in his dad's footsteps (P6, L84-89).

Theme 3: Boundaries

The importance of implementing boundaries was a reoccurring theme throughout all of the interviews, with clear reinforced boundaries being seen as a protective factor against criminal behaviour. The significance of early boundary setting was also emphasised:

“Early intervention.. getting those boundaries in place from an early age and getting the appropriate boundaries in as they get older.”(P2, L250-251)

This signifies the importance of boundary setting, not just within the early years but throughout childhood. Boundary setting as a theme refers to the guidelines implemented by parents to teach a child what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour (Childalbert, 2015). The two sub-themes relate to the importance of boundaries being reinforced by parents and also the experiences participants had of the reward and consequence systems implemented by parents.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement refers to the implementation and consistency of boundary setting within the home. There appeared to be a mutual agreement throughout all the interviews that “there are boundaries put in place... it's the parents implementing those boundaries that is the problem” (P2, L74-75). Researchers have found that a lack of rule setting and inconsistent discipline are directly associated with delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009). Another problem appears to be the lack of reinforcement of consequences once the boundaries have been implemented; “..they do put in boundaries but they are very lapse with them. They give and they break the boundaries, it's ok if that child breaks them because there is no consequences.”(P1, L82-83). One issue with inconsistent consequences is;

“..there's a lot of rules and boundaries out in the community, but they have to start in the home for the children to understand, to mature and to follow rules and boundaries..”(P6, L52-53).

This emphasises the need for consistency within the home in implementing rules and boundaries and following through with consequences for the child to understand and follow the rules set out in the community. If a child is used to breaking the rules set out at home and getting away with it, they are likely to convey that into the community which could result in the consequence being a criminal record. This is supported by Hirschi (1969 cited in Wiatrowski et al., 1981) who claims that those people who do not feel bound by rules are more likely to go and break them.

Rewards and Consequences

Baumrind (1991 cited in Wright and Cullen, 2001) believed the most effective parents conveyed clear standards surrounding their children's conduct, which included disciplining their child in a supportive manner rather than erratic punishment. The experiences the participants described regarding the rewards and punishments the

children receive who they work with were quite the opposite. “I have seen parents who struggle so much as pat their child on their back as praise, they just see the constant negative in their child” (P6, 121-122). Participants explained how some parents reward their children when it’s not necessary to avoid conflict and have an ‘easy life’. On the other hand, some parents show constant negativity towards their child, with the child receiving little to no rewards or praise.

“..some parents will give rewards too easily and perhaps give rewards when it’s not due” (P3, L158-159).

Rewarding the child when they have done something wrong or when it is not due is positively reinforcing negative behaviours, which will result in the child carrying on displaying those behaviours in the hope to receive another reward. This also suggests to the child that the negative behaviours they are displaying are acceptable, causing confusion for the child when they receive a punishment for it elsewhere. This may be because “parents are tired through the fighting and the battling with the young offender so they tend to give it up for a quiet life but don’t realise the quiet life comes back and bites them later on” (P6, L149-151). On the other hand;

“..we’ve got parents who are negative all the time towards the young people and that has a really big effect on the young person” (P5, L139-140).

This becomes an issue as parents “can’t see past the offending behaviour to look for the positives in the child” (P6, L240). Also, some parents may implement consequences that are absolutely extreme, but they don’t realise what they’re doing is wrong (P2, 280-281). Parenting behaviours like this cause major issues for the child, not just in terms of the child committing criminal offences but potentially on their well-being. In terms of criminal offences, constant negativity and holding grudges can cause the child to ‘give up’ and think “..‘ah well I can’t do anything right so I might as well go the whole hog” (P6, L246-247), resulting in either initially committing an offence or re-offending. Again, parenting skills was highlighted as an issue and the lack of knowledge of how to deliver effective rewards and punishments. The parents also appear to lack the ability to take their time to think of an effective consequence that will work, or look for a different strategy if their initial idea was not successful (P6, L141-141; P2, L131-132).

Discussion

Overall, the research question was explored in great detail, generating themes that supported the research previously discussed in the introduction. The use of specialists as an alternative to interviewing parents and children, allowed for a greater depth of information that was deemed to be less biased. It was interesting to see that the information gained from the participants was very similar to previous research in terms of effective parenting styles and the patterns of behaviours most commonly displayed by parents whose children offend.

The main themes discussed and participants thoughts surrounding effective parenting styles and behaviours were in support of previous literature. Participants beliefs surrounding effective parenting behaviours reflected the authoritative parenting style created by Diana Baumrind (1991) suggesting warmth, parental interest, clear control and support were protective factors against childhood delinquency (Kawabata et al., 2011; Hoeve et al., 2011; Simons and Conger, 2007; Baumrind 1991; Barnes et al.,

1992). Furthermore, the most common parenting behaviours discussed displayed by parents whose children commit crime reflect the other proposed parenting styles; authoritarian, permissive and neglect. Although research suggested that neglectful parenting styles were the highest predictors of delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2011), the majority of participants were in agreement that only a small proportion of the parents they worked with were neglectful, the majority appeared to fall under the authoritarian or permissive category of parenting. Participants also supported findings made by Steinburg (2001) that the strength of the relationship between parent and child can have an effect on a child's choice of peers.

One limitation of the research was participants were not able to witness a large proportion of behaviours that were present within the home. As a result, the information was limited when discussing some topic areas. Another limitation was the small sample size used, as data was only collated from six participants, it is very unlikely that the sample was representative of a larger population meaning it lacked generalisability.

A common theme throughout the interviews was the lack of funding and the need for more marketing and accessibility of the interventions available to aid and support parents. It was clear that a lot of parents do need help and would hugely benefit from early interventions, such as being taught the basic parenting skills. This simple intervention could potentially prevent children turning to crime and ultimately improve the parent-child bond. However, The Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) implements punishment rather than support and interventions for parents (Arthur, 2005): It is clear that parents lack skills and knowledge about effective parenting, suggesting that punishment alone may be deemed as an ineffective approach to take.

In conclusion, this research has supported previous literature which highlights parenting behaviours as playing an important role in whether or not a child turns to crime. This suggests that more research is needed into the interventions used to aid parents. Furthermore, the anti-social behavioural act (2003) and its approach to dealing with parents, in my opinion needs to be revisited.

Reflexive analysis

I chose this area of research as I have always been intrigued by why children turn to crime. I currently volunteer for Manchester Youth Offending service and this was one of the main reasons I decided to focus on parenting styles. From my own experiences I noticed a trend in the parenting behaviours of those I came into contact with. I was however conscious of inputting my own experiences during the interviews as I realised this could potentially result in leading questions which would jeopardize the answers given. Although I found some areas of the research difficult I thoroughly enjoyed the journey as I gained an insight into the experiences of specialists who work within the field. The interviews gave me an alternative view on the hardships that some parents may face when trying to raise a child who offends and how not all parents they work with are 'bad parents'.

Luckily, I didn't encounter too many problems throughout the process. I was fortunate enough to be granted confirmation to interview six participants from the local youth offending service and similar agencies who were keen to participate in my research and gave in-depth answers and examples of personal experiences to the questions asked.

I am extremely passionate about this area of research as I believe no child is born 'bad'. I believe childhood delinquency is still a big issue and the way to tackle it is to put early interventions in place to 'nip it in the bud' before it escalates. A personal reflexive account has been attached (appendix 9).

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