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LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY UPDATE - JANUARY 2020

SPORT AND SERIOUS YOUTH VIOLENCE

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Welcome to the second literature review summary on sport and youth offending in this series! The first literature review summary was published in 2019 and looked at why young people offend, the role of sport in promoting desistance and early interventions for young people at risk of offending. As the original content has not been included in this literature review summary, it is recommended that the two literature review summary leaflets should be read in order of publication. The first literature review summary can be downloaded

"On behalf of Derbyshire Police & Crime Commissioner, in collaboration with StreetGames, we would like to thank Loughborough University for producing this literature review which has been written as part of a wider programme of research being undertaken to advance understanding around the role of sport in helping to combat youth crime and anti-social behaviour"

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INTRODUCTION

This literature review provides academically informed insight on the role of sport in addressing serious violence and crime for young people. This review sits within the context of HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy (2018) which outlines efforts 'to break the deadly cycle of violence that devastates the lives of individuals, families and communities' (p7). The review focuses on early intervention and prevention which is one of the four key themes within the Serious Violence Strategy and summarises current evidence around the most appropriate and effective ways of utilising sport in this context.

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH VIOLENCE

Serious Youth Violence (SYV) is understood to have significant negative consequences for young people, both as victims and perpetrators as well as for communities and society (Dahlberg and Krug, 2002). Levels of homicide, knife crime and gun crime have risen since 2014 (ONS, 2019) leading to an increased focus on serious youth violence. This section provides insight on the causes of serious youth violence.

Definition of youth violence

The World Health Organisation (2002, p 4) defines violence as 'the intentional use of physical force of power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation'.

The working definition of Serious Youth Violence (SYV) includes aggravated assault, murder, rape and robbery (Malti and Averdijk, 2017). SYV is also closely linked to aggressive behaviour, not always against the law, which can be defined as intentionally causing physical or psychological harm to others and can include arguing, physical attacks and reputational damage (Krahe, 2013). Carrying a knife or weapon is also associated with violence (McAra and McVie, 2016).

Who gets involved in youth violence?

Moffitt (1993) suggests that there are two groups of young people who engage in SYV. The first group of young people start their involvement at an early age and this persists into adulthood resulting in patterns of violent behaviour.

The second group are only involved in SYV during adolescence, usually on an occasional basis. Poverty experienced at both household and neighbourhood levels is a shared characteristic of both groups.

Reasons for involvement in youth violence

It is important to recognise that young people's involvement in serious youth violence and crime is complex and contested – there is not one single reason why a young person becomes involved (Thompson, 2019).

McAra and McVie (2016, p 75) suggest that violence is a 'mechanism used by young people to overcome experiences of vulnerability and adversity'. Vulnerable young people who become involved in violence may have limited opportunities for gaining status in a pro-social way and do not see education as a route to self-advancement (McAra and McVie, 2016). Violence may, therefore, be seen as a way for the young person to exert power and to develop a sense of self (McAra and McVie, 2016).

Van der Kolk (n.d) argues that a deficit in emotional self-regulation as a result of complex trauma can also result in aggression as a form of excessive behaviour and may involve acting out a traumatic past including, for example, behaving as a perpetrator.

Situational factors such as intense peer pressure and specific adolescent developmental changes such as an increase in reward seeking may act as triggers for an involvement in SYV for some young people (Steinberg, 2008).

Transient involvement in youth violence

Rational choice theory (Becker, 1968) suggests that prior to committing a crime a young person weighs the potential risks and costs against potential benefits. As the desire for rewards is elevated during adolescence (Galvan, 2013), the potential benefits of receiving admiration from their peers and the 'thrill' experience outweighs the perceived chances of getting caught and punished and any social disapproval. As a result of the maturation process, this desire for rewards eventually reduces, typically starting at the age of fifteen years (Steinberg, 2008).

Involvement in gangs and violence

Youth gang members contribute disproportionately to overall levels of crime, including violent and serious offences, known to have an adverse impact on local communities (O'Brien et al., 2013). Gang membership is known to be associated with knife and gun crime and more recently with county lines and child criminal exploitation.

