

**‘IT’S LIFE BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT’.  
AN IMPACT STUDY LOOKING AT YOUTH  
OFFENDING PRACTITIONERS INTERACTIONS WITH  
THEIR SERVICE USERS.  
AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.**

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**Abstract**

In recent years, studies that aim to understand the experiences of youth justice practice have tended to focus on the practice as a whole using quantitative methods and statistics to explain the trends in offending behaviours rather than the impact this has on the practitioners themselves (Burnett & Appleton, 2004). There has also been a tendency to concentrate solely on the offending behaviour rather than the individual’s behaviour, which is portrayed mainly in negative ways, resulting in even less emphasis on the impacts and implications for practitioner and client relationship. For this very reason, a single participant case study utilising Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, aimed to look into the experience of a practitioner within a youth offending team, to understand the psychological impacts both positive and negative that may occur, in work related situations. The study’s main aim was to extract rich idiographic data, in order to give the researcher a clear and richer understanding of their experiences and coping mechanisms needed to efficiently manage their daily activities. The participant Trevor (pseudonym) was a white male with extensive experience working with young people, also with a youth working background. A youth offending office such as the one in the study was a very busy environment, and unexpected events occurred frequently from the initial observations during part 1 of the interview. Due to the nature of the work, the interview with Trevor had to be conducted in 2 parts to facilitate the study. There was a main theme in the interview, whereby time constraints and adhering to procedures affected the way relationships were built up. Other emerging themes from the semi-structured interview reflected on a reactive practice, whereby immediate action was required, uncertainty in daily planning of duties, resulting in what Trevor described as ‘fire fighting’. However, where policies and procedures are in place, in inter- agency organisations such as youth offending teams, the mix of historical, professional and cultural traditions (Eadie & Canton, 2002) may unfortunately do little to alter these working practices for the foreseeable future, but measures may be introduced to ease these working practices.

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## **Introduction**

As a result of changes in the Criminal Justice System, to tackle youth offending, The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was established and the National Youth Justice Board (YJB), culminated in a network of youth offending teams (YOT's). Section 37 of the CDA 1998(See appendix A for explanation), was described as the 'new youth justice' (Goldson, 2000). It was also stated that, it shall be the principle aim of the youth justice system to prevent offending by children and young people.

Youth offending team staff members have often been described as 'frontline staff' by the very nature of their work, whereby they come into contact with young people on a daily basis. (Trotter, 1999) described the young people as 'involuntary clients'. Involuntary clients by their nature are deemed as being not so forthcoming and do not choose the services of youth justice organisations, and could conceivably be opposed to receiving any interventional support, which in turn creates negative impacts for the practitioner. Trotter (1999) highlights the fact that practitioners working with involuntary clients have the dual role of both legal enforcement and problem solving by all means that are available. Trotter (1999) identifies that involuntary clients do not choose to receive services from criminal justice organisations, whereby the process of engagement and relationship building is key to help the young person desist from their criminal activities.

The reference to individuals as young people can be explained by the use of the semi-structured interviews that were carried out with the interviewee, Trevor (pseudonym). Trevor referred to these individuals as young people throughout the interview.

In order to keep parity, and consistency, reference was made throughout the research to young people. In no way did this reflect nor have any relevance as to any personal views. Also the reference to young people is not gender specific and makes no reference to any particular ethnic group.

The aim of the research was to understand the experience of a youth offending practitioner in their occupational surrounding. Previous qualitative research has concentrated on youth offending teams as a collective whereby linking of results with quantitative data (triangulation) was carried out, although qualitative data was only seen as filling in the missing points. One such study was carried out by (Burnett & Appleton, 2004) although the study was more concerned with occupational culture and an 'ideology of unity' (Crawford, 1994).

The literature regarding occupational culture by Burnett & Appleton (2004) proved to be informative and provided a useful insight into working practices within a newly formed youth offending team brought about by the Crime and Disorder Act 1999. However the interest and reason for the study was to establish the experiences of practitioners more recently as it has been over 10 years since the inception of the YOT. A single case study approach was decided and the participant had vast experience in youth work and youth offending.

From the interviews that were transcribed, the next process was to try and elicit emergent themes that collectively would highlight possible psychological impacts, either positive or

negative in nature that could develop. (Smith, Harre, & van Langenhove, 1995) commented that most research in health and social psychology takes a nomothetic approach to establish general laws regarding human behaviour. However in contrast, IPA takes an idiographic approach, which may reflect certain concerns with the details of particular cases.

