HIS, HERS, AND THEIRS: COMPARATIVE NARRATIVES FROM YOUNG MEN

AND WOMEN WHO USE VIOLENCE.

Abstract

Purpose

This paper explores narratives of violence in the lives of young men and young women in Australia. Through partnering with young people to understand and make meaning of their stories, authors highlight similarities and differences in gendered experiences of violence, and the implications of these for cross-disciplinary practice.

Design/methodology/ approach

This article presents the synthesis of narrative data from two separate studies that worked with justice-involved young men and young women, who had both experienced and used violence. Study 1 used a thematic analysis of practitioner narratives and qualitative data from in-session narratives. Study 2 used a thematic analysis of interview data using grounded approach and peer review to promote trustworthiness and inter-rater reliability.

Findings

Insights on the experiences of young people who use violence are notably absent in most forms of violence discourse, practice and research. Findings demonstrate that understandings of youth violence are linked to identity, but also situated within contexts of trauma, place, gender, relationality and community. This conceptualisation of violence, is particularly important to understandings of young female violence.

Originality/ value

Through collaborative approaches of co-design and co-production, the paper outlines that a stronger understanding of the experiences of young men *and* young women (often an over-looked cohort) in the justice system can help improve the trauma-informed and gender responsiveness of interventions across practice settings. The authors highlight that exploring gendered

differences in narratives of youth violence is necessary and seeking lived experiences of youth justice young people is instructive to academia, policy and practice.

Key words: Youth justice, gender, violence, collaborative design, trauma, social work.

His, hers, and theirs: comparative narratives from young people who use violence

1.1 Purpose

The voices and experiences of young people who use violence are frequently missing from practice, research, and policy discourse. Often justice involved young people are not invited to contribute, or like the practitioners working with them, are left out of discourse surrounding their experience altogether (Blakemore et al., 2018; Creaney, 2018). This has contributed to a widening gap between the realities and complexities of contemporary adolescent life and the intervention designed to address youth violence. While ever practice and policy continue to draw on offending profiles of adult men to inform interventions with a focus on predicting and mitigating risk, there remains a lack of attention to relationships and connections necessary for young people to feel heard and supported toward safer outcomes.

Using narrative analysis from two distinct studies, in this paper two practitioner academics compare and consider the co-produced narratives outlining experiences of 34 justice-involved young men and women identified as perpetrators of violence. Narratives provided by these young people highlight nuanced gendered differences in beliefs and experiences regarding family, education, and housing, their role in the use of violence and the importance of place, belonging, and community. The young women discussed in Study 1 were on community supervision orders, and reside in the Hunter region of New South Wales (NSW), Australia and the young men discussed in Study 2 were on remand in a Youth Justice custodial setting in NSW Australia. The youth across both studies identified with either the male or female gender, as such 'male' and 'female' will be referred to for the purposes of this subsequent narrative analysis.

Recent crime statistics indicate that youth-perpetrated assaults and crime involving young Australians is a growing and evolving issue (NSW Productivity Commission, 2018).

Reported incidence and prevalence rates identify that youth offending in general has decreased over the last decade; however, when isolating for youth-perpetrated domestic violence (DV), youth offending has increased (Boxall et al., 2020). Young people commit approximately 7% of all DFV assaults recorded in NSW, with DFV assaults making up approximately 40% of the entirety of assaults perpetrated by young people (NSW Government Department of Communities and Justice, 2022). It is equally important to acknowledge that youth DV rarely occurs in isolation from other violence (Ingram et al., 2020).

Australian and international research points to gender factors present in youth-perpetrated DV, with contemporary findings indicating that males who perpetrate violence make up almost two-thirds of all youth offenders of violence (Condry & Miles, 2014; Freeman, 2018). Young women are more likely than young men to be the victims of youth violence in interpersonal relationships (Freeman, 2018). We acknowledge that most domestic and family violence in Australia is perpetrated by men against women who are known to them (Freeman, 2018). It is notable, however that during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic period, women under 18 were charged at higher rates for interpersonal violence offences than their male peers in parts of regional Australia (NSW BOCSAR, 2021a, b).