Risk factors for young people getting involved in gangs are highly complex and operate across multiple domains including the individual, peers, family, school and the community. Andershed et al. (2016) suggest that the prevalence of multiple risk factors is worthy of consideration as a predictor of who will get involved in youth offending. However, the nature and the complexity of these risk factors means that it is impossible to accurately predict which young people will become gang members. Nevertheless, common factors for young people's involvement in gangs are socio-economic disadvantage and vulnerabilities of the young people (Gebo, 2016).

Ward and Maruna (2007) suggest that it might be helpful to consider the extent of internal and external obstacles (rather than risk factors) that may drive a young person to become involved in anti-social or offending behaviour as this may mean that they have too few strengths to be able to adopt a pro-social approach to life.

McAra and McVie (2016) highlight that young people involved in violence are often highly vulnerable and display high levels of victimisation. The context of childhood trauma in the form of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) is significant for its impact on child behaviour (van der Kolk, n.d.) including the link to youth offending (Fox et al., 2015).

Reasons for joining gangs are complex and cannot be understood as a conscious decision to become involved. Gang members are mainly male, often seeking a sense of family, bonding and a sense of belonging.

Girls who belong to gangs are more likely to enter and exit gangs at an earlier age than boys and to commit more crime than 'non-gang' girls. Their reasons for joining gangs are usually linked to delinquent peers and social disorganisation. Sutton (2017) also points out that 'gang' girls are more likely to have experienced physical and sexual abuse and may join gangs for protection, a sense of family and to escape the history of trauma even though this may increase their risk of victimization by members of their own gang.

Most young people's involvement in gangs is fluid and temporary, lasting for an average of one to two years and membership is again related to maturation. However, membership of a gang is associated with frequent and ongoing exposure to violence and trauma (Quinn et al., 2017) and may have consequences for life (Carson et al., 2013). This includes long-lasting physical and mental health problems (Gilman et al., 2014) as well as lower educational attainment, unemployment, economic hardship, family problems, sustained delinquency and increased probability of arrest (Dong and Kroh, 2016).

Involvement in county lines and violence

County lines drug dealing is a rapidly evolving illicit drug supply model which sees urban drug gangs cross police borders to courier heroin and crack cocaine to rural or coastal towns (HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy, 2018).

Robinson et al. (2019) suggest that in the context of county lines and drug dealing:

- Criminal gangs seek marginalised, vulnerable young people, mainly males, from care home settings, those not attending school and typically in areas of socio-economic disadvantage to sell drugs.

- Young people involved in cannabis supply had often been drawn into county lines activity to pay off a debt. Victims, usually male, were unlikely to see themselves as being exploited and rejected the victim label 'to uphold their masculine status and professed it was their own choice' (p 706).

- Involvement often resulted in exposure to the risk of violence, danger and contact with the criminal justice system.

PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE THROUGH EARLY INTERVENTION

Haines and Case (2018) argue that the prevention of offending is important as contact with the youth justice system can encourage re-offending. They argue that:

> *What works are child-friendly interventions, diversion from the formal youth justice system, practice underpinned by engagement, participation and evidence-based partnerships.*

> *Interventions at a later stage that are focused on treating offenders have the potential to make matters worse. This includes the toxic mixing with other offenders, not addressing the causes, a feeling of illegitimate treatment by the young person and restrictions on future opportunities through labelling and criminalisation.*

Different approaches to early intervention and prevention

Early intervention and prevention work can adopt universal or targeted approaches (HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy, 2018). The HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy (2018) cautions that the evidence of long-term benefits of both types of programme is limited.

- Universal (primary prevention) approaches include all young people who can access the programme regardless of risk factors.

- Targeted (Second or early intervention) approaches that are based on work with specific individuals and sub-populations (Hennigan et al., 2015).