Mason & Prior (2008) stated that to fully understand the relationship between practitioner and young offender, the practitioner should be competent enough to fully engage with the young person. The young person's perception of the youth offending team and why they have to attend may seem confusing and they initially may feel as they are being young people enjoying themselves and have not committed anything of a criminal nature. Having the perception that they may be coerced into attending the YOT, (Eadie & Canton, 2002) that they may be suspicious of the processes of youth justice systems in place. From this, there may be a likelihood of the young person not fully engaging in the meetings between the young person and the practitioner, unless effective engagement techniques are applied from the practitioner. The practitioner having gained a wealth of experience and training should be able to identify the needs of the young person, firstly by trying to engage with the young person. Engaging is one of the ten elements that the Youth Justice Board (YJB, 2008), have implemented regarding effective practice (Youth Justice Board of England & Wales, 2003). The process of engagement during the assessment phase should be holistic and is designed to assist the practitioner alleviate problems and to possibly reduce the psychological impact upon themselves and his/her fellow colleagues, when using techniques such as interactive and motivational methods. This may be applied further by forming good and effective relationships between the young and adult in a wider context, henceforth enabling an understanding of each other's cognitive attitudes and behaviour, promoting wellbeing and positive impacts. A well undertaken youth informed assessment will or should potentially alert the practitioner to potential barriers to engagement in terms of maturity thinking, literacy skills and lifestyle issues, and reduce the likelihood of failures to recognize these barriers, all of which should influence how, where and when work is undertaken (Farrow, Kelly and Wilkinson, 2007). The apparent overarching objective of the youth offending staff is to try and reduce or break the cycle of offending and also prevent further offending, by all means possible. This may be achieved by calling upon an extensive range of tools available to themselves such as ASSET assessments (see appendix A for explanation) and certain intervention plans that are available since the inception of National Standards. However as appropriate as this may seem, these standards have often been criticised for leading to unfair and ineffective practice mainly because of the lack of accountability and discretion that will more than likely heighten the impact for the practitioners carrying out their everyday tasks effectively (Eadie & Canton, 2002).

Although practitioners work as an individual, they are also part of a team, and as a team they should be able to share different knowledge and experiences in order to effectively achieve working objectives. Hochschild (1984) set out research on the basis for what she referred to as emotional labour in service work. The collective nature indicated that during times of conflict and abuse, usually from non-willing service users as referred to by Hochschild, rather than feel stressed and angry, it is best to share the experience with a colleague and reduce the immediate impact felt as it happens. Leidner (1993) describes this anger situation as the bureaucratic 'inflexible routines' of the production organisation that intrudes upon the service interaction. As a result of this, the anger from the client is vented at the nearest person, being the practitioner, causing what (Bitner, Booms & Mohr, 1994) described as real and meaningful pain. This would constitute a possible negative psychological impact that the practitioner would need to deal with to prevent further negative effects.

The proposed area of research that is concerned with the possible psychological impacts amongst practitioners dealing with young offenders within youth offending teams has generally been regarded as being under-researched. This is where the effectiveness of qualitative methods such as Discourse Analysis (Yin, 1984) comes into fruition, and most recently Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis has gained in popularity, especially in health care and social psychology areas. Some quantitative methods have been used for research in the past that utilised methods such as, statistical evidence based approaches (Bateman, 2006). In contrast, by using methods such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, rich idiographic data may be extracted from the individuals' experience, by utilising semi-structured interviews. The title of this study, *It's life, But Not as We Know it*, suggests that in most areas of the justice system, salience amongst job roles are seen by the public and an understanding of their role in the justice process, such as the police or courts, but a youth offending practitioner is in essence disassociated from the public and have no concept of their job role and understanding. From this the case study aims to explore this further, and gain an insight into the world of the practitioner and the area of youth offending behaviours, to better understand their experience.

Most of the young people attending the YOT offices will be assessed and put on a referral order. However, Wedd (2005) argued that the referral order can put the reflexive practitioner into potential conflict with their client, and the likely outcome would be an institutionalised bullying and unfairness, thus it could be argued that being invited to agree to a contract in a room full of adults may make the young person feel under unfair pressure, potentially making the job harder for the practitioner, increasing the negative impact put upon the practitioner. Although it may be conceived that practitioners experience would enable them to adapt their approach accordingly for a positive outcome.

