

CHILDREN, RISK AND CRIME: EARLY INTERVENTIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE 'AT RISK'

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Children, Risk and Crime: the On Track Youth Lifestyles Surveys

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Introduction

The On Track Youth Lifestyles Surveys were undertaken as part of the National Evaluation of the On Track multiple intervention program in the UK. On Track is an evidence-based preventative program targeted at 4-12 year olds and their families in 24 high deprivation, high crime areas within England and Wales. It aims to reduce children's risk of offending and involvement in antisocial behaviour and crime. The Youth Lifestyles Surveys collected self-report data around the four domains of: family, schools, community and individual/peer factors from over 3000 primary and secondary school pupils who were likely to come from On Track areas. The surveys allowed for the collection of baseline data about risk factors, protective factors and self-reported involvement in problem behaviours of children living in the On Track areas. In this paper I will present some of the findings from the Youth Lifestyles Surveys and place them in the context of recent research on the identification of risk and protective factors and their role in relation to future offending behaviour. I will consider some of the implications of the findings from our survey but in doing so I will also draw attention to criticisms of the assumptions underpinning the risk factor

paradigm and how these assumptions may themselves play a part in the construction of a fear of crime and the management of 'dangerousness'.

Crime and its Remedies

Hazel Blears, the UK's Minister of State for Crime Reduction recently argued that "Studies can predict with uncanny foresight which children are predisposed to a life of villainy" (The Independent, 2004).

On the basis of this evidence Ms Blears went on to argue that "I don't think it's stigmatising those children by targeting them ... You can intervene at an early age and say ... Let's put the support in as early as we can" (ibid.).

In these two arguments Ms Blears succinctly spells out the policy of the British government on crime reduction through early interventions and the assumption upon which it is based. The assumption is one that has wide support in the research literature on risk assessment and early interventions. Researchers in a number of countries, but particularly in the USA and the UK, have brought together a substantial body of evidence from longitudinal studies which suggests an important relationship between family, school, community and individual/peer group risk factors on the one hand and future offending behaviours on the other. Studies have not always identified the same factors; indeed, a very large number have been implicated in one way or another. On the other hand, there is some consensus among researchers about which ones are most commonly found in the life histories of offenders. Professor David Farrington (1996), for instance, has argued that some combination or other of nine factors can be identified as arising most commonly.

- Prenatal and perinatal factors (early childbearing increasing the risks of such undesirable outcomes for children as low school attainment, antisocial behaviour, substance use and early sexual activity)
- Personality factors (including impulsiveness, hyperactivity, restlessness and limited ability to concentrate which are all associated with low attainment in school and poor ability to foresee the consequences of offending)
- Intelligence and attainment (one argument put forward about the link between low intelligence and crime is its association with a poor ability

- to manipulate abstract concepts and to appreciate the feelings of victims)
- Parental supervision and discipline (harsh or erratic parental discipline and cold or rejecting parental attitudes have been linked to delinquency)
 - Parental conflict and separation (However, it may not be a 'broken home' that creates an increased risk of offending so much as the parental conflict that lead to the separation)
 - Socio-economic status (social and economic deprivation are important predictors of antisocial behaviour and crime)
 - Delinquent friends (delinquents tend to have delinquent friends and breaking up with delinquent friends often coincides with desisting from crime)
 - School influences (the prevalence of offending by pupils varies widely between secondary schools, but it is not clear how far schools themselves can have an effect upon delinquency; for example, by paying insufficient attention to bullying or providing too much punishment and too little praise)
 - Community influences (the risks of becoming criminally involved are higher for young people raised in disorganised inner city areas, characterised by physical deterioration over-crowded households, publicly-subsidised renting and high residential mobility. Yet it is not clear whether this is due to a direct influence on children, or whether environmental stress causes family adversity which in turn causes delinquency.

A complicating factor in much of this research on risk factors is that there does not appear to be one factor that stands out as very significantly more important than others, nor any strong evidence that risk factors in the singular impact significantly upon future offending. Risk factors appear to frequently coincide in the antecedents of offenders which suggest an impact that is interrational. For example, adolescents living in physically deteriorated and socially disorganised neighbourhoods tend, disproportionately, to come from families with poor parental supervision and erratic discipline, and to display a high level of impulsiveness and be of low intelligence (accepting for the moment some assumptions about what these terms mean!).