Australia's First Nations people under 18 constitute roughly 5% of Australia's young people yet make up 59% of incarcerated youth (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2018). Australian First Nations young people are more than 18 times more likely than their non-First Nations peers to be incarcerated (AIHW, 2018). Australian First Nations young people in a South Australian (SA) study, were found to be incarcerated younger, more often for violence related offences and to experience poorer mental health (Malvaso, 2022). In NSW, analysis of the experiences of 1,055 young people involved with justice due to DFV assault offences found that 21% of the young people were First Nation, more than 90% had some type

of ADVO applied against them, while just under 20% of young people charged with DFV assault had been bail refused at the time of their incident (NSW Government Department of Communities and Justice, 2022).

Justice statistics in NSW, where the studies reported on here are based, do not differentiate between First Nations males and females. This means the experiences of justice-involved young Australian First Nations women remain relatively invisible. This invisibility brings with it risks for these young women of perpetuating cycles of systemic violence, where practice and policy are driven by colonised traditions about what violence looks like across systems and cultures. Consistent with a theme of invisibility in the justice system, to date, explicit recognition of the role of trauma in the lives of justice-involved young people has not been consistently regarded and accounted for in practice and program development (Duron et al., 2020). The term "trauma" is often used in a broad sense to encompass either prior acute experiences and/or chronic and cumulative difficulties. Consistent with Branson and colleagues (2017), the authors argue trauma should not be considered as a homogenous experience.

Through the work of Ayotte et al., (2017) we understand that a fruitful working alliance between young person and practitioner requires respect, mutual trust, felt safety, and a modelling of supportive dialogue. Deeply relational, First Nation ways of doing and knowing (Martin & Mirraboopa 2003) honour the importance of kinship and its relationship to First Nation lore, and the inherited cultural obligation to make people, kin and Country work (Dudgeon & Bray 2019). In this sense, connection and relationship building goes beyond the establishment of rapport, it requires context, acknowledging and recognising history, and positioning yourself to completely *hear* another person's story (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 42). Absent, according to France and Homel (2006) is the *hearing* of voices of young justice involved people in violence intervention programs. Both hearing and listening is central to First

Nation community (Atkinson 2002), with concerted and purposeful listening and communication being core to effective work alongside First Nation people and communities (Bennett et al., 2011).

This paper will compare and contrast findings from two studies with justice-involved young people in New South Wales, Australia. Both studies recognise trauma to be an experience, as opposed to an event, which should be understood as culturally and contextually defined. Both studies also acknowledge the factors that contribute to trauma include dynamics of disadvantage, misrepresentation, disempowerment, broken and lost connections, which are intersectionality tied with the structural and systemic experiences for justice involved young people (Branson et al., 2017), this is especially so for Australia's First Nation young people (Sullivan, et al., 2019).

Attempts to understand young people's use of violence in their interpersonal relationships without recognising the role and presence of violence within community life more broadly, fails to recognise the complexity of situated experiences of violence. Interpersonal violence rarely occurs in isolation from other forms violence and criminal activity more generally (Bromfield et al., 2010).

Warton's (2020), work conceptualises youth violence through its relationship with aspects of identity and identity formation. Warton (2020), found that violence and relationship with identity was the most prevalent theme emerging from participant narratives on their experiences of crime. An identity typified as violent, was found to have greater relevance to a person's social identity compared their personal identity. Warton (2020) consistent with Staff and Kreager's (2008), find that young men from areas of less advantage may gain peer acceptance and status through their use of and participation in violence. This is not dissimilar to findings reported by Blakemore and colleagues (2018, 2020), where understandings of youth

violence are linked to identity, but also situated within contexts of trauma, place, gender, relationality and community.