These approaches can be used before violence takes place at the primary level, immediately after violence has taken place with the attempt to prevent short-term consequences at the secondary level or after violence has taken place with the attempt to prevent long-term consequences at the tertiary level (HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy, 2018). In the sporting context, the focus is often placed on early intervention and prevention work at the primary and secondary work as interventions at the tertiary level require significant levels of expertise and resources.

Universal (Primary prevention)

Key aims identified in HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy (2018) for universal intervention programmes are:

- To build resilience, self-confidence and character in young people

- To support positive choices and provide young people with the ability to engage positively with society

- To improve critical thinking skills

- To provide a healthy, stable and supportive framework in home or school

Prevention programmes are likely to be more acceptable to the community and more easily adopted (Gebo, 2016). They should start at primary school age and continue into late adolescence to reduce the likelihood of young people getting involved in serious violence (Dubow et al., 2016). McAra and McVie (2016) suggest that prevention focused specifically on communities with high levels of poverty and adversity could result in a positive reduction in youth violence.

However, Hennigan et al. (2015) caution that universal approaches might lack the intensity and focus needed to address the needs of high-risk youth who might choose not to attend or, who might drop out of universal programmes.

Targeted (Secondary prevention)

Key aims identified in HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy (2018) for targeted early intervention programmes are:

- To build resilience

- To provide support for young people at risk of being drawn into crime

- To engage with young people at the 'teachable moment'

Key considerations relevant to a targeted approach include:

- A holistic, usually individual, approach which ideally involves the family as well as the young person can be effective (Hennigan et al., 2015).

- An intervention for targeted young people at risk of or already involved in gangs delivered on an individual basis, local, with the appropriate programme structure and content and with a focus on the most effective age range of 10-16 years (Hennigan et al., 2015).

Key challenges for a targeted approach:

Difficult to identify and engage the high-risk young people who need it most even if programmes are well-placed and intentioned (Lipsey, 2009).

Referral systems and agencies do not always identify the high-risk young people who would benefit from these programmes (Melde et al., 2011).

Interventions should avoid creating opportunities for unsupervised interaction between 'risky' young people which may result in a form of 'deviancy training' (Hennigan et al., 2010).

Running programmes in areas where street gangs already operate is very challenging because of the community dynamics (Hennigan et al., 2015).

Managing the risk of working with a young person who is already considering joining a gang and who might encourage others in the programme to become gang members (Hennigan et al., 2015).

Targeted programmes should prioritise the following aspects:

- Personal development in the context of the family and in the context of peer relations (Decker et al., 2014; Hennigan et al., 2015).

- Development of a pro-social identity (Thompson, 2019).

- Developing strengths rather than a focus on risk reduction (Hennigan et al., 2015).

- Offering young people the support to reflect and think critically about their futures (Thompson, 2019).

- Offering employment and education programmes with support from practitioners (Thompson, 2019).

- Long-term support for young people at high risk of joining gangs (Lemmon, 2008) and a focus on the behaviours, attitudes and the social contexts related to joining gangs (Klein and Maxson, 2006).

DESISTANCE FROM YOUTH VIOLENCE AND INVOLVEMENT IN GANGS

Where it is too late for prevention as young people are already involved in youth violence, interventions may focus on promoting desistance from violence through tackling young people's involvement in gangs.

> *Gang desistance can be seen for some young people as either a gradual loosening of ties to the gang (although there is a risk that they might return to the gang at a later stage) or as a complete and immediate breaking of ties (Pyrooz et al., 2010).*

> *It might involve a 'critical moment' when a young person wants to leave a gang such as witnessing or being a victim of violence, family changes, employment or moving area (Pyrooz and Decker, 2011). Thompson (2019) argues that this 'critical moment' needs to be combined with appropriate professional support and a positive alternative.*

> *Consequences for leaving a gang can include no consequences, victimization by rival gang members, harassment from law enforcement and less often, victimization by former gang peers. But for some young people who want to leave a gang, it can be described as a case of 'do or die – if the police don't get you, the gang will...' (Thompson, 2019).*

> *An individual may be considered as an ex-gang member in terms of both 'de-identification' – no longer identifying as a gang member and 'dis-engagement' - the severing of ties.*

> *Carson et al. (2013) suggest that in the light of these findings, consideration should be given as to whether intervention programmes should focus on the desistance from crime or on the desistance from the gang.*

ROLE OF SPORT-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Sport's contribution to Universal programmes (Primary prevention)

Sport, in its role as a positive activity, is well placed to take a universal, preventative role. Positive activities are considered as having a useful role for developing young people's resilience and enhancing protective factors (HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy, 2018).