Psychological impacts may affect individuals such as youth offending practitioners in the context of their job. Due to the nature of the role they are often described as being 'front stage' occupations, because of the fact that they are dealing face to face with young people for most of their working day. (Eadie and Canton, 2002). This practice environment, with ever changing challenges, can and may have long lasting implications for their ability to sustain employment, relating to the practitioners mental health and wellbeing. This may be due to certain types of exposure to certain unpleasant experiences, often referred to as work place incivilities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that they may face during a working day. The impact may be of both positive and negative in nature. However any type of variation in the day to day life of a practitioner can impact upon this. Much research has been carried out with the view to identify stress factors within a work place setting. From this, personality has been considered to affect the stress process in many ways, for example, a person with high self-esteem and optimism is more likely to view a stressful work situation as challenging, rather than a threatening optimism (Cox; Ferguson & Kivimaki, 1996) which can be defined as expectations of positive experiences and outcomes in one's life.

Modern stress research (Baltes, Reese & Lippit, 1980) have posited regarding the importance of everyday problems that may be regarded as vital factors in development in life events both socially and in the workplace.

As with any particular type of occupation, there invariably involves a certain amount of training, in order for the individual to carry out their tasks efficiently and thus helping to reduce the risk of error (Horsfield, 2003), and in turn reducing the psychological impact upon that person. However, some occupations do involve more risk than others. This certainly can be attributed to a youth offending practitioner, who has little margin for error because of the serious consequences as the matter of public protection is paramount. This possibly may be the case in this study in question, but if not the case, further research may uncover possible

causes or give a better understanding from another angle. An important factor, or probably one of the most important factors would be the implications for their future wellbeing and mental health whilst employed in these occupations, and this is important for the mental wellbeing of the practitioner working within a youth offending team. (Mitchell 1983; Mitchell & Everly, 1993) described such experiences as human trauma, whereby an individual may be faced with a situation that may bring on a feeling of danger (Janik, 1992) although not of disastrous proportions. The event may not be out of the ordinary and may have both positive and negative responses (Selye, 1956)

When reviewing the potential relevant literature for the research topic, a recurring number of salient topics started to become apparent on more than one occasion. Time restraints, uncertainty in work planning and 'role overload' (Freudenberger, 1975) were apparent. Role overload can have lasting impacts upon the individual when exposed to overload for long periods of time. The term was referred to as 'burnout' and possibly has relevance within this field of work. Historically the phenomenon of 'burnout' (Freudenberger, 1975) was simply described as failure or exhaustion because of excessive demands on energy, strength or resources.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Consent for this research project was arranged initially by contacting the participant's immediate line manager in the youth offending team. Permission was requested for someone who would be interested in taking part in the qualitative study. The participant (N=1) was contacted after a letter was posted asking for a case worker/manager, who would be interested in taking part in research was put on the notice board, for all staff to see. Trevor (pseudonym) expressed an interest to take part. He has been with the youth offending team since its inception in 1999, with previous experience working in children's homes and youth work. It should be clear at this stage that the participant agreed voluntarily to take part in the study, and that no incentives were offered to take part.

The aim of the study was to see into the world of youth offending from the perspective of the practitioner, and to experience everyday occurrences that impact upon their wellbeing.

The emphasis on a single case study reflected (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999) regarding researchers adopting small sample sizes and also single case studies mainly because of the primary concern with a detailed account of individual experience.

### ***Data collection***

The primary method of data collection is within the 1-1 semi-structured interview itself, and was conducted solely by the researcher. The interview was conducted in private, in one of the interview rooms at the YOT premises, and was digitally recorded, so as to enable the researcher to make sense of the interviewee making sense of their experiences. This process is commonly referred to as a 'double hermeneutic', whereby the participant is trying to make sense of their world, and at the same time, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2003: 51; Smith, 2004:40).

As is the nature of IPA, verbatim extracts from the transcripts were used in the study, meaning that the data could not be described as being kept confidential. To comply with the School's Research Ethics Committee, the data was described as 'limit to confidentiality', although there was full anonymising of data, and also the digital data was deleted permanently after the date agreed on the consent form.

Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenological method of interviewing is informal, interactive and uses questions designed to elicit descriptions of experiences, to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences of structures of the experience.

The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to explore in detail the participant's view of the topic of interest, in this particular instance, to try and understand the experiences of the practitioner working with young people and possible psychological impacts, whether positive or negative, that may impinge upon practitioners working in the YOT. IPA is an inductive approach insomuch that it is a 'bottom up' approach rather than a 'top down' approach. Deiner (1984) distinguished between a 'bottom up' approach to a 'top down' approach by stating that a 'bottom up' approach is reliant on basic human and universal needs, and if these needs are satisfied, then at this point the person is considered to be happy. This being the case, then the approach was of a phenomenological nature, because of it being concerned with the individual's personal perception or account of their experiences. At the same time, IPA recognizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process and is susceptible to change over time, and also the fact that it recognizes that the outcome of any qualitative analysis represents an interaction between participants' accounts and the researcher's interpretive framework, henceforth, the analysis is both interpretive and phenomenological (Smith, Jarman, Osborn, 1999, p. 218). The interview schedule began with specific questions directed personally at the participant, for example, what do you do on a daily basis in your role? Also the question of how different would their life would be if they worked in another job role? This approach was aimed at making the participant feeling comfortable with the interview, especially as it being recorded, and the assumption would be that if the participant was comfortable talking about themselves at the early stage, the building of 'rapport' would enable them to talk more freely, in order to obtain rich information required. Once the interview was finished, the participant was debriefed, and it was reiterated that the recordings would be deleted after the date given on debrief form, and until that date would remain secure and anonymous.

### ***Ethics***

It was the duty of the researcher to make sure that the research complied with current ethical standards. The complete anonymity of the participant was maintained at all times and it was also imperative that the participant was not put under any undue stress or harm during and after the interview was carried out. The research did meet the current British Psychological Society ethical standards and also complied with the School of Social Science's School Research Ethics Committee (SREC).

### ***Analysis: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.***

This study utilised Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to make sense of and explore the personal accounts and lived experience of the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA in detail aims to explore participants' personal lived experience, and how participants make sense of that personal experience (Smith, 2004:40). Shaw (2010, p178) added that the central objective of IPA was to understand what personal and social experiences mean to people who experience them. It was suggested by Pogrebin (2004) that qualitative studies such as interpretive phenomenological analysis are being utilised more frequently because of the need to supplement statistical models and conclusions with experiential data, thus allowing for a clearer understanding of how to instigate possible interventions to reduce recidivism amongst offenders. This area qualitative research was also

stated by (Miller & Glasner, 2004), whereby qualitative data can fill the gaps to understand the social world as a starting point for commandeering social change.

## Results

The subordinate and superordinate themes that emanated from the interview are listed below in table 1.

Table 1- Superordinate and subordinate themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
1.Sense of Self	1.1 Beliefs/Values,1.2 ,Self-esteem, 1.3 Building Trust Through Interaction
2. Responsibility	2.1 Coping/getting though,2.2 Frustration,
3. Impact	3.1 Emotional Attachment, 3.2 Fire-Fighting,3.3 Vulnerability
4 Reflection	4.1 Personal achievement

### ***The superordinate theme 1- Sense of self***

*Beliefs/values, confidence, self-esteem, trust*

### **Subordinate theme 1.1 beliefs and values**

*“Well that’s interesting because obviously as a youth worker erm, my background has always been looking after the welfare needs of young people are paramount erm and their emotional wellbeing is something I am very keen to promote erm, there is a little dilemma that when you see what control the control side of the youth justice system does to young people, as the example I gave you before about what intervention levels and it almost feels as an individual case worker you can only tailor that to make sure for the best outcomes for young people, so yes I am very much welfare based and want to promote health and wellbeing for young people, but I steer a course, as a professional to get the best out of young people , yes they are going to have to jump through hoops, if you like comply with a court order, erm but I do not lose sight of the fact that if I can improve their life experiences, they feel better, and actually they are more likely not to offend, but it is getting that balance”.21:503-523.*