This conceptualisation of violence, seems especially important to understandings of young female violence (Rak, 2022a,b). The evolution of female violence has been debated and raised problematic questions for policy, research, and practice because of the way violence has been historically constructed and understood (Blakemore, Randall et al., 2021). In the past, as well as in public discourse, women who used violence were often characterised in deficit-based narratives where they were portrayed as being less of a woman, not meeting the feminine ideal, or being oppressed, or where their violence was the result of victimisation (Boxall et al., 2020; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Common to many of these understandings is recognition of the deep and potent role of trauma in the lives of most of the young women who use violence (Swan et al., 2008).

Australian state and social responses to male violence have been considerably different. Despite this, rates of trauma for young male offenders are also consistently high when compared with the general population (Calleja, 2020; Williams, 2020), especially for those convicted for violent crimes (Malvaso et al., 2018). It should be noted that while the high prevalence of trauma among young people in youth justice systems has been well established, the relationship between trauma, crime and recidivism is still widely debated in the literature (Vitopoulos et al., 2018). Youth use of crime, including acts of violence, is theorised as being a tool for communicating unmet and unrecognized needs as well as for recognition, control and redistributing lost or taken away power (Blakemore et al., 2018). Conceptualising violence as a means of power redistribution and as a method of communication and connection is particularly relevant for when considering the experience of violence for young First Nation people and young people from minority backgrounds (Moore et al., 2013).

Genuine attempts to recognise the role of victimisation as a driver and motivator of youth violence, mean that practice, policy and academia must also recognise the impact of historical, current and ongoing role of oppression and systemic violence (Boxall et al., 2020). Community and interpersonal violence for some of Australia's First Nation young people is embedded in, and intersects with the layered and collective damage born from acts of continuous acts of oppression (White, 2005). Atkinson's (2002) work on trauma articulates how ongoing exposure to enduring inequality, victimisation, displacement, state intervention into everyday life and colonialised violence, may develop into lateral, community and self-violence, ultimately contributing to intergenerational impacts and cyclic trauma. A one size fits all approach to work with justice involved young people that does not acknowledge the role of trauma and cultural responsiveness is likely to be ineffective. Co-production and co-design with young people can enhance access, equity and participation in interventions (Malvaso et al., 2022).

The evidence base for criminogenic understandings of youth offending and young people's use of violence has primarily focused on the offending of young males (Farrington 2003; Jolliffe et al., 2019). More recent work has cited the need for more gender-specific research to be undertaken (Craig & Trulson 2019). Carrington (2013) has long argued for the need for more gender-specific research highlighting the greater role that feminist theorists could play in theorising adolescent female-perpetrated violence. Carrington (2013) suggests an absence of feminist thought creates space for anti-feminist and neoliberal sentiment to flourish, thereby reproducing the 'bad girl' discourse that critiques any behaviours considered counter-feminine as being the result of growth in gender equity (Brown 2011; Chesney-Lind & Eliason 2006). Further, Carrington (2013), argues that female violence may not be increasing, and that increasing reports of violence have grown as the world of women has opened up in the public domain, making women more visible.

Crawshaw (2010) has established the links between socially constructed hegemonic masculinity and manhood and the resulting power imbalances between and within individuals and community groups, leading to a reproduction of power imbalance between and within genders, classes, ethnicities and broader institutions. In this way hegemonic masculinity, may be enacted at the micro and macro level; through the behaviours and actions of men as individuals and exist as a contributing factor in broader, structural, systemic, and political states (Scott-Samuel et al., 2009). From a neoliberal value standpoint, hegemonic masculinity also supports competition and individualism (Wolfman, 2021). Theoretically, the role of hegemonic masculinity in the use of violence emerges as hegemonic masculinity itself becomes (or is perceived to become) destabilised through intersectionality from other power sources such as wealth, age, class, gender, race and religion (Connell, 2005) which go on to re-influence relations, in almost an action/consequence stimulus response at the micro and macro level (Jefferson, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity and violence, in this sense, must be considered in within the context of positionality, hierarchy and intersectionality, and treated as a gender ideology, influencing relationships between men and women as well as relationships between men and other men across a variety of settings.