Sport can offer:

- Supervised activity
- Fun and variety
- Pro-social friendships especially for girls
- Activities for normative peer activities
- Positive adult role models
- Support for protective factors such as a safe place, routine activities, setting boundaries, building resilience, a sense of belonging, and a pro-social identity.

The positive role that sport can have for young people who have experienced complex trauma as a result of gang violence either as bystanders or members might also be valuable for sport to consider at the design stage of universal or targeted programmes as appropriate. However, sufficient levels of expertise and resources will need to be put into place to protect against the risk of doing harm.

- Van der Kolk (n.d, p12) recommends that group activities based on 'safety', 'predictability' and 'fun' can make a positive contribution to trauma recovery once young people have received sufficient support to enable them to take part in simple group activities.
- Skuse and Matthew (2014) identify the need for structure and routine in everyday life as well as the need to develop trusting relationships with appropriate adults as the foundation for trauma recovery programmes.

Sport's contribution to Targeted programmes (Secondary prevention)

Sport can make a contribution to targeted early intervention programmes within a holistic approach to working with targeted young people.

Whilst the evidence base for targeted early intervention programmes is still relatively weak, the following factors should be considered in planning a targeted programme that involves sport:

- Targeted delivery requires an appropriate level of expertise of both sport programme managers and delivery staff e.g. coaches, leaders and volunteers.
- Sufficient level of resources to make sure that funding is in place for staff, activities and the time and level of services required to support young people (Big Lottery Fund, 2018).
- Plans for long-term funding to support the effective engagement and relationship-building with young people (Big Lottery Fund, 2018)
- The use of a wider developmental programme of education and support (Big Lottery Fund, 2018).
- Avoiding the use of 'scare tactics' such as bringing together high-risk young people and adult offenders in prison as this increases the likelihood of young people committing crime (HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy, 2018).
- Ability to deliver what has been promised in terms of the engagement and retention of targeted young people and able to collect convincing evidence of the benefits and outcomes.
- Identification of the potential risks if the sports programme does not deliver what has been promised.

It should be noted that the impact of short-term funding can hinder the ability of frontline practitioners to plan ahead and to work collaboratively and can create competition for resources rather than foster collaboration (Big Lottery Fund, 2018).

Challenges associated with demonstrating the impact of sport as a form of prevention and early intervention

As noted above, the evidence base around the use of sport to support prevention and early intervention is limited and there are a number of reasons for this. The academic literature from the youth justice sector suggests that evaluation programmes are often problematic. Reasons include:

- Existing studies are limited in terms of sample size, timing and the lack of longitudinal evaluations (Densley et al., 2016).

- Results of studies are often mixed with some younger teenagers showing a short-term change towards a more negative attitude towards gangs but in the longer term a change towards more pro-gang attitudes as some teenagers are more likely to join gangs when they get older (Densley et al., 2016).

- The 'sleeper effect' which describes how the full results of the intervention can appear at a later date (Esbensen and Matsuda, 2013).

- Only when a programme is delivered with high fidelity can any intervention be attributed to a change and the variability in programme deliverers can make this challenging (Esbensen and Matsuda, 2013).

- It is difficult to collect evidence on the impact of intervention programmes on the protective factors as there is ambiguity about protective factors, how they work and how they interact together (Fortune and Ward, 2017).

- The concept of prevention is problematic for collecting evidence. Demonstrating the impact of prevention is complex since it is not possible to know what might have happened if the programme had not been in place.

- The evidence base does not currently explain why only some young people experiencing high risk factors commit crime or join gangs.