Risk factor research has come to have a major influence over government policy on crime reduction in the UK in recent years. As Ms Bleas argues in the quotations reported earlier, if there is good evidence of what factors are significant in the formation of antisocial and/or criminal behaviours and that population most at risk can be identified, it then makes some sense to target these individuals or, perhaps more neutrally, those factors, at an early stage before their influence becomes intractable.

The On Track Program: Policy and Methodology

The On Track early intervention program was designed to do just this. The assumptions of the program are quite simple:

- That risk factors are likely to play a significant role in the formation of antisocial and offending behaviour
- Where risk factors play a role in future offending this is likely to occur where there are a number of factors operating upon an individual
- Interventions need to address that range of risk factors that are implicated in future offending behaviour, therefore multiple intervention programs are more likely to lead to positive outcomes than individual interventions.
- We know that risk factors occur in four domains of the child's experience (family, school, community, peer group/individual) but our knowledge of which interventions and which combination of interventions are most likely to be successful is not well developed, therefore the design of the program should be experimental, allowing different interventions, combinations and strategies to be evaluated for their effectiveness.
- Procedures for identifying individuals with high risk factors and for targeting interventions accurately are also a long way from an exact science, therefore the target population for the On Track program was drawn from fairly small high crime, high social deprivation areas to increase the likelihood of the effectiveness of any individually targeted or universal intervention strategy.

The On Track Youth Lifestyles Surveys

The On Track Youth Lifestyles Surveys formed one element of a broader evaluation of the On Track program undertaken from a team at the University of Sheffield led by Alan France, Jean Hine and myself. In this respect the intention of the surveys was to provide some base-line data on offending in the On Track areas from a self-report study which would be repeated at intervals throughout the program's intended 7 year lifespan. However, the surveys also gave us an opportunity to explore some aspects of the risk factor model itself, both in terms of its efficacy and in terms of its underpinning assumptions.

The two surveys (primary and secondary) were completed by approximately 30,000 children. The secondary school survey, which will provide the focus for the remainder of the discussion in this paper, was based upon a previously validated instrument used in the UK Communities That Care Project (CTC, 2002) that is itself based upon an earlier survey developed in the United States (Hawkins et al, 1992). The surveys took place between May and June 2001. Response rates were excellent with surveys returned from 29 out of 39 secondary schools (74%) and 6 out of 6 middle schools. Secondary pupils returned 18,184 valid responses out of a possible 21,000. There was no evidence from our validation procedures to suggest that schools with lower participation rates had different characteristics from those with higher participation rates, nor that lower participation rates affected the representativeness of the sample within these schools. The age of respondent secondary school ranged from eleven to sixteen but as there was a smaller number of year eleven respondents, after checking for significant variations between year ten and year eleven responses these age groups were combined for the purposes of reporting. The proportion of girls and boys in each age group were almost identical.

Children were invited to self identify their ethnicity. 73% identified as white which is a lower figure than in other similar surveys and may reflect the high levels of social deprivation in On Track areas.

Ethnicity by Secondary School Attendance

	%	N
White (UK or European)	71	12,854
White Irish	2	321
Black Caribbean	3	566
Black African	2	445
Black Other	1	146
Bangladeshi	2	274
Indian	4	722
Pakistani	6	1,124
Chinese	0.5	93
Mixed (White + Black Caribbean)	2	331
Mixed (White + Black African)	0.5	86
Mixed (White + Asian)	1	180
Missing or Other	6	1,042
Total		18,184

Throughout the survey significant differences were found between different ethnic groups. However, considerable caution needs to be used in interpreting these findings. The dangers of simplistic racist associations between problem behaviours and ethnicity might be obvious but it is also necessary to caution against an oversimplification of 'cultural differences' implying that problem behaviour is located in some kind of cultural deficit or abnormality. The reality is more complex and requires a fuller understanding of the social and historical contexts of individual and community identities as well as well as of the construction and articulation of identity in resistance to and in compliance with these contexts. Stereotyping through methodological oversimplification is a highly problematic but not inevitable consequence of survey research. However, the differences that such surveys illuminate may inform the development of more sophisticated approaches to the exploration of particular conundrums revealed by quantitative analysis.

