Beyond individual trauma: towards a multi-faceted trauma-informed restorative approach to youth justice that connects individual trauma with family reparation and recognition of bias and discrimination.

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Abstract

This article outlines findings from surveys and interviews with young people and their parents/caregivers in a Youth Offending Service (YOS) in London. The YOS worked to a model of three elements, these being: trauma-informed practice; restorative justice; awareness of unconscious bias. The article presents a literature review that explores these key elements of the YOS model before presenting the findings that emerge from the data. We found the trauma-recovery approach builds resilience, hope for the future, and a positive sense of self-identity in young people. Within this, restorative practice between young people and parents was identified as a unique and impactful form of the trauma-recovery process. Awareness of bias and a non-judgemental approach also appeared to impact positively on young people, with some limitations. Integrating restorative practice and awareness of unconscious bias into the trauma-informed approach built a unique multi-faceted approach to trauma-informed care that took account of individual, family and institutional trauma. This integrated approach makes possible trauma-informed restorative practices centred on reparation of harm done to young people, including by the professionals and institutions that should protect them. We argue that truly restorative trauma-informed youth justice interventions need a combined focus on the individual and systemic traumas experienced by young people in order to recognise how their lives are impacted not just by individual or family problems but by broader issues of structural inequality.

Key words: youth offending, youth justice, trauma-informed practice, restorative justice, unconscious bias, inequality.

Introduction

This article presents findings from a case study of a Youth Offending Service (YOS) in London. The YOS have structured their service around recognising the impact of young people's experiences, particularly past trauma, on their offending behaviour and on their wider lives and relationships. They have incorporated into their trauma-informed approach a form of restorative practice that has centred on young people's relationship with their families, particularly with parents/caregivers, to support reparation of harm in these relationships from both sides. They have also integrated into their approach the provision of unconscious bias training for all YOS staff and the recognition of the impact of bias on their practice with young people. Beyond this, they are building an organisational culture that recognises the impact of bias and inequality on young people's lives and the need for trauma-informed restorative practice to address the harm caused by institutional prejudice. Our

research explored how the overall approach brought these three elements together to support young people's trauma recovery, taking account of individual, family and systemic trauma.

This article, first, presents a literature review exploring the three elements of the YOS approach. It then presents the research data which found that the trauma-informed approach builds resilience, aspirations, and positive identities in young people. Further, restorative practice with young people and parents appears to be a unique and impactful form of restorative justice that supports trauma-recovery. Awareness of bias and a non-judgemental approach also had positive impacts. We argue that by incorporating restorative practice with families and recognition of young people's experiences of inequality and discrimination into a trauma-informed approach, a model can be created that recognises how individual, family and structural issues intersect in young people's experiences prior to offending. The integrated trauma informed approach makes possible restorative practices that centre on harm done to (and not just by) young people. Within this, the recognition of how bias and discrimination impacts on young people allows for a focus on reparation of harm between young people and the professionals and institutions that have enacted such bias against them.

Trauma-informed practice

Over the last decade, a predominant focus on punitive rather than supportive interventions in youth justice has been increasingly questioned, paving the way for new models to emerge that recognise young people's support needs (Case and Haines, 2015). A review of case files in youth offending services conducted by HMI Probation (2017) found 81% of the young people had experienced trauma in their lives. A key recommendation of the review was national incorporation of the trauma-informed approach into YOS practice. While this approach is relatively new, there is evidence to suggest that interrupting the influence of trauma and enabling young offenders to access recovery and healthy coping methods can lead to greater levels of engagement with interventions and a reduction in re-offending (Levenson & Willis, 2019).

The four fundamental approaches to trauma-informed practice are to *realise* the impact of trauma; *recognise* and *respond to* generalised and individual presentations of trauma; and *resist* (re)traumatisation with the goal of supporting service-users to access potential avenues of recovery (SAMHSA, 2014). SAMHSA suggests the trauma-informed approach works best when the following key principles are embedded in policies, practices, values, and environments of a service : safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support opportunities; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice and choice; cultural, historical and gender issues.

Trauma can arise from a vast array of experiences including: physical, emotional and sexual abuse; neglect; bereavement; living in a violent environment and/or witnessing violence; proximity to addiction, mental illness and generational trauma; separation or estrangement from family; socioeconomic hardship and repeated exposure to prejudice and discrimination (Brennan et al, 2019). As such, this encompasses structural discrimination as one aspect of trauma alongside individual and family issues.