The identities of young people who use and experience violence often intersect as both victim/survivors and perpetrators, and they are frequently excluded from support systems because of their use of violence despite also being victims of violence (Blakemore, Randall et al., 2021). As Antunes and Manasse (2022) note, the relationship between structural disadvantage and violence has been well established. The childhood experience of family violence for young perpetrators of violence are viewed as a strong factor in, and predictor of, future and continued violence, with research suggesting that the use of

intimidation and violence for control purposes can be learned by young people through watching their parents and caregivers (Contreras & Cano, 2014).

For young people—particularly for Australia's First Nation's young people—an experience of OOHC is one factor associated with general juvenile recidivism (Bollinger et al., 2017; McFarlane 2011). How justice and care experienced young people are perceived and treated across both systems often presents as a significant service gap (Mendes, Snow, & Baidawi, 2014). The work of Blakemore et al., (2018) outlines a common practice conundrum where practitioners express a desire, but lack of skill, experience or confidence, to work with young people across service areas, particularly in areas of youth violence, trauma and cultural responsivity. Confounding this, at times, inconsistent provision of practice, is the absence of the voices of justice involved young people in decision making, research and policy (France & Homel, 2006; McFarlane, 2011). For young men and women involved with justice and out-of-home care systems, crime and involvement in offending has been identified as means to connect and bond with families of origin (Blakemore et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2014). Work with practitioners in, and peripheral to, the youth justice system indicates that irrespective of the care status of an individual, practitioners alternately conceptualise offending by young people as either a means of communicating often unmet needs and/or connecting with peers, family, community and kin (Blakemore et al., 2018).

1.2 Approach

This article presents the synthesis of narrative data from two separate studies that worked with justice-involved young people who had both experienced and used violence.

These studies are described in Table 1. The decision to compare and contrast findings from these two separate studies was informed by discussion between the authors, identifying the common cohort experiences and differences instructive to policy and practice. Both

studies explored the experiences of justice involved young people. Study 1 was focused on young women while Study 2 was focused on young men. Both studies explored the experiences of similar aged young people charged with violence related offences in New South Wales.

Table 1

	Study 1.	**Study 2.**
Investigator	Louise Rak	Dr Timothy Warton
Project Name	Name.Narrate.Navigate (NNN).	The development of a criminal identity amongst adolescent males.
Ethics Approval	HREC = H-2018-0468 AIATSIS = EO107-14012019 DCJ-YJ = FILE: 19/01442.01 SERAP= 2019407	DCJ-YJ= File 18/00756
Sample cohort	Young women who had been charged with, plead or been found guilty of violence related charges, who were under YJ supervision and participants in the NNN program for youth violence.	Young men who had been charged with, plead or been found guilty of violence related charges, who were under YJ supervision on remand with or without community based supervised orders.
Types of offences	Interpersonal, family, domestic violence, property damage, affray and group violence, assault, GBH.	Domestic and family violence, affray and group violence, property damage, armed robbery, assault, AOABH, GBH
Sample location	Hunter Valley, NSW, Australia	Western Sydney, NSW
Sample size	14	20
Sample gender	Female	Male
Sample age	14-17yrs, mean age 15	16-19 yrs, mean age 16.9
Data collected as featured in this paper	Photovoice photos and in session narratives NNN Practitioner Narratives	Face-to-face, semi structured interviews on young people's criminal and related experiences in the way it relates to social and personal identity.
Time for data collection	8-9 weeks, one, two-hour session per week.	90 minutes, one off sessions.
Data analysis methods for study 1 as featured in this paper .	Thematic analysis of practitioner narratives and qualitative data from in-session narratives.	

Data analysis methods for study 2.	Thematic analysis of interview data using grounded approach and peer review to promote trustworthiness and inter-rater reliability.