Young People's Self-Reports of Problem Behaviour

The use of self-report techniques with young people in survey work has a well-established history. A number of recent surveys with young people have included these methods. As well as the Communities That Care (2002) *Youth at Risk?* Survey, other surveys have included the Youth Justice Board's *Youth Survey* (2001) and the Edinburgh *Study of Youth Transitions and Crime* (Smith et al, 2001). As with these surveys, extensive validation and quality assurance procedures have been undertaken to ensure, as far as is possible, the integrity of the data collected.

From the responses to the Secondary School Survey, nine main types of problem behaviour were identified. These fell into two broad categories. The first category is constituted by behaviours that may be defined as substance use and are characterised in particular by the effects of the behaviour upon the child himself or herself. These behaviours include use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. A second category of problem behaviour is characterised by more general anti-social impacts and includes stealing, receiving stolen property, attacking someone, carrying a knife and vandalism. In addition we looked at young people's self-reports of truancy and exclusion from school.

Alcohol use was common amongst all groups (61% overall) except children of Pakistani heritage (3%). As one might expect, there were important age differences with 75% of the year 10/11 children reporting drinking alcohol in the last four weeks, compared with 47% of year seven children. Smoking was less common overall but more common among girls (19%) than boys (12%). While only 7% of children in the first year of secondary school reported smoking, this figure increased dramatically to 20% by year nine and was still rising by years 10/11 (24%). Drug use was significantly higher among older children (24% of year 10/11) and children of mixed Black/White backgrounds (21%). There was little difference between boys (14%) and girls (12%). When broken down by ethnicity much more significant differences were found, with 21% of the mixed Black/white group reporting drug use compared with 3% of the Black African group.

Self-reports of stealing in the last 12 months dramatically increased with age (19% in year seven compared with 34% in year 10/11) Thirty nine per cent of the mixed Black/White group reported stealing in the last 12 months

compared to 12% of the Asian group. The percentage of 'looked after' children (42%) reporting stealing was almost double that reported by those living with two birth parents (23%). There was only a small difference between the proportion of boys (29%) reporting stealing compares with girls (25%).

Self reports pointed to less likelihood of children receiving stolen property than stealing which may indicated lesser involvement in more generalised criminal activity.

Fourteen per cent of this sample reported attacking someone with the intention of hurting them in the last 12 months. Boys (19%) were more than twice as likely as girls (8%) to say that they had attacked someone in the last 12 months. Reports of attacking someone increased with age and there were also differences between ethnic groups. A high proportion of 'looked after' children reported attacking someone (21%).

There were considerable differences between boys' (15%) and girls' (4%) self-reports of carrying a knife. The percentage of children carrying a knife to school doubles between year seven (6%) and year ten/eleven (12%). A much higher proportion of 'looked after' children (21%) reported carrying a knife to school than children in other family types.

Girls (32%) were as likely to commit acts of vandalism as boys (33%) and vandalism also increased considerably with age (from 20% of children in year seven to 40% in year 10/11).

Truancy and Exclusion from School

Truancy and exclusion from school have both been given a high profile in media representations of problem behaviour and hence have become of interest to policy makers. That there is a relationship between problems in school and later offending is something that has been long recognised in the research literature (Berridge et al. 2001; Flood-Page et al. 2000; Graham, 1988; Graham and Bowling, 1995), yet there remains some uncertainty upon the precise nature of these relationships. In particular, despite strong evidence of a relationship between school exclusion and later offending it is important to exercise caution in explaining this relationship. Exclusion from school, unlike truancy, or any of the other behaviours we have considered so

far, is not itself a behaviour of the child, it is rather a response by the school to what it perceives as problem behaviour. Schools vary significantly in their exclusion practices and, as is well known (Rutter, 1979), these practices are more likely to be influenced by factors to do with the school (its culture, organisation and leadership) than with the characteristics of individual pupils or differences between school catchment areas. Reports of school exclusion therefore are likely to tell us as much about schools and the national and local policy frameworks within which they operate as they do about the behaviour of individual children. This should, not however, diminish the significance of the relationship between school exclusion and future offending, it should perhaps rather focus our attention on the importance of enacting measures that ensure schools operate practices of inclusion and are able to provide effective support in school for even the most difficult of children.