The trauma-informed approach offers alternative perspectives for supporting young offenders. For example, children and young people struggling with the effects of trauma may be caught in 'survival mode' and find it very difficult to process and understand their own and other people's emotions. They may struggle to conceptualise and understand the gravity of their actions.

As such, traditional development interventions for young offenders, such as victim-centred restorative justice, are unlikely to produce positive outcomes without first establishing a trauma-recovery process that can support young people to reach the cognitive threshold necessary for empathetic, introspective and consequential thinking (Skuse & Matthew, 2015).

Restorative justice

Literature on the use of approaches such as mediation and restorative justice in youth offending services has suggested that drawing on young people's empathy for others may be an effective alternative to focusing on punitive measures (Walklate, 1998). However, the use of restorative approaches in youth justice has also been critiqued for placing the needs of the victim rather than those of the young person at the centre of the intervention, with its critics arguing that the needs and vulnerabilities of the child should remain paramount (Case & Haines, 2015). Different approaches to restorative justice place differing levels of emphasis on the victim and offender and more 'balanced' models have been articulated (Cunneen & Goldson, 2015). The origins of restorative justice were more in line with these balanced models (particularly among indigenous groups in Australia, New Zealand and the Americas). However, contemporary restorative justice models have shifted far from these ideals and are predominantly more punitive interpretations (Cunneen & Goldson, 2015). Arguably, taking a trauma-informed approach to youth justice should shift the focus of restorative practice from harm done *by* young people towards a renewed focus on the need for reparation of the harm done *to* young people.

The broader research literature suggests youth crime interventions should be relational, long-term and supportive (Creaney, 2014). However, within such research, consideration of the importance of relational work does not tend to move beyond the professional-young person dynamic, to consider young people and others in their lives, particularly their families. Yet, relationships with families and communities are crucial considerations when considering a restorative approach to youth justice. Recent research has found that young people's motivations for engagement in crime can be impacted by family circumstances, particularly a desire to contribute or provide for their families, and that the impact of their offending on their families is a more powerful deterrent than a focus on penal consequences (Thompson, 2019).

This has arguably been under-considered in shaping restorative justice practice and a restorative approach to young people's family relationships may be more effective than a focus on reparation with victims. Research has suggested that young people can struggle to develop empathy for their victims, particularly where they cannot relate to them and are disconnected from their particular lives and experiences (Edwards, Adler & Gray, 2016). This has an impact on the effectiveness of typical restorative justice approaches that centre only on reparation with victims. A focus on family reparation that supports two-way communication complements a trauma-informed approach to youth justice that recognises the impact of adverse experiences in childhood. However, the broader social inequalities young people face also need consideration in shaping interventions (Corr, 2014).

Unconscious bias

A sole focus on individual trauma in youth justice risks framing young people's offending behaviour as an individual issue not impacted by their broader experiences. Therefore, a key element of well-

rounded trauma-informed practice is organisational awareness of, and action to address, bias and prejudice within service functioning and practice. Professional understanding of inherent power dynamics and identity-based experiences is fundamental to building trusting and healing relationships with service-users (SAMHSA, 2014). Studies have shown that repeated exposure to discrimination can result in heightened levels of traumatic stress in individuals (Alessi et al, 2013; Kang & Burton, 2014). Recognition of this is vital for youth justice in the context of persistent race and gender disparities within the justice system (YJB, 2018). Unconscious bias in youth justice practice and provision has been cited as one explanation for these disparities (Lammy, 2017; MacPherson, 1999).

Unconscious bias refers to deeply embedded prejudice that is invisible to the subjective mind (Payne & Gawronski, 2010). This prejudice can be comprised of stereotypes and beliefs pertaining to an individual or group. Research has shown that this prejudice can be activated without conscious control and can influence attitudes, decisions and actions (Phills, Hahn & Gawronski, 2020). Unconscious bias training has emerged to tackle this phenomenon. This training involves raising awareness of the presence and impact of this bias in the individual; and providing strategies to reduce this bias (EHRC, 2018). Critics of unconscious bias training argue that it does not guarantee a sustained reduction or elimination of bias and prejudice (Forscher et al, 2019). Rather, it can have greater impact when combined with long-term diversity training and initiatives that both place a greater emphasis on systemic discrimination and emphasise the responsibility of individuals within institutions as change-agents (Bezrukova et al, 2016).