1.3 Sample

Study 1 focuses on the experiences of 14 females with whom author 1 worked as part of her PhD studies in the Name.Narrate.Navigate (NNN) program for youth violence during the period 2019-2021. NNN is a trauma-informed and culturally safe program co-designed with community members, practitioners, and young people with an experience of violence, with cultural oversight from a First Nations Elder and Cultural Reference Group (Blakemore, Randall et al., 2021). The program explores key drivers of violence (emotional recognition, communication, empathy, power and control, shame and choice) through psychoeducation, groupwork and creative methods including Photovoice (Fitzgibbon & Stengel, 2018). The young women in Study 1 at the time of data collection lived in the Maitland and Port Stephens areas of NSW. Domestic Violence related charges for young people in these areas exceed state norms. In the period 2020-2021, young people aged under 18yrs represented 7% of all alleged offenders proceeded against by NSW Police for DV-related charges. During that same period, comparatively, young people represented 12% of all alleged DV offenders proceeded against by police in the Maitland local government area. Young women represented 39% of all alleged DV offenders in NSW during this period, but 52% of those proceeded against by NSW Police in the Maitland area (BOCSAR, 2021a). It is more common for young people to be charged, and proceeded against by police for non-DV related assaults. In NSW during the period 2020-2021, 40% of those proceeded against by police for non-DV related assaults were young women, in the Port Stephens local area 59% were young women (BOCSAR, 2021b). As noted, a concerning gap in youth crime statistics is that First Nation identity is reported but not by gender. This is particularly problematic when

attempting to understand the numbers of young First Nation women in the justice system (Ng, 2014).

Study 2 focuses on the experiences of 20 young men who resided across NSW, Australia and were interviewed by Warton (2020) as part of his PhD studies. Demographic data for this cohort has not been included given the geographic spread of origin, but at the time of data collection these young men were being detained in the Youth Justice remand centre in Western Sydney, NSW. All the young men interviewed by Warton (2020), had lengthy experiences with the criminal justice system and were able to describe a range of formal and informal experiences that were related to criminality in some way. This sample was not intended to be representative, or generalisable, but using a grounded approach was more concerned with capturing emerging data from experiential narratives.

In both Study 1 and Study 2 young people's histories with the criminal justice system and with using violence were identified from their narrative discussions with the authors rather than official records, consistent with the fact both studies were concerned with their perceptions and giving voice to their experience.

1.4 Data Collection

Data collected across both Study 1 and Study 2 emphasised the value of coproduction of understandings of youth violence. The process of co-production with young people, especially those who use violence, has its basis in relationality; situated between both the young people and from young person to practitioner. Without relationality, the freedom and safety to share narratives and experiences becomes non-existent. Both studies used co-design processes that were assessed against the NSW government's guide to consumer engagement and co-design capability framework (NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation, 2022). This framework identifies four key stages to co-design including engagement, information

gathering, understanding, and improvements. Table 2 describes the approach both studies

took to ensure data collection was collaborative and co-designed.

Table 2

	Study 1.	**Study 2.**
Investigator	Louise Rak	Dr Timothy Warton
Project Name	Name.Narrate.Navigate (NNN).	The development of a criminal identity amongst adolescent males.
Engagement	Use of reciprocal communication to frame experiences and opportunities. Creation of a climate of safety with a foundation of shared respect and trust and guided use of Australian First Nation ways of knowing and doing-Yarning and Deep Listening.	Use of reciprocal communication to frame experiences and opportunities. Creation of a climate of safety with a foundation of shared respect and trust through the use of semi-structured interview techniques based on skills and professional and personal experience.
Information gathering	Mutual insights gained from the sharing of lived experiences.	Mutual insights gained from the sharing of lived experiences.
Understanding	Throughout NNN, reciprocal learning occurs between facilitator/practitioner and young person through the identification of common themes, areas for improvement and opportunities for growth. Young person led insight into motivators for violence.	Use of Grounded Approach with young person led insight into criminal identity formation and motivators for violence.
Improvements	Practice improvements and insights led by young people embedded into ongoing work through a process of action research.	Interview and practice approach improvements based on repeat interactions with young people. Practice improvements implemented throughout Youth Justice services.

	The production of youth forward journal articles (academic and practice focused), to highlight the narratives of young people and their experiences. Ongoing independent evaluation of NNN, youth led with feedback incorporated back into program delivery.	The production of youth forward journal articles (academic and practice focused) and NSW government departmental practice and policy notes to highlight the narratives of young people and their experiences.