The On Track surveys broadly replicated the findings of previous studies in respect of school exclusion. Boys (17%) were twice as likely to report having been excluded from school than girls (8%), and this distribution is consistent for each year of secondary schooling. Our figures do suggest that children in schools in the On Track areas are significantly at greater 'risk' of exclusion from school than the national average for the UK. Consistent with national figures a disproportionately large number of Black children in our sample reported exclusion from school compared to white children (20% compared to 12%). However, this figure was exceeded by children of white Irish heritage (26%) and by 'looked after' children (32%).

Although some overlap between truancy and school exclusion certainly exists, reports of truancy overwhelmingly exceeded reports of school exclusion, suggesting that only a small proportion of truants are displaying behaviour serious enough to lead to their exclusion from school. There was very little difference between secondary school girls (16%) and boys (18%) reporting truancy during the last four weeks. These figures are of course likely to be underestimates as a proportion of truants and excluded children will not have been in school at the time of the survey.

The extent of problem behaviour can be examined by considering combinations of the behaviours described above. As one might expect within

the overall population the analysis revealed a distribution that was skewed towards three or less problem behaviours.

Number of Problem Behaviours

Number of problem behaviours	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	2656	30%	2903	33%	5559	32%
One	2007	23%	2178	24%	4185	24%
2-3	2306	26%	2293	26%	4599	26%
4-6	1395	16%	1317	15%	2712	15%
7-9	445	5%	249	3%	694	4%
Total N	8809		8940		17749	

Gender differences were not particularly significant but age clearly was a factor with those reporting between four and nine problem behaviours increasing from 10% in year seven to 30% in year 10/11.

Frequency of problem behaviours by school year

Number of problem behaviours	Year 7		Year 8		Year 9		Year 10/11		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	2093	46%	1665	34%	1051	24%	695	18%	5504	31%
One	1160	25%	1173	24%	962	22%	879	24%	4174	24%
2-3	890	19%	1222	25%	1320	30%	1145	30%	4577	26%
4-6	389	9%	641	13%	817	19%	689	23%	2536	15%
7-9	65	1%	146	3%	216	5%	271	7%	698	4%
Total N	4597		4847		4366		3679		17489	

Building upon the work of Graham and Bowling (1995), problem behaviours reported in the survey were aggregated to form an overall measure of offending. Sub-components of this measure (property crime, violence and vandalism) were identified for the purposes of comparison, along with reports of receiving an initial caution, warning or court conviction.

Proportion of boys and girls reporting offending

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Offending	4450	55%	3973	49%	8423	52%
Property crime	3204	40%	2561	32%	5765	36%
Attacking someone	1537	19%	716	8%	2253	14%
Vandalism	2646	33%	2680	32%	5326	32%
Official caution, warning or court conviction	1365	17%	647	8%	2012	12%

Secondary school boys reported greater prevalence of offending than girls, though the most significant differences were between 'attacking someone' and between receiving an official caution, warning or court conviction. By contrast, the percentage of those reporting vandalism was almost identical between boys and girls.

Proportion of offending by school year

	Year 7		Year 8		Year 9		Year 10/11		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Offending	1576	39%	2209	49%	2403	59%	2212	61%	8400	52%
Property crime	1035	26%	1490	34%	1641	41%	1580	45%	5746	36%
Attacking someone	429	10%	580	13%	621	15%	621	17%	2251	14%
Vandalism	890	21%	1384	31%	1583	38%	1472	40%	5329	32%
Official caution, warning or court conviction	320	8%	499	11%	579	14%	617	17%	2051	12%

The trend towards increased prevalence with age was predictable but there is some evidence of this trend slowing down after year nine.