Research methods

Context

The research was commissioned by the YOS. As such, our positionalities were impacted by our role as commissioned evaluators. We sought to hold ourselves accountable to our biases in this regard and to conduct a critical analysis of the service approach. The research sought to assess the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach which was integrated with restorative justice and unconscious bias awareness. The research obtained ethical approval via Goldsmiths, University of London.

The YOS is located in a diverse London borough. At the last census, 47% of the borough's population were from BAME groups, and the proportion is much higher among young people than the all-age population (ONS, 2012). The borough is in the top 20% most deprived local authorities nationally (MHCLG, 2015).

Methods

We originally planned to collect data from young people and families through interviews and focus groups with young people and parents/caregivers and a survey with young people. These plans were adapted somewhat due to initial challenges in gaining agreement from young people and parents to be interviewed, and later, the Covid-19 pandemic bringing face-to-face research to a halt. A small number of interviews took place with young people and parents/caregivers. Due to the initial challenges, we undertook regular visits to the YOS over a four-month period, to build connections with staff and potential interviewees and observe day-to-day interactions. We later implemented a

second survey for parents/caregivers, alongside the survey for young people. These mirrored each other through the use of similar questions, and provided a way to contact potential interviewees. Surveys contained a mix of closed and open questions about experiences of the YOS. Interviews used the survey questions as a stimulus into more open discussion. Recruiting participants to take part in surveys and interviews remained a challenge throughout the research, despite support from YOS staff and extending the data collection period. This article focuses primarily on the data from surveys and interviews, with some brief reference to observational data.

Sample

In total, 63 surveys were completed by 44 young people and 19 parents. Nine interviews took place with six young people and three parents/caregivers (who had also completed surveys). 81% of survey participants were from BAME backgrounds (n=51): 63% were Black (n=40); 13% were mixed/multiple ethnic groups (n=8); 5% were Asian (n=3). 9.5% were white (n=6) while 9.5% stated 'other' or 'prefer not to say' (n=6). 63% of survey participants were male (n=40), 35% were female (n=22), and 2% stated 'other' or 'prefer not to say' (n=1). In terms of religion, 39% identified as Christian (n=25), 37% as 'no religion' (n=23), 11% as Muslim (n=7), and 13% stated 'other' or 'prefer not to say' (n=8). Of the young people who took part, ten were aged 13-15 years and 34 were 16 and over. Over half of the young people who completed the survey had been with the YOS under six months and only one quarter had been involved for a year or more. Therefore, findings primarily reflect the experiences of young people who were early in the YOS process.

Analysis

Data gathered from the young people and their parents/caregivers was subject to thematic analysis through coding and identifying themes and sub-themes within survey responses and interview transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Coding was undertaken manually by the researchers who saturated themselves in the data through reading and re-reading transcripts and survey responses to identify themes within and across data-sets. Silverman (1993: 73) outlines how different signs relating to similar themes often exist within different narratives. These may not all be articulated in the same way, and the links may be subtle. In this case, for example, participants discussed issues of bias and discrimination without using these terms. The analysis was conducted with particular attention to the key elements of the YOS model, around which survey and interview schedules were designed. Therefore, the over-arching themes reflect the trauma-informed approach, and the emphases on restorative practice and unconscious bias:

- Working with trauma
- Restorative practice
- Unconscious bias awareness and practice

Findings within these main themes are analysed and presented through a range of sub-themes below.

Working with trauma

Staff at the YOS appeared dedicated to the trauma-informed approach. A sense of collaborative learning was observed, with staff regularly developing and sharing resources on 'working with trauma' within their respective teams. This sense of collaboration extended to a process described

by a YOS staff member as 'group reflective practice' where staff 'workshopped' cases together. This process was observed during a meeting in which a staff member expressed difficulties in progressing a young person's case. Members from several different teams present at this meeting explored this case in significant detail, offering unique insights and examining all aspects of personal history and experiences of trauma that may have been creating 'road-blocks' for the young person. The staff member who held the case was guided towards several different options which supported this young person's progression.