Data collection in Study 1 was situated by the first author's PhD studies as part of the NNN program (Blakemore et al., 2020). NNN includes collaborative data generating approaches; appreciative inquiry, reciprocal communication (Linehan, 2015), and Australian First Nations ways of knowing and doing, such as Yarning guided by an Australian First Nations Elder and facilitators (Geia et al., 2013). Reciprocal communication methods and Yarning are used in NNN to elicit narrative expression, recorded as ingroup narratives for qualitative analysis. Practitioner narratives and reflections also form part of NNN data collection and similarly form part of the data for Study 1.

Data collection in Study 2 included narrative data from semi-structured interviews with young males at the Youth Justice NSW remand centre in Western Sydney. Interviews were designed to elicit narratives of the participants' experiences with crime, the criminal justice system, and other experiences around family, education, and peer association. Data collection took a grounded approach, which allowed meaning to emerge from the data in keeping with an exploratory research design. The data collection process was successful in allowing all participants to have their narratives understood and recorded. The process did not seek to support or disprove any hypotheses; rather, the literature was used to guide the

analysis and allow patterns and relationships of meaning to emerge from the data (Creswell, 2009).

1.5 Data analysis

Narrative data drawn from the two studies was de-identified and analysed manually by both authors using a constant comparative method of inductive analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). Initially the two researchers read, re-read and coded their own data separately. They then met to compare codes and establish a unified set of themes. Once the themes were identified, the practitioner researchers analysed connections and comparisons arising from the datasets using axial coding (Neuman, 2004). Upon analysis of the 34 narratives from the two separate studies several key differences emerged between females and males: experiences of housing and homelessness, beliefs regarding education, and connection with family. Similarities included perceptions of self in relation to social and community identities, as well as the importance of readiness to use violence.

1.6 Findings

Joint analysis of both datasets revealed key differences and similarities across the two cohorts. The differences included experiences of homelessness, housing and education and the experience of family connections. Similarities included how the young men and women held their social and community identities and a shared understanding of the importance of a readiness to use violence.   De-identified quotes from the young people involved in the two studies have been utilised to demonstrate these key differences and similarities.

Housing instability and homelessness that often corresponded with violence was a topic of group conversation that frequently emerged in the young female NNN groups. For the young women who were homeless, the use of transactional violence (Rak, 2022b)— that is, where violence is used as a commodity in exchange for something (in this case, to secure a night's housing) — was a regular occurrence and one that was told with shame and sadness.

Transactional violence often occurred alongside unsafe and exploitative sexual relationships or one-off encounters, often with older males, for the purpose of having somewhere to stay. Among the male cohort, the use of violence or any other form of coercion to secure housing did not emerge from any of the narratives. This does not mean that the phenomenon does not occur (although it may not); however, it is of interest that the young men at no time discussed a relationship between accommodation problems and violence.

Most young women who have participated in NNN left school with the equivalent of a year six education. Those who were still at school were on partial attendance, attending for less than one day per week. The young women shared stories of grief and loss regarding their education, including sadness at missing their year six formal, being told by caseworkers that they could not 'hack being at school', and deep regret at missing opportunities to learn for their future. Despite receiving messages that they did not belong at school, the young women wanted to return to learning but felt they had missed their opportunity to learn. Their confidence for learning was minimal, but their desire was present. Many shared examples of barriers to returning to education when they attempted to reconnect. A Youth Justice caseworker shared a story with the NNN facilitators of working with a young woman for six months to encourage her to sign up for a preparatory learning course at TAFE, a post school learning option. However, the young woman was yelled at and dismissed by the TAFE intake worker once the young woman's expulsion from school for violence became known.

Young men's experiences with education were similar; however, their narratives revealed interesting points of difference. Of the cohort, only one young man reported an undisrupted education experience (prior to custody). Six participants were enrolled in behavioural schools and attended four or less days per week, three had been expelled for using violence at school and were awaiting enrolment elsewhere. The remainder no longer went to school and were working casually or had plans to obtain employment.