Children's Experiences of Risk and Protection

In this section of the paper I want to turn to our analysis of risk. The results of our factor analysis produced a model of risk and protection as shown in the following table:

On Track Risk and Protective Factors

	Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Family domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor parental supervision and discipline • Family conflict • Parental attitudes condoning of problem behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive relationship with parents • Family attachment
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of commitment to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for pro-social involvement in school • Positive feelings about school • High school expectations of behaviour
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community disorganisation and neglect • Lack of neighbourhood attachment • Easy availability of drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive relationships with adults
Individual/ Peer group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes condoning problem behaviour • Friends involved in problem behaviour • Individual conflictual attitudes • Victim of crime or bullying 	

Risk and protection were calculated as 'high', 'moderate', or 'low', depending on the distribution of responses on those questions comprising the relevant risk or protective factor.

The Family Domain

The overall levels of risk and protection in this domain as derived from young people's responses to the questionnaire are shown in the following table.

Levels of Risk and Protection in the Family domain

	Factor	Low	Moderate	High
Risk	Poor parental supervision and discipline	40%	49%	11%
	Family Conflict	52%	23%	25%
	Parental attitudes condoning problem behaviour	60%	34%	6%
Protection	Positive relationship with parents	5%	35%	60%
	Family attachment	2%	15%	83%

Levels of protection in the family are generally high. The factor with the highest level of risk is family conflict with just over a quarter of the responses indicating high risk on this category, though the other three risk factors in this domain had a relatively small number of children at high risk.

Family attachment decreases with age from 90% of year 7 pupils giving responses suggesting high protection to 76% of year 10/11. There is also a decrease in positive relationships with parents across school years (69% in year 7 to 51% in year 10/11). However, there is no corresponding increase in pupils reporting high risk on family conflict and this reflects the complexity of the relationship between risk and protective factors, where we see risk being quite constant but levels of protection have fallen.

The School Domain

In the School Domain the majority of children gave responses that suggest their schools have high expectations of behaviour, and almost two thirds of the children reported very positive feelings about school. A similar

proportion had opportunities for pro-social involvement in school. Boys demonstrate less commitment to school and therefore more risk than do girls (20% of boys fell into the high risk category compared to 15% of girls).

Commitment to school, perhaps unsurprisingly, decreases with age from 13% with little commitment (and therefore high risk) in year 7, to 20 % in year 10/11. Similar decreases were found respect of positive feelings about school and teachers (72% having high protection in year 7 decreasing to 58% in year 10/11); opportunities for pro-social involvement (72% high protection in year 7 to 52% in year 10/11); and a decrease in beliefs about school expectations of behaviour (fro 84% reporting high expectations in year 7 to 70% in year 10/11).

These lowering levels of protective factors across the school years are startling, especially as our evidence indicates that it is in the school domain that protective factors are most likely to come into play. The finding does suggest that schools should be examining these changes more closely to see how high levels of protection can be maintained.

Levels of risk and protection in the school domain

	Factor	Low	Moderate	High
Risk	Lack of commitment to school	42%	41%	17%
Protection	Opportunities for pro-social involvement	4%	35%	62%
	Positive feelings about school	6%	30%	64%
	High school expectations of behaviour	3%	20%	76%

The Community Domain

Levels of risk and protection in the community domain

	Factor	Low	Moderate	High
Risk	Community disorganisation and neglect	50%	23%	27%
	Lack of neighbourhood attachment	63%	19%	18%

	Easy availability of drugs	24%	46%	30%
Protection	Positive relationship with adults	32%	20%	48%

The community domain relates to the neighbourhood where the child lives and his/her views about it.

- Most children are relatively positive in responses relating to attachment to their neighbourhood, with almost two-thirds having little or no risk and thus high attachment.
- Just 18% of the children gave responses that indicate lack of attachment sufficient to be classified as high risk. This is despite a quite negative picture of their neighbourhoods apparent from other risk factors.
- One-half of the children in the survey indicated some community disorganisation and neglect. This relates to abandoned buildings, fights and crime, and feeling unsafe after dark.
- Three-quarters of the children reported that drugs were moderately or very easily available in their neighbourhoods.
- Although one protective factor did feature in this domain this revealed the lowest levels of protection of any of the 6 protective factors included in this analysis.

The Individual/ Peer Domain

The individual/peer domain contains 4 risk factors and no protective factors. It relates to questions about the child's attitudes and his/her reports of friends' activities and also information on victimisation.