This deep integration of the trauma-informed approached was reflected in survey responses where 80% (n=35) of young people felt the YOS understood how their life experiences had affected them. In addition, 100% (n=44) of young people felt 'listened to' at the YOS.

Self-identity

Justice-involved young people are often repeatedly exposed to negative narratives which can impact upon their self-identity. Supporting young people to reject harmful narratives is key to enabling long-term trauma-recovery (Skuse & Matthew, 2015). The survey asked young people to share three or more words that described how they would like to be perceived by other people and to share three or more words that described how they felt their YOS worker would describe them. Overall, young people reported many more positive words than negative in response to both questions. The most frequently used words were: *funny, good/good person, nice/nice person, energetic, caring, helpful, trustworthy, polite, respectful, positive, ambitious* and *smart.* The consistency between positive words for how they wanted to be described as well as how the young people felt their YOS worker would describe them suggests that, at the time of the survey, young people held positive self-perceptions, supported by YOS staff. In interviews, young people were asked to expand on why they chose their descriptive words. One young person had used, 'enlightened', 'smart', 'optimistic', 'polite', 'funny' and 'inquisitive' as words they would have liked others use to describe them .

> *Some of the words on there, [YOS worker] always said to me. Every time I came in, he would give another, he would give me something. He would give me a situation and ask me, 'why do you think this would happen?' or something like that and I would solve it and he'd be like, 'you're too smart'.* (Young person 2)

When asked how the young person felt to be described in these ways, they stated 'it made me feel proud'. This young person was no longer attending the YOS and their relationship with their YOS worker had a lasting impact. The words shared with them by this practitioner 'stuck with [them]' and enabled them to feel confidence in their abilities.

Another young person shared that YOS practitioners had challenged their perceptions of the justice system, particularly how they felt they would be perceived when attending the service.

> *You don't expect much positivity from staff because obviously you're coming here because you've been sent for a punishment. You wouldn't expect positive adults around you that still want to smile and still respect you. Even though they know what you've done, they don't really look at you how other people look at you.* (Young person 1)

The young person quoted above initially expected a 'punishing' atmosphere when attending the YOS, but found they were treated instead with respect and positivity. They elaborated on how they believed they were initially perceived at the YOS, and how this belief changed during their attendance.

> *At the start of everything they probably looked at me as 'yeah, she's a cool girl but I know there's something else behind'. Because I was challenging, especially with new people I used to meet back in the day. I would have a wall blocked in front of me, find it hard to communicate, show how I feel. So now it's like they've seen me and I know that they love me, because I'm just like that positive person.* (Young person 1)

This young person's experience of feeling 'seen' by YOS staff, despite difficulties in communicating, echoes survey responses indicating young people felt they were perceived positively. Overall this reflects that the YOS approach was having the intended outcome of supporting young people in their development of a positive self-identity, a vital element of the trauma-recovery process. This also reflected the service's commitment to reparation of harm and minimising unconscious bias in their practice.

Fostering resilience and hope

One young person expressed their thoughts on moving away from offending and how their involvement with the YOS had supported them to see a different future.

> *Prison, that's the only place you're going to end up. But now it's like I can see into the future and I can see where I'm headed.* (Young person 2)

Guiding young people into pathways such as education, employment or training can support in nurturing hope for the future. Justice-involved young people often have disrupted experiences of education, through exclusions and/or being moved from school-to-school (Ministry of Justice & Department of Education, 2016). Raising aspirations and nurturing ambitions is key in supporting the development of a positive self-identity.

Young people were asked in surveys to report whether they felt their experience in education, work and/or training had changed since they started attending the YOS. The scale ranged from 'very bad' to 'very good'. 16% (n=7) of young people reported a change. No young people reported a negative change e.g. from 'good' to 'bad'. The relatively low levels of change reported may reflect that over half of survey participants had only been with the YOS for a period of six months or less.

The below comments are young people reporting what had enabled change:

> *[The YOS] has given me more motivation to go to college and work because they helped me understand more about careers.* (Survey respondent – young person)

> *[My YOT worker] has been helping me with college and is coming to masterclasses with me.* (Survey respondent – young person)

Young people who reported no change were asked to share what they felt may help support change . These comments reflected a sense of frustration with schooling in particular and a lack of a clear sense of what might support this to change. One respondent identified that change might be

possible 'If the teachers were more understanding', reflecting the need for a trauma-informed restorative approach for the elimination of judgement and bias beyond the YOS itself.