As noted, young women expressed grief and loss around their education experiences; however, this expression was not observed in the male cohort. A more typical observation was that school was understood in terms of socialisation, group membership, or belonging; specifically, that school was something for 'others'. These others were typically considered 'good kids' or 'kids that don't really get into trouble that much'. The 'others' who were engaged in education were usually clearly describable. They were young people who were considered far less likely to use violence to 'solve' interpersonal and social problems, and more likely to seek out adult or police intervention during times of conflict or danger. However, this differed for the participants, who noted that they would use violence individually or call upon peers to help violently 'solve' a social problem.

Simply put, most of the male cohort reflected the idea that they 'didn't belong' at school, while the young women were actively told that they did not belong. This distinction highlights a gendered experience of structurally defined social exclusion, as with the findings of Hughes (2020) who argues that settings of education can perpetuate symbolic and structural violence as well as social exclusion. This out-group comparison was persistent for the young men and was generally accompanied by expressions of plans to attain employment. For example, Brendan summarised this point in saying, 'I won't be here [in custody], I'd be killing it more if I had friends like that [achieving pro-social goals]. But then it'd be boring with those kids … I'd be called a flop … I don't really ever need school. I have work ready for me when I get out anyway'.

All the young women in NNN had family members with current or previous levels of association with the Justice system. Similar to the findings of Wolff & Baglivio (2017) sibling association with police was commonplace, each person had stories of being young and present at the arrests of their family members prior to the commencement of their own offending. The young women of NNN articulated their sense of obligation to bear witness to

the arrests and at times, attempting to intervene between Police and their older family members. Family attitudes towards the offending behaviours of the young women were mixed. Female participants could identify at least one family member who wanted them to stop their offending, but overwhelmingly they provided examples of when they were encouraged to continue their offending. Many of their stories were examples of times they had used violence on behalf of a family member for a perceived slight or to keep a partner in line. Starkly, most young women had damaged relationships with their mothers, highlighting the antecedence of some of their major periods of violence as being due to negative interactions with, and invalidation from, their mothers.

There were notable similarities in the male cohort in relation to their families. As with the young women, most young men had family members with involvement in the criminal justice system. Most young men were also able to discuss some level of familial disapproval, at least about being in custody; however, the levels of disapproval varied, which had implications for expressions about crime and violence. The greater the level of familial disapproval, the more sophisticated the violent and criminal justifications, as well as the expressed intention to stop offending. For example, once participant, Aiden, whose family had an extensive criminal and violent history, had a very normalised understanding of violence. When asked about his family response to him being in custody he stated that 'they don't like it, they don't want me making their same mistakes... but they don't care much, I live with my nan anyways... she just laughs. Says I'm getting what I deserve *young person laughed*.' Conversely, Ahmed stated that his father cries and becomes 'really upset' in court and had no other family members that had been involved in the system. During the interview there were several instances of dissonance around his violence expressed, for example Ahmed stated 'I am a good person, but just like obviously I'm here, because like I've done

bad and bad things and stuff. I've already stopped anyways. All my charges are from early this year.'

There were similarities between males and females, specifically regarding social and community identity and readiness to use violence. It was important to both males and females to hold a social identity or reputation for readiness to fight. Failure to be ready had important social consequences. If young people did not engage in violence when called upon, they faced rejection from peer groups which also may be accompanied by being assaulted themselves. For young women, this meant ensuring that they were seen to get at least one kick or punch in, even if they became known as the 'last one into the fight'. Similarly, we observed the role that violence played in group positionality and hierarchy. In both cohorts, group positionality appeared to be related to a history or reputation of violence having occurred in the past — that is, greater perceived social respect if someone has 'proved themselves' violently.

At both the individual and wider levels, young women had a complex experience of belonging and connection within their communities that at times came across as fatalistic. Their use of violence within and outside interpersonal relationships was often (but not always) contextualised by survival. And despite sharing narratives that could be interpreted as fatalistic, they also viewed themselves as resourceful and resilient.