Levels of risk and protection in the individual/peer domain

	Factor	Low	Moderate	High
Risk	Attitudes condoning problem behaviour	42%	37%	21%
	Individual conflictual attitudes	34%	52%	14%
	Friends involved in problem behaviour	24%	37%	38%
	Victims of crime or bullying	39%	43%	18%

About a fifth of the children in the survey presented as having high risk in terms of their accepting attitudes toward problem behaviour. However, although a high proportion of children are assessed as having some conflictual attitudes, a relatively low proportion (14%) fall into the high risk category. The majority (three-quarters) report having friends who are involved in problem behaviour and a very high proportion (38%) are assessed as being at high risk on this factor.

Victimisation is not a factor in traditional pictures of risk and protection but there is emerging evidence of a link between victimisation and offending. Our results reveal that levels of recent victimisation among secondary school children are very high (almost a fifth reporting multiple victimisation at a severity to put them into the high risk category).

Although there were no significant differences between boys and girls in our sample there were, perhaps predictable, differences across school years. For example, in year seven just 9% presented attitudes condoning of problem behaviour but by year 10/11 this figure had risen to 34%. There were also significant differences between different ethnic groups. For instance, the highest levels of risk on attitudes condoning problem behaviour are found among children of White Irish and mixed White and Black Caribbean background (63%) and White UK (62%). The lowest levels of risk on this factor are among Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and Black African groups with 33%, 37%, 45% and 41% respectively.

Overall, 75% of children reported having friends with involvement in problem behaviour, with boys more likely to fall into this category and to be at high risk (43% compared with girls 34%). Again the risk increases significantly for all children over school years (23% to 52%). Similar differences between ethnic groups were apparent on this factor as on other factors in this domain.

Risk, Protection and Offending Behaviours

There are many statistically significant correlations between risk and protection factors and offending behaviours but by using multivariate logistic regression analysis it is possible to assess which factors are most important to different types of offending. (Logistic regression constructs

statistical models from the data that calculate the odds of an individual in the offending group having each characteristic. If the odds of an event are greater than one, the event is more likely to happen than not; if the odds are less than one the event is likely to happen than happen). (In the results that are presented here only those odds ratios that make a statistically significant contribution to the regression model at $p < 0.01$ and have a 95% confidence interval of less than 30% of the value of odds ratio have been included).

Overall Offending

We initially looked at all types of offending and compared those who reported being involved in at least one type of offence in the last year with those children who reported they had not been involved in any type of offending. (This former group comprised 52% of our overall sample). The analysis was also undertaken to look at multiple offending.

Interestingly none of the protective factors contribute to the model at all. They neither reduce nor increase the likelihood of offending. The factors which contribute to an increased likelihood of offending and of multiple offending are:

- Parental supervision
- Sibling with problem behaviour
- Parental attitudes
- Community neglect
- Availability of drugs
- Attitudes condoning problem behaviour
- Friends involved in problem behaviour
- Conflictual attitudes
- Victimization

Three other problem behaviours come through as contributing to offending: smoking; drinking; and particularly using drugs.

The risk domain that most strongly contributes to the likelihood of offending and of multiple offending is the individual/peer domain, with all four risk factors making an independent contribution. The strongest

contributor is friends' involvement in problem behaviour, with children who are assessed as having high risk on this factor having odds four times greater than those with low risk of being involved in some form of offending, and almost 6 times the odds of reporting multiple types of offending. This suggests that the social aspects of offending are important to many children and should not be underestimated in approaches to reduce offending.

Consistent with other work emerging in this area, high risk on victimisation is also a contributory factor. This confirms the view that victims and offenders are not distinct and separate groups.

Overall, the results suggest a group of children with problematic attitudes who have friends involved in problem behaviour and who are offending themselves. Proximity to an offending community and engagement in criminal activities would also seem to place young people at greater risk of being a victim of those same activities.