APPENDIX A: Features of an effective intervention for addressing offending and serious violence

Programmes embedded in the community are better at supporting the engagement of young people 'at risk' as this is the foundation of an effective intervention programme (Ungar, 2011).

Garcia-Poole et al. (2019) suggest that further features of an effective intervention for 'at risk' young people should include:

1. Well-defined programme aims.

2. A focus on pre-adolescent and early adolescent years before risk behaviours reach a peak.

3. Personal and social competencies.

4. Consideration of the community dimension in terms of a young person's sense of belonging to the community.

5. Strong referral systems in place.

6. Well-qualified and trained staff.

7. Innovative activities and formats.

8. Regular reviews of strategies to recruit and retain young people, programme duration and session spacing to see what works and to adapt programmes if necessary.

9. High levels of retention.

10. Awareness of types of risk factors for young people.

11. Consideration of group size and composition.

12. Balance between completing paperwork for reporting progress of referrals and spending quality time with young people.

13. Quality assurance built into the programme to secure sufficient funding for continuous programme development.

14. Collection of higher levels of evidence to make sure that the programme is properly implemented and evaluated especially for multi-site programmes.
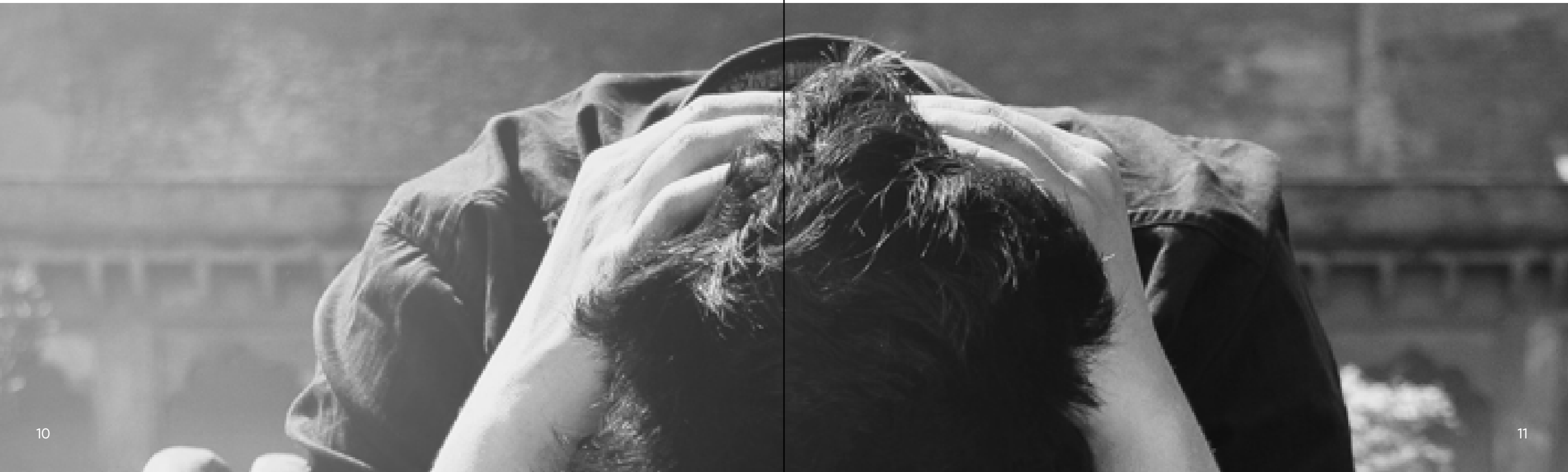
This appendix outlines different approaches that are possible in designing prevention and early intervention programmes. Each approach has been shown to be valuable in different contexts.

A. Enhancing protective factors

B. Pro-social factors

C. Positive youth development

D. Strength-based approaches

E. Mentoring

F. Group-based approaches

G. Approaches for working with girls and young women

A. Protective factors

O'Brien et al. (2013) suggest that protective factors as a form of prevention, in particular, of gang membership are useful and should include the development of:

- Increased parental monitoring and youth coping strategies

- Strong parental involvement and family cohesiveness

- Social skills, interactions with pro-social peers and a belief in moral order

- Commitment to school

This suggests that intervention programmes using sport to promote protective factors might be able to provide opportunities to develop self-esteem, resilience, access to both pro-social peers and adults as well as to foster a sense of belonging.