The question that was asked to Trevor was regarding his feelings of whether he was in favour of care or control in youth practice, to which the reader will unanimously sense his desire for a welfare based approach regarding young people in the criminal justice system. The extract conveys to the reader that Trevor’s work history has always been from a welfare stance and the uneasiness he conveys when he talks of what control does to young people in the youth justice system. Historically youth justice has been guided from a welfare based approach, and gradually the shift has moved to a more punitive ‘culture of control’ (Garland, 2001), whereby this was epitomised by a zero tolerance policy incorporating more use of custodial sentences, naming and shaming of young people and a greater emphasis on risk assessments. This apparent uneasiness with control seems to impact on Trevor although the need to adhere to professional boundaries and his description of the young people having to ‘jump through hoops’ conveys that, the relationship building process and engagement has forged a mutual respect between Trevor and the young person whereas a firm approach may be adopted to comply with a court order, but not such a punitive stance whereby all of his work is undone by severe punishment of the young person. Although historically the debate over care or control has shifted between the two poles, critics from both spectrums have argued their case. (O’ Malley, 2001) purported that welfarism had been criticised for creating state dependency, creating a burden on the state agencies and deflecting the responsibilities

away from the individual. Although Trevor's beliefs are of a welfare viewpoint it could be argued that this approach creates a higher workload and pressure for frontline staff such as youth offending practitioners. However a more punitive approach may seem to appease public perceptions of the public, whereas it appears that 'something is being done' or the young person has received their 'just desserts'. Although (Pitts, 1999: 17) states that punitive measures progress young people on the path of more serious crime and creates tensions between practitioner's views over the care or control debate. This dilemma was a salient feature when Trevor mentioned previously the approach from some staff described as 'stand offish' in their approach to some of their clients and this only exacerbates impact upon the individual.

### **Subordinate theme 1.2 self esteem**

*'When you see first-hand the realisation by a young person in a panel meeting that their behaviour has caused harm to others and they start to verbalise what they feel and how they think they could begin to repair that harm it becomes a very powerful and life-changing moment'.*

This extract conveys to the reader of a positive impact for both Trevor and the young person attending in the engagement and relationship building process, whereby a realisation of damage and harm is spoken, allowing the young person to have the chance to verbalise their feelings and to try and put right the damage done. The concept of self-mastery can be traced back to Bandura (1982) in which it was stated that internal beliefs can be used in situations whereby a sense of how well the situations were handled and dealt with, and certainly the extract shows progress and positive impacts. As Trevor mentioned previously that he was a specialist in restorative justice, the personal achievement of all the challenging work he had committed to the young person appeared to pay dividends in the final outcome of what he strives for within his remit as a case manager. From a positive psychological aspect this outcome of success and jubilation of what he described as 'a life changing moment' promoted what (Deiner, 2000) referred to as work happiness, encompassing positive cognitions and emotions that have resulted in a subjective sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction.

### **Subordinate theme 1.3 Building Trust through interaction**

*"Argh, definitely, some staff very much have a very... what could we say.....a very stand-offish approach to young people, they make an appointment, go in very cold erm... very sort of matter of fact, shove work sheets in front of their noses of the young person and expect them to do them and when they automatically and when the person has a little bit of resistance to that, they automatically think they are breaching the order, whereas I prefer to spend a little time erm.. building relationships with the young person, before I even attempt to do more work sheets, etcetera, etcetera, because to me the relationship with the young person is the absolute key, because if you haven't got the relationship you won't get a positive outcome. 10:229- 240.*

Trevor has previously stressed the importance of relationship building as a key element in effective practice to which all YOT staff adhere to the same rules and principles as all other practitioners, building upon trust within an organization. Trust has been defines as a

psychological state that comprises of the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations (Rosseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998: 395).

Jarrett et al. (2005) in their research regarding social capital whereby they describe social capital as a need for a building of relationships with adult and young people to better understand the divide and help to improve a more effective practice for intervention plans. Allport (1954) found that there were similarities in building of relationships in group settings whereby young people's perceptions of adults were of a dismissive and disinterested nature when concerned with the young person's ideas for change. Trevor's descriptive narrative displays tones of disapproval regarding certain staff members who conduct themselves in a negative way with young people. In trying to understand positive and negative impacts that are sometimes out of the practitioner's control, professional discretion can be a significant factor to the wellbeing of the practitioner. The fact that some of the practitioners by the very fact of their approach and working practices may invite negative impacts upon themselves, which can possibly be avoided by using professional discretion. Conflicts in working practices is not uncommon (Burnett & Appleton, 2004) looked at different typologies of YOT practitioner, in a similar vein to (Reiner, 2000) in his descriptions of different types of police officer, which he described as 'cop cultures'. Trevor's working relationship with certain staff regarding cultural and organizational differences will have negative impacts upon the intervention plans and the actions taken regarding the young person (Maguire, Kemshall, Noaks & Wincup: 2001) unless there is an ideology of unity Burnett & Appleton (2004).