Odds ratio of factors related to offending in general

Contributory Variable	Any offending in last 12 months	More than one type of offending in last 12 months
Number with behaviour	8583	4423
Gender = male	1.4	1.8
School year = 10/11	0.7	-
Family = single parent	-	1.5
Parental supervision risk high	1.5	1.4
Sibling problem risk moderate	1.4	-
Sibling problem risk high	-	1.9
Parental attitudes risk high	1.7	1.6
Community neglect risk high	-	1.3
Availability of drugs risk high	1.9	2.0
Attitudes condoning	2.1	2.2

problem behaviour (high)		
Friends' involvement problems risk high	4.2	5.8
Conflictual attitudes risk high	3.5	4.4
Victimisation risk high	1.9	2.7
Is a current smoker	1.4	1.4
Has consumed alcohol 1-2 times in last 4 weeks	1.3	1.8
Has used drugs in last 4 weeks	2.4	2.2

Property and Violent Offending

The following table looks at differences between different types of offences: property offences; vandalism; carrying a knife; and, attacking someone.

Vandalism is the only offence where gender does not make a significant difference, suggesting that this offence is equally likely to be carried out by boys and by girls. The factor making the greatest contribution in respect of vandalism is high risk in friends' involvement in problem behaviour. This suggests that vandalism may often be a social activity but there is evidence that it is something children are less likely to be involved in as they get older.

The risk factor that makes the biggest contribution to attacking someone is holding personal attitudes that are conflictual, one of which is a belief that it is all right to beat someone up if they start the fight. Those at high risk on this factor have odds more than four times greater that they have attacked someone in the last year than those at low risk on this item.

The least common kind of criminal activity is carrying a knife to school, reported by only 10% of children. This is definitely a male activity H boys having odds 5 times greater than girls of reporting this kind of behaviour. It is also the behaviour where victimisation makes its highest

contribution, suggesting some link between being a victim of bullying or crime and carrying a knife to school, maybe as a form of self-defence.

Odds ratios of factors related to property and violent offending

Contributory Variable	Any offending in last 12 months	Vandalism	Carried a knife	Attacked someone
Number with behaviour	5874	5427	1610	2315
Gender = male	1.6		4.8	2.4
Ethnicity = white				0.6
School year = 8		1.4		
School year = 9	0.8			
Family = single parent	1.3			
Parental supervision risk high	1.6			
Sibling problem risk high	2.0	1.9	1.6	1.6
Parental attitudes risk high		1.5	1.7	1.7
Community neglect risk high		1.2		1.5
Availability of drugs risk high	1.6	2.0		
Attitudes condoning problem behaviour (high)	1.5	2.0	2.1	1.7
Friends' involvement problems risk high	4.0	3.9		2.2
Conflictual attitudes risk high	3.1	2.8		4.6

Victimisation risk high	2.2	1.2	2.5	2.3
Is a current smoker	1.5			
Has used drugs in last 4 weeks	2.3	2.0	2.0	1.7
Has played truant in the last 4 weeks				1.6
Positive relation with adults high protection			1.5	

Types of Property Offence

If we look in detail at the factors related to different types of property offending we see some substantial differences emerging here too, suggesting that not all property offending can be treated or prevented in the same way.

The only factor contributing to all types of property offending is drug use in the last 4 weeks, although even here there are differences with the greatest impact being on theft of a car, theft from a car and mobile phone theft. It makes less of an impact on other offences which is possibly interesting given that burglary is often linked to the funding of drug use.

Shoplifting is the most commonly reported type of property offence in this survey, being committed equally by girls and boys. All the risk factors in the individual/peer domain contribute to involvement in shoplifting, with friends involvement in problem behaviour making the most substantial impact (4 times greater for those with high risk on this factor than for those with low risk). This might suggest that shoplifting is a social offence, whereas the offences where this factor does not contribute (theft of a car, theft from a car and mobile phone theft) are more likely to be individual offences. However, further research is needed to clarify this issue.

By way of contrast with shoplifting, burglary is very much a minority offence, with just 3% of the children in this survey reporting that they had

broken into a house with the intention of stealing something.. This might suggest that only a few factors would be significant but in fact the evidence suggest a combination of high risk factors. All four of the factors in the individual/peer group domain feature, each increasing the odds of involvement in burglary by around a factor of a three.