Parents/caregivers were also asked about their young person's engagement with education, work or training. 21% (n=4) reported seeing a change. The majority of changes reported were improvements, with one parent reporting a negative change. The parents/caregivers who reported change were asked to share why they felt a change had happened. These comments suggested the YOS had supported the young people to make change in themselves.

> *He got to understand the way to grow up*. (Survey respondent - parent)

> *YOS engagement has provided the opportunity to make the right choices [and] pathways and enabled him to access training which would not [happen] otherwise.* (Survey respondent - parent)

These reported changes indicate the success of the trauma-informed approach for some respondents. Empowering young people to access education or employment is key to supporting long-term recovery. This, in combination with the positive self-perceptions reported by young people demonstrated the model of practice has supported some young people to develop a positive and hopeful vision for themselves and their futures. However, change was limited to what young people could change in themselves, as demonstrated by those who reported no change citing ongoing tensions in their relationships with teachers and schools.

Trust and communication

As highlighted earlier, research suggests youth crime interventions should be relational, long-term and supportive. Forming positive and collaborative relationships between professionals and service-users and a sense of physical and psychological safety is key to the trauma-informed approach (SAMHSA, 2014). Research suggests the justice system can be a traumatising space for young people, requiring youth offending services to pay attention to addressing aspects of the system that can generate feelings of danger and fear (Loughran & Reid, 2018).

In the survey, 95% (n=42) of young people said they felt 'safe' attending the YOS. Similarly, 95% (n=42) of young people said they felt 'comfortable'. In interviews, young people shared the importance of positive interactions with staff at first-contact:

> *Just the way they presented themselves, the conversations, the communication, everything. I got the respect I wanted to receive, so they got the respect they would have wanted to receive back.* (Young person 1)

Another key principle underpinning the trauma-informed approach is trustworthiness and transparency. This requires a service operating openly and honestly and actively promoting the building and maintenance of trust in relationships with service-users. This is particularly relevant for traumatised young people who may have had their trust in others ruptured due to traumatic experiences (Liddle et al, 2016).

Through the survey, young people unanimously expressed trust in the YOS with 100% (n=44) saying they could trust their YOS worker. In interview, young people explained what had helped them to feel this trust.

> *They believed me and understand me, I'm grateful because I don't want someone seeing me as something I'm not.* (Young person 2)

This reflects the importance of the integration of minimising bias and harm into the trauma-informed approach, allowing this young person to feel understood. This sense of being understood and its impact on relationships with the YOS was also reflected in survey responses where 94% (n=41) of young people felt able to express themselves and 90% (n=40) felt able to speak their mind. Further, 82% (n=36) felt safe talking about their problems to YOS staff and 94% (n=41) felt comfortable talking with their YOS worker about any difficulties they were facing.

Some concerns did emerge in interviews, however, surrounding trust in disclosing personal situations to YOS staff, from both young people and parents, particularly in relation to safeguarding. Maintaining trust whilst abiding by safeguarding policy presents a challenge for youth offending services. Practitioners are bound by law to report safeguarding concerns and crime. Some justice-involved young people at the time of contact with the system may still be actively or passively engaged in crime and this raises difficulties for developing trust. Both young people and parents shared in interview that the fear of disclosure had, at times, limited how open the young person could be in their interactions with YOS staff. This demonstrates the importance of the ability of a service to manage expectations of service-users and caregivers in relation to confidentiality and information-sharing. Transparency and consistency in such communication can build trusting relationships. However, it may also leave young people wary about discussing their complex lives.

Contrasting views regarding communication emerged from survey responses and interviews with parents/caregivers. In the survey, 69% (n=13) of parents/caregivers said they felt comfortable communicating with the YOS, suggesting that while the majority had positive experiences of such communication, a significant proportion of parents were wary. Despite the unanimous sense of trust expressed by young people in the YOS, only 58% (n=11) of parents/caregivers felt they/their young person could 'trust the YOS staff'. In interview, one parent discussed how a lack of contact from the YOS with their young person after positive initial meetings had left them disillusioned and concerned for their child. This parent's experience speaks to the importance of reliable, trusting relationships within trauma-informed practice, particularly in an approach that places an emphasis on supporting a trauma-recovery process to reach certain outcomes, such as desistance from offending. This presents a challenge for services who may only be sparingly in contact with a young person, dependent on requirements for attendance. It also reflects the need for restorative practice within a trauma-informed approach to remain reflexive to harm caused by the service to its young people and their families. Opportunities for both young people and families to engage in restorative sessions with the staff could expand the restorative justice element of the YOS model.