### ***The superordinate theme 2- Accepting Responsibility***

*Coping/getting through, Frustration,*

*'Yeah, obviously because ... you know, human interaction being what it is, if you can't shut off, if you have been upset by something, say a young person has been particularly negative or there is some particular behaviours that you know are detrimental or risky behaviours, if they disclose child protection issues or mental health issues, or erm, or they have re-offended, erm, you obviously carry that for the rest of the day, because not only is it a pragmatic process to do something about it, if it is referrals with another colleague or contacting the police etc... etc, erm you also feel let down, obviously because you try and build relationships with that young person, and erm, you feel let down'.6:127-138.*

#### **Subordinate theme 2.1 Coping/getting through**

Trevor's account of his particular frustrations with his daily routine whereby his day does not seem to be going according to plan highlights the unpredictable environment he faces within his working environment. There are negative behavioural issues evident and Trevor's description of 'carrying' issues such as child protection and mental health issues exposes himself to potentially stressful situations, especially as he mentioned '*you obviously carry that for the rest of the day*'.

*"That's a good question erm, I 'm not a drinker sooo... that wouldn't .... I would probably just go home and read or watch television or watch a film, or I like cooking so I would probably cook a meal, go see my partner or whatever". 8: 188-192.*

Trevor conveys in his narrative, a sensible and level headed approach to dealing with a bad day where he may feel stressed, but as he states, he is not a drinker, so that he would not find comfort in alcohol. In this working environment social support from other colleagues doing the same duties would act as a buffer (moderator) of the increased risk associated with high levels of stress and coping mechanisms are important to be an effective practitioner. From this to reduce the effects of stress it was posited that a degree of interaction with co-workers buffered the effects of work stress. Johnson (1986). To further understand stress and its effects on the body, there becomes a point whereby some form of coping mechanism for stress comes into play (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Lazarus & Folkman (1984) posited that one of the scales of positive reinterpretation is a tendency that they termed positive reappraisal which is a type of emotional focused coping mechanism in stressful situations and how to manage stress, perhaps where he states that he may go and see his partner would be a way of seeking social support as an emotional focused coping mechanism.

### **Subordinate theme 2.2 Frustration**

*“Now we do have an issue about how erm.. Restorative justice (RJ), is being delivered because obviously police colleagues out in the communities are using RJ erm sometimes inappropriately as a way of a quick fix , erm , I do have concerns and I am starting to unpick what is going erm out in the community erm , so for example young person shop thefts and you know local beat officer and PCSO become aware of it you know takes the young person back to the shop to apologise erm , we are not really doing a lot , erm is that really RJ? In its truest form as the kid just stands in the shop and says sorry to the shop keeper. Yeah that’s the worry, it is inconsistent, for me RJ is only done properly and it is not a caveat to solve all ills and I think erm unless we get a uniformed approach for RJ, then it is danger it will be used badly (emphasis). With certain police officers and certain PCSO’s and certain communities and that can have a detrimental effect for later on if the young person does come into the youth justice system for the sorts of stuff we try and do, very careful risk assessment, very careful work with people who have caused harm erm but we will have to wait and see, it is early days really.14:342-354.*

From this extract it is clear to the reader that Trevor is frustrated and has reservations regarding the use of restorative justice by other agencies, with which he feels are not properly trained and are using RJ as Trevor describes as a ‘quick fix’. (Jehn, 1995) stated that at any time people work together their difference in opinions and working styles can lead to workplace or task conflict, and if not resolved may lead to frustration and anger. Engestrom (1999) stated that where practitioners from agencies such as youth offending are engaged in shared activities, their professional learning is expanded as they negotiate working practices that cross professional boundaries. The Youth Justice Board set out guidelines for YOT, and police collaboration in the RJ process whereby it was stated that the police and youth offending team should work closely together for the out of court disposal to work effectively. Differences in working styles and agency agendas for closer working relations would reduce the impact and ensure RJ is consistently applied to young people.

