

'HARD-TO-REACH' YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY: A MODEL FOR PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

Briefing Note

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The views expressed in this briefing note are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

Background to the research

The first round of audits and strategies produced by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships largely dealt with young people as offenders. The audits used methods which were inappropriate for uncovering young people's views and experiences. Young people were poorly represented in consultation, and few strategies addressed their role as victims of crime. For hard-to-reach groups of young people, these limitations were even greater.

The Home Office commissioned research to examine homeless and school-excluded young people's experiences of crime and disorder. As part of this research, a model for consultation was developed which can be used with hard-to-reach young people elsewhere.

The fieldwork, undertaken in Newcastle upon Tyne in 2000, involved 118 homeless young people, 164 school excluded young people and over 75 people who work with these groups. The young people were approached in the places where they normally meet and were invited to respond to and develop a range of visual materials (including brainstorming and timelines); observation and informal discussions were also undertaken while these activities took place.

The findings and the model for consultation with hard-to-reach young people (PARC) will be of interest to community safety practitioners and of practical use to those undertaking consultation in the future.

Research findings

The research found that the experience of homeless young people was:

- being young and homeless means being labelled in a particular way, largely as a criminal and as a threat to society
- most of their offending is petty crime or victimless 'lifestyle' crime, e.g. begging and drug use
- they are most at risk in spaces where control is exercised over them, rather than on the street; these include the home and in dealings with the police
- their involvement in crime (as offender or victim) often exacerbates their existing situation and sometimes plays a role in them becoming homeless

The report shows that the experience of school excluded young people was:

- they are frequently labelled as trouble-makers and offenders, and are valued little by many people and agencies
- offending is widespread among some groups of school excluded young people. Most is petty crime, e.g. criminal damage and drug use, though some take part in more serious property and violent crimes
- their experiences of crime other than offending tended to be serious and involved familiar people and places. Those victimising the young people were most likely to be other young people (especially bullying) and family members (sexual or physical abuse, fighting between siblings).

- many of them had experienced harassment from the police.
- offending and victimisation can have a direct relationship with school exclusion, e.g. self-exclusion due to bullying, exclusion due to offending

Hard-to-reach young people and community safety

On the basis of these findings, the report concludes that hard-to-reach young people:

- perceive that they are labelled, subject to a high level of control, and rarely listened to
- many of them have been both offenders and victims of crime and there is no absolute distinction between these two roles
- their victimisation is under-reported, not always taken seriously by law enforcement agencies, and seldom addressed in any way by policy
- many are disadvantaged by criminal justice, housing, education and/or welfare policies which contribute to the creation of homelessness and school exclusion, and criminalise certain groups of young people
- they have specific perspectives on crime. Their own stories and interpretations need to be taken into account and acted upon
- they are capable of raising and discussing a range of appropriate ideas for policy solutions. These skills need to be valued, and they should be encouraged to participate in devising solutions to the problems that they experience

Consultation with hard-to-reach young people

The report suggests that for this group:

- consultation should include a strong qualitative element (e.g. their attitudes, experiences and understandings of crime should be explored in depth)
- participatory research approaches (including those described above) offer great benefits in involving young people in the audit and strategy process and in promoting their interests
- research findings should be addressed and acted upon where appropriate but, since there are certain limitations to such methods, their use as a basis for action must be acknowledged if they are to be used effectively

Participatory Action Research and Consultation

During the project, *Participatory Action Research and Consultation* (PARC) was developed as a model for research and consultation with young people around community safety and with hard-to-reach groups in general. PARC involves the following stages:

Stages of PARC	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identification of an issue for consultation. The purpose may be to achieve greater understanding of the issue or to evaluate a particular aspect of service delivery.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establishment of a steering group comprising young people, members of the consultation/research team and agency staff. This group should have responsibility to address the findings and to promote change.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All steering group members must ensure that the organisations that they represent are committed to change. Consultation needs to be embedded in practice, policy and procedure and mechanisms to ensure that findings can be translated into action need to be developed.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consultation is undertaken using participatory visual techniques (such as brainstorming and timelines), interviews and other methods as appropriate. The consultation process should be flexible so that its focus and steering group membership can be adapted as findings emerge. Young people should have the opportunity to play a central role in checking and analysing findings.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The steering group should respond to early findings at all stages of the consultation process. The group should be able to take decisions quickly and in partnership with the young people involved, but support should be given where they wish to act separately.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Steering group members can work most effectively across levels of their organisations and in partnership across the community safety strategy group.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Findings and details of subsequent action should be fed back to all of those involved in the consultation, especially the young people who took part.

Related PRC publications

Newburn, T. and Jones, T. (2002) *Consultation by Crime and Disorder Partnerships*. Police Research Series, Paper 148. London: Home Office.

The Partnership Working toolkit on the Crime Reduction website provides further guidance on consultation www.crimereduction.org.uk/toolkits.p00.htm

Further Information

If you would like further information about any aspect of this research, please contact Rachel Pain, University of Durham (rachel.pain@durham.ac.uk) or Peter Francis, University of Northumbria (peter.francis@unn.ac.uk)

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