B. Pro-social factors

The engagement of young people in pro-social activities has been associated with a reduced likelihood of contact with the youth justice system and less contact with gang members (Gebo, 2016). Thompson (2019) highlights the benefits for young people already involved in gangs and serious violence of becoming engaged in pro-social activities:

- Building aspirations

- Something to do – a positive activity

- Able to express themselves

- Building confidence

C. Positive Youth Development

Geldhof et al. (2019) offer the approach of Positive Youth Development based on the five Cs (Competence, Confidence, Character, Caring, Connection) to prevent and remediate negative development and to promote the skills that young people need to thrive in a more preventative context. The five Cs are strength-based and positive outcomes which suggest that when they are all in place, a young person is likely to be thriving.

Garcia-Poole et al. (2019) argue that positive youth development supports protective factors by creating opportunities for: social bonding and engagement, setting pro-social standards, acknowledging positive behaviour, offering constructive pastimes, promoting a commitment to learning and promoting a positive identity.

D. A strengths-based approach

Byrne and Case (2016) argue that interventions should be designed to promote strengths and develop a pro-social identity for sustainable desistance. The needs of the young person need to be prioritised, their capacities, rights and potentialities identified so that interventions are child-focused and developmentally informed.

E. Mentoring programmes

Although there is some evidence from other parts of the world such as the United States of America that vulnerable young people with mentors engage in less deviant and criminal behaviour than those without a mentor (Eby et al., 2008), there is little evidence of mentoring programmes as an effective type of intervention programme in the UK. Nevertheless, mentoring is associated with positive social and emotional benefits, enhanced educational accomplishments and increased self-esteem (Tucker et al., 2019). Mentoring is often used to act as a buffer to negative social contexts including anti-social peer relationships (Gunay and Bacon, 2019) and is considered for use both within sport and youth justice settings.

Characteristics of effective mentoring relationships include:

- Naturally occurring mentor relationships which are often from similar backgrounds and long-lasting (Raposa et al., 2018).

- Sharing common interests and lasting for an extended period of time (DuBois et al., 2011).

- Trust, social levelling and a non-hierarchical mentor-mentee relationship (Gunay and Bacon, 2019).

- Providing a combination of emotional support, educational support and protection from harm ((Tucker et al., 2019).

- Mentor versatility to aid resilience and help the mentee to respond to the stresses that they face (Tucker et al., 2019).

Insight from the Big Lottery Fund (2018) suggests that the following elements should be considered when planning for the delivery of mentoring programmes:

- Sufficient time for the mentor to build a supportive, trusting relationship that can provide the intensive, longitudinal support that a young person needs.

- Finding the right time to intervene and offer ways out of violence – the 'teachable' moment.

- Links to a mental health specialist to support the young person.

- Using sport to engage with the young person and to promote positive values.

F. Group-based programmes

Sport provision for young people is often organised in the community around a group structure, either informally or formally. The benefits of group-based programmes in the context of early intervention and prevention are:

i. Creating a 'sense of belonging' which is helpful for work on the development of identity (Glola, 2016)

ii. More cost effective than individual or family interventions (Garcia-Poole et al., 2019)

iii. Providing unique experiences to facilitate positive development outcomes (Garcia-Poole et al., 2019)

Vysniauskyte-Rimklene and Matuleviclute (2016) promote supportive and caring group environments for:

iv. Establishing healthy relationships

v. Learning from each other

vi. Practising specific competencies and skills

G. Approaches for working with girls and young women

Gomez Auyong et al. (2018) offer three potential approaches for preventing and reducing gang membership by girls; 1) Programmes to develop pro-social friendships; 2) Activities for normative peer activities; and 3) protective factors in the community.

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