Odds ratios of factors related to different types of property offending

Contributory Variable	Shoplifting	Theft of car	Theft from car	Mobile phone theft	Burglary	Receiving stolen goods
Number with behaviour	4031	900	921	945	625	3512
Gender = male		6.6	4.0	3.3	1.6	1.8
Ethnicity = white				0.5		
Ethnicity = Indian						1.7
School year = 9					0.6	
School year = 10/11					0.5	
Family = single parent						1.4
Family = both parents	0.8					
Parental supervision risk high	1.6				1.7	1.7
Family conflict risk high	1.5					
Sibling problem risk high						1.6
Parental attitudes risk				2.0		1.5

high						
Community neglect risk high		1.8		1.7		1.3
Availability of drugs risk high					1.5	2.4
Pro-social attitudes risk high	1.4				1.7	1.7
Friends' involvement problems risk high	4.2				2.8	3.5
Conflictual attitudes risk high	2.6				3.2	3.1
Victimisation risk high	1.6				2.9	2.4
Is a current smoker	1.5	1.7			1.4	
Has used drugs in last 4 weeks	2.0	3.3	2.4	2.6	1.9	1.9
Truanted in the last 4 weeks		2.0	1.7	2.1		
Persistent or recent truant					1.8	
Binge drinking in last 4 weeks	1.4				1.4	

Summary

The detailed analysis of the contribution of risk and protection factors to different types of offending reveals that offending is not a homogeneous activity. Protective factors have not emerged from the analysis as making a significant contribution to less offending, although their development and

measurement is still very much in its infancy and it may be that the operationalisation of these concepts in the survey, or indeed their cut-off points, need to be reviewed.

However, the analysis has confirmed the importance of risk factors, highlighting that different risk factors come into play for different types of offending

The Management of Risk or the Construction of Normality?

The findings of the On Track Youth Lifestyles surveys provide insights into the relationship between young people and risk that may valuably be incorporated into early intervention crime reduction programs. Yet the results also illustrate the complexity of the relationships involved and this does present challenges to policy makers and practitioners concerned with program design. Although approximately half of the children taking part in the survey (52%) admitted to some sort of offending, the linear regression model for offending suggests a group of young people who have some flirtation with crime in their early years at secondary school, but who then desist as they get older. There is also strong evidence from our analysis that type of offending is influenced by different factors in different domains which suggests not only that there are differences between social and non-social offending but also that both the type of intervention and the targeting of interventions are of considerable importance. However, targeting interventions towards those most at risk of longer term involvement in particular forms of offending is far from a precise science. Applied more indiscriminately, intervention programs do run the risk of stigmatising young people, and perhaps inadvertently, through secondary deviance, reinforcing those behaviours they are intended to counteract.

In this respect the social context in which crime, and particularly youth crime, is understood to be a problem is significant. In thinking through the development of early intervention strategies, it is useful to consider that there is good evidence that youth crime, despite common-place misperceptions, has declined over the last decade.

The policy context of crime reduction therefore is not unimportant. It is of interest that the use of custodial measures against children has during the

same period seen a dramatic increase, leading one commentator to observe how the policy agenda around youth crime has come to be characterised by

'conditions of 'moral panic' within which policy and practice has been refocused upon punishment, retribution and the wholesale incarceration of children.

Goldson, 1997:79

The appeal of early intervention programs perhaps needs to be tempered by the possibility that such programs offer a simplistic (perhaps oversimplistic) crime management system based upon a tenuous assumption that youth crime is an outcome of dysfunctional individuals, schools and communities and that the technology (i.e. risk factor assessment) exists by which experts can identify those most at risk before they begin offending. Nikolas Rose has described this process as one in which "The soul of the young person has become the object of government through expertise". It is also the case that risk factor based early intervention programs emphasise crime reduction as a science of the personal, a science decontextualised of any analysis or theorisation of the underlying social order. Or to put it another way, the notion of 'risk' supports an anti-welfare rhetoric that legitimizes the redistribution of social resources into a privatised world of individual responsibility and risk management. It adopts a language that "replaces need as the core principle of social policy formation and welfare delivery" (Kemshall, 2002:1).

Nonetheless, with these cautions in mind the evidence from the On Track Youth Lifestyles Surveys does suggest support for a multi-intervention approach, targeting a range of factors in different domains of the child's experience but it also strongly points to the importance of understanding and sympathetically engaging broader issues to do with the social context within which risk factors and protective factors, are not only constructed but have meaning in the lives of children and young people.