Restorative practice

As highlighted earlier, research suggests that restorative justice practice with young people should not exclusively focus on victim reparation. Rather, more balanced models that are inclusive of the

broader influential contexts in young people's lives, such as within families and communities, may have a greater impact for long-term rehabilitation (Cunneen & Goldson, 2015). The YOS appeared to be making connections between young people and their families.

Restoring connections

A key focus of the YOS approach to restorative practice was to rebuild fractured or difficult relationships within the families of young people. To understand the efficacy of the YOS approach to restoration within families, parents and young people were asked to report in surveys how they felt about their family relationships *before* they started attending the YOS, and *after.* The scale ranged from 'very bad' to 'very good'. 23% (n=10) of young people reported positive change in their relationship with family since attending the YOS. 21% (n=4) of parents/caregivers reported positive change in their relationship with their young person. No respondents reported that family relationships had worsened since attending the YOS. While the proportion of young people and parents reporting improvements in relationships is relatively low, this may reflect that over half of survey respondents had been involved with the YOS for under 6 months and were fairly early in the process. Below are some comments from young people in the survey about what had enabled change:

> *My YOT worker has helped me and my Mum understand each other better*. (Survey respondent – young person)
>
> *My life at home has really changed, both my parents are both aware. If anything, it has brought us closer. My mother and me have spent more time together*. (Survey respondent – young person)
>
> *I stopped doing stupid things like robbing people. I'm helping my Mum more, I'm at home more.* (Survey respondent – young person)
>
> *I'm thinking more about my actions than previously*. (Survey respondent – young person)
>
> *My behaviour has changed and I'm more aware of the impact my decisions have*. (Survey respondent – young person)

The following comments are from young people who did not report change, who shared what might help support change:

> *I think doing more things with my parents will better our relationship*. (Survey respondent – young person)
>
> *Not much they could do. It was me that got myself there. More advice on what to do next.* (Survey respondent – young person)
>
> *I would like to get a job so I'm less [of] a burden on the family*. (Survey respondent – young person)

Below are some comments from parents about what they felt had helped make change in their relationship with their young person:

> *Being able to spend more time with family*. (Survey respondent - parent)

I've changed my communication approach. (Survey respondent – parent)

Survey responses demonstrate the restorative work within families has achieved intended outcomes for some respondents, particularly through supporting constructive communication. It is also clear that the general trauma-informed support for young people, through enabling them to understand the reasoning behind, and implications of, their choices and actions, has generated improvements in family relationships. The responses highlight that this is a two-way process, with young people feeling their parents understand them better, and parents identifying how their own approach has changed. However, the young people's comments about what did or could effect change reflect a sole focus on their own agency – and are not connected to broader experiences of trauma and inequality that might be beyond their control. This may be why levels of change are relatively low. As such, there is potential to consider how the restorative approach might be expanded to other relationships. With the focus on awareness of bias, reparation of harm between young people and the systems and services they encounter, both within and beyond the YOS, is a crucial consideration.

Unconscious bias awareness and practice

As highlighted above, the majority of young people and family members reported feeling safety, trust and comfort in their interactions with the YOS. There were some less positive examples. One young person shared they had been repeatedly misgendered by staff due to their physical appearance and choice of clothing. They explained it put them 'in a bad mood' during visits. This experience highlights the importance of tackling bias-informed assumptions in creating emotional safety for service-users.

In staff meetings, YOS practitioners shared it was not uncommon for parents and caregivers to arrive 'on the defensive' and to report feeling 'judged' by questions regarding their young person's upbringing, feeling their parenting abilities were under interrogation. One parent reflected in interview on their previous experiences with statutory services.