At the individual level, connection and belonging were often linked to housing and family stability. As Rose, who was homeless at the time, stated, 'I live here, there and everywhere — it's shit'. For those in more secure, but overcrowded, public housing, the situation was slightly different, as explained by Josie: 'I guess it's alright, boring, too many people … lots of the ferals moved out, has made it better and feel safe'.

More broadly, examples of torn loyalties were provided in terms of being both connected to place by a sense of belonging 'it's shit but you know what you're getting at least' (Rose), but also being stuck in place, as described by Harley: 'I chose the criminal life, all my mates are criminals … as soon as people realise that postcode [where Harley lives] they think they know all about me … it's hard to make friends from anywhere else'. Conversations centred around place, space, community and belonging, as the young women detailed their desire to be connected to their community while also acknowledging such connections carried risk (Rak, 2022). These stories are not to suggest that the young women were without power or community influence. Many examples were shared, both through story and as witnessed by the facilitators, of females policing what was permissible within the community. As echoed in the work of Littman et al., (2020), violent consequences were enacted by the females if these community norms were breached.

The experiences of the young males were similar; however, there were differences regarding the links between connectedness, housing, and survival. The young men in the cohort identified with their local area in terms of a relationship to violence and crime. This relationship included social elements of belonging and group membership, social standing or being 'known', and ties to local areas. For example, Adnan stated, 'that's everyone bro, you wanna be known as a person. Ya wanna big-note yourself. Known in the area, everyone to know your name. Whatever area you're in, you wanna be known'. This idea of being 'known' in Adnan's local area was mostly tied to the capacity to be violent or a threat to others. It was also more related to social standing or hierarchy than belonging. Further, Adnan stated, 'if I changed [moved area], then I'd have my name like in my old area, not the new place … then I'd have to go hang out with all the criminals, do the crim shit again'. This statement reflected a sense of loss of belonging and community, not a fresh start, if the young person moved to another community. Young men also frequently discussed 'in- and out-

group' memberships related to violence, particularly around inner and outer Western Sydney. Several stories were found in the narratives about group-based violence between young men from different areas of Sydney.

At the individual level, the relationship between local area and violence was discussed in terms of the effects that an area had on the young men in terms of trauma exposure and resilience. For example, Brendan noted, 'I'm from a rough neighbourhood and it makes you resilient to shit it throws at you, but it does fuck you up too." This identification of his neighbourhood as 'rough' indicated high rates of violence in the community that suggested (as was evident from the rest of the narrative) that he was not shocked or afraid of violence, but usually assumed that violence would occur, and that he always had to be ready.

This comparative analysis should be understood in the context of several limitations. There is a difference in data collection methods between the cohorts, and more hours were spent with individuals in the NNN groups. There is also an argument for a lack of generalisability given the sizes of the samples. The two separate studies from which data were compared in this paper are methodologically dissimilar. Study 1 was situated within an intervention program and Study 2 was focused on semi- structured interviews; however, the authors suggest that while these differences are important to note, the process of a third layer of joint thematic analysis of data from the two separate studies mitigates loss of method integrity. Further research with more streamlined data collection and analysis is required to replicate and further these initial findings and reflections.

1.7 Originality

Our understandings of youth violence, both within and outside interpersonal relationships, continues to evolve and change, and as it does- so too must practice interventions. This paper suggests that there needs to be a greater willingness, through co-design and co-production, to seek the experiences of those using violence in our policy and

practice responses. Seeking the voices of young people who use violence does not validate their use of violence, rather it aims to understand, learn, and validate the circumstances motivating and preceding the violence, especially when considering gender. While recognising the limitations from differing data sources and data collection methods, the gendered differences in our findings have important implications for gender responsive practice. These implications are instructive to the potential value of methods that are both trauma-informed, as well as being culturally responsive. The instructive difference in the data collection methods indicate that there is potential in trauma informed and culturally safe ways of engaging with and exploring the experiences of justice involved young people for more responsive evidence to inform policy and practice. As the focus on youth-perpetrated violence from both a policy and practice perspective increases, continued work on the methods outlined is needed for ongoing learning and practice development to occur.

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