> *Just the environment that my son was coming from hasn't been an encouraging one, that he's probably been exposed to certain things [which] is why he has ended up in certain situations. But looking at the facts and our story and journey, it's really been a case of the local authority not supporting and not listening to us as a family in terms of what support we needed at the early stages. It was definitely highlighted before all of this happened, in my previous emails to [the local authority] about my concerns. I'm actually living my concerns now.* (Parent 1)

This parent shared how they also felt 'judged' by the YOS, as well as by several other services. However, many parents felt the YOS approach was 'non-judgemental' towards both them and their young person.

> *The main thing was their attitude, if you like, towards both myself and my son in that they seemed very good in getting a connection with him and I think that was because they were very calm, there was no judgement from them.* (Parent 2)

> *I find the YOS to be very non-judgemental and with a restorative as opposed to punitive approach, which was crucial for my son's engagement.* (Survey respondent - parent)

These perspectives make apparent the importance of maintaining a bias-free mentality in order to establish a safe environment.

Supporting trauma recovery

As discussed earlier, a key element of the trauma-recovery process is the development of a positive self-identity and YOS staff were supporting this with positive affirmation of young people that went some way towards countering harmful narratives. As studies have shown that repeated exposure to prejudice and discrimination can result in heightened levels of traumatic stress (Alessi et al, 2013; Kang & Burton, 2014), it is important to consider impact of institutional bias and discrimination within youth justice practice. Young people from BAME backgrounds, in particular, are disproportionately represented in the justice system (Lammy, 2017). Consideration of 'Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues' is one of the key principles in developing a trauma-informed culture within youth justice practice (SAMHSA, 2014).

Young people's experiences of the police were often negative. One young person shared in interview their experience of inappropriate use of force by police officers, stating: 'I didn't pay my bus fare and they had me on the ground. They were just on me'. This young person shared that they had, in the past, been stopped and searched three times in one month and felt that police did this due to their race, choice of clothing and the area they lived in.

This re-emphasises the importance of ensuring a sense of safety and trust in YOS-service-user relationships. As highlighted above, young people and family members may arrive to a YOS with preconceptions, due to previous negative and traumatic interactions with the justice system and other statutory services. One young person interviewed expressed how their past experiences affected how they expected the YOS to be at their first-contact:

> *When I first came, I thought I was going to walk in and expect like a rude manner, this is probably what I'm going to expect because it's to do with the police and what not.* (Young person 4)

Another young person shared their perspective on racism in the justice system:

> *Say a black person was to get stabbed, they could leave the case open for months and still not solve it. But they could solve a case of a young black male… coming back with money to help put clothes on his back, or give back to his Mum. They'll solve that in the blink of an eye. Things like that just don't make sense to me.* (Young person 2)

Recognition of identity-based traumatic experiences, institutional and inter-personal bias and the impact of this on service-users is a critical concern for trauma-informed care. The key elements of trauma-informed care such as establishing a sense of safety for service-users, building trust and collaborative relationships, and supporting service-users in their recovery and rehabilitation, all engender practitioners to engage in consistent reflexivity to eliminate biases. Beyond this, reparation of the harm created by such experiences needs to be built into the trauma-informed approach.

One young person shared that their YOS worker had helped them to understand 'unconscious bias' and its influence on their life. They said it had supported them to see things 'in a different way' and

changed how they understood the prejudice they were subject to. As illustrated earlier, supporting young people in the formation of a positive self-identity requires equally supporting them to build resilience against harmful negative narratives, and to resist (re)traumatisation. This can be achieved by empowering young people to recognise and challenge bias that harms both themselves and others. This important aspect of trauma-informed practice is reflected in this young person's experience of their YOS worker sharing their personal learning around unconscious bias with them.

The YOS approach to addressing unconscious bias functioned as one tool for reflexivity among others they were able to draw on. The bias training at the YOS appeared to function as an add-on to other equality and diversity training initiatives as well as to them working within the 'SOCIAL GRACES' framework. This framework reminds practitioners to remain cognizant of identity-based experiences and how they intersect, as well as how the practitioner's own identities and social contexts may influence their point-of-view (Totsuka, 2014). It is a framework that emphasises the power dynamics at play in services and institutions. Practitioners regularly referred to this framework in staff meetings observed, when discussing elements of unconscious bias in practice. At the time of writing, the YOS staff have also received 'race-based trauma' training.

As already discussed, there is potential to further integrate the recognition of the impact of bias and inequality on young people's lives into the trauma-informed restorative practices of the YOS through a focus on reparation of harm between young people and professional services. This is already happening implicitly between young people and YOS staff through the forms of practice described here and the organisational culture created through the service approach and its underpinning principles. However, there is potential to make it more deliberate and explicit. This could be extended to include police, schools, and other institutions the young people have contact with.

Conclusion

The research findings presented above demonstrate that the YOS model that brings together trauma-informed care, restorative practice and unconscious bias awareness appears to be creating a safe and trusting environment for its service-users. A supportive and relational approach emerged as crucial to the effectiveness of the YOS approach. It was particularly pertinent that young people in the survey unanimously expressed their trust in heir YOS workers, though some exceptions and nuances to this emerged in interviews with young people and parents.

The research evidences how the trauma-recovery approach builds resilience, hope for the future, and a positive sense of self-identity in young people. Restorative practice between young people and parents appears to be a unique form of restorative justice that is having an impact on relationships between young people and their families, with some young people and parents identifying positive changes in these relationships. This approach to restorative practice reflects a trauma-informed approach that recognises the impact of adverse childhood experiences. Considering restorative approaches through the lens of trauma-informed practice means that they need to focus on reparation of harm done to (as opposed to just by) young people who have offended. This means the restorative practice is necessarily a two-way process.

The YOS staff's awareness of bias and their non-judgemental approach also impacted positively on young people who distinguished between this and their experiences with other professionals, particularly police. There is also evidence that some young people recognise the impact of bias and

inequality on their lives and experiences. This recognition of how inequality and discrimination impacts on young people's lives demonstrates that the trauma-informed approach is taking account of structural and identity-based trauma. The integrated approach meant that the staff were able to take account of individual, family and institutional trauma – with an understanding of how racism and other inequalities impact on the lives of young people in the youth justice system.

Unconscious bias training is most effective in conjunction with long-term initiatives that emphasise identity-based experiences, reflect the impact of institutional and interpersonal bias and are inclusive of intersectional issues. There was scope for further training on issues not yet covered such as gender-based and LGBTQ+ specific trauma, as exemplified by the experience of the young person who was misgendered. It could also be considered whether there is need for more representation of some minority groups in YOS services. For example, it was clear in observations that a number of service-users were from Gypsy or Traveller backgrounds and the unique prejudice they face was not necessarily fully understood within the service. Some specific awareness-raising training in relation to such groups may be helpful. In light of the experiences shared by young people of their negative perceptions and experiences of teachers and police, such training could also be offered/delivered to schools and police officers who work closely with the service.

In recognising young people's experiences of bias and discrimination (as well as institutional trauma) in their experiences with services such as the YOS, teachers and police, there is potential to expand the restorative practice of the YOS to also support these relationships with professionals and institutions. Again, reparation of harm done *to* young people is key, keeping their needs at the centre. The integrated model of trauma-informed care with restorative practice and recognition of how bias and discrimination acts on young people's lives, makes possible such radical and critical practice in youth justice. As such, there is potential to develop the model the YOS has initiated and for it to be replicated and built on throughout the sector.

Overall, the case study demonstrates that the trauma-informed approach combined with restorative practice and bias awareness appears to be effective. Its efficacy is reflected in the unanimous trust in the service and sense of being listened to, exhibited by young people in the survey. This unique and multi-faceted model of trauma-informed care includes restorative practices that focus on family relationships. Also central to the approach was the acknowledgement of harm caused by structural inequality and institutional trauma. Further research could test the model more widely and with young people (and their families) who have been engaged with youth offending services over time.

The case study has wider implications for the development of youth offending services that recognise individual, family and structural trauma, and work with young people (and others who work with them such as teachers and police) to understand and address the impact and repair the harm of both on their lives. Restorative practices focused on young people's families (potentially extending to their wider communities) may be more effective than restorative justice that places the 'victim' at the centre. The research makes clear that a focus on relationships and support is essential to effective trauma-informed practice. Within this approach, recognising and working with the dynamics of young people's relationships with their families as well as their experiences of inequality and bias is crucial – rather than focusing solely on the individual in the system. This integrated and multi-faceted approach makes possible trauma-informed and restorative practices centred on reparation of harm done *to* (and not just *by*) young people, including by the professionals and institutions that should protect them.

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