### **The superordinate theme 3- Impact**

*Emotional Attachment, Fire-fighting, risky behaviours, vulnerability*

### **Subordinate theme 3.1 Emotional Attachment**

*“Definitely, and I think you need to be aware of that erm, and you need to be aware of where the professional boundaries are, so you may care about the young person and you may deeply worry about the young person but at the end of the day you know they are our clients and they are our service users, they are young people you have to work with. 23: 558-564.*

Trevor conveys to the reader the importance of professional boundaries within his role as case manager and tries to distinguish between the caring and empathetic person who feels the pain with the young person in their proximity.

Originally conceived in social work settings, emotional intelligence sought to motivate an individual and persist in the face of adversity to defer gratification that will regulate moods and emotions (Goleman, 1996) that will keep distress from impairing cognitive functions. The need to care for the young person remains at the core of Trevor's ideology, but on the professional level he conveys the message that the young people are service users and that practitioner and client relationship has professional boundaries.

### **Subordinate theme 3.2 Fire fighting**

*'A bad day is not having your people turn up, or turn up and not wanting to engage, crisis management where someone kicks off with one of the young people and it takes you away from your planned work, and you end up 'fire fighting', because of people becoming homeless, arrested etcetera'..... 2:39-43.*

Trevor's description of 'fire fighting' related to the fact that certain situations in his workplace environment, caused a sense of panic and feeling the need to rush around, akin to a fire fighting situation. This invoked images of panic, danger, a crisis that needs to be dealt with sooner rather than later. A progression of unforeseen occurrences throughout the day mounted up and therefore, too many distractions, finally culminating into a panic situation whereby not enough time to get planned jobs done. (Eadie & Canton, 2002) stated that the first priority any practitioner should be able to do is engage their motivation, at least to the extent of securing attendance reliability for appointments. In the extract, when the researcher asked the question to Trevor to describe a bad day, Trevor emphasised the fact that a major contributing factor that constitutes to a bad day was the fact that young people that do not turn up and not wanting to engage in the session whether through unforeseen circumstances or just not being bothered did have a major impact on Trevor's day. Reducing the impact of non-attendance through a reflective process whereby they may be able to find a way to explain the reasons for the non-attendance or failure to engage (Eadie & Canton, 2002).

The superordinate theme of impact and especially risky behaviours highlighted the complex understanding of the adolescent life development processes of the young person and the possibility of conflict between adult and adolescent cognitive processes that ultimately will have negative impacts placed upon the practitioner, unless equilibrium is sought.

### **Subordinate theme 3.3 Vulnerability**

*'I very, very rarely do get threatened, erm, but I do have concerns of some of the young people's risky behaviours that are carrying knives, weapons, etcetera, etcetera, and etcetera. Erm and all we can do is to highlight these risks and try to address these issues the best we can'. 4:97-101.*

This extract leads the interviewer to believe that Trevor did not have immediate issues with the fear of threat or hostility from the young person in his company. This may be due to perhaps a good understanding and his previous experience in youth work, insomuch that he displayed an understanding and his apparent confidence to deal with conflict resolution effectively. Bandura (1982) described self-efficacy and the social learning theory, the ability to perform a given behaviour pattern. The awareness and expectation within the individual expectations are considered to be the primary cognitive determinant of whether or not an individual will attempt a given behaviour. However there are major concerns with a minority

of the young people entering the YOT offices that appeared to be carrying weapons, in which Trevor described as 'risky behaviours'. The most obvious reason would be that not all of the staff had the same amount of experience as Trevor and the necessary capabilities of dealing with potential conflict, should it arise at any given time. Sportsman (2005) posits that conflict can be described as two or more people viewing issues or situations from different perspectives. This indifference thus leads to conflict arising, and an issue which can arise in any environment regarding practitioner/ client situation.

Beck (1992) stipulated that society exists within a risk environment, with a mixture of positive 'good risks', but moreover outweighed by risks relating to threat, harm or danger, and risk is synonymous with perceptions of young people and predominantly of a criminal nature. Adolescent risky behaviours or 'novelty seeking' behaviour cover a multitude of areas in psychology, from biological explanations and being more relevant with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis( IPA) and also social psychological explanations from the viewpoint of an adolescent's social world, from legal definitions, to deviant ones and to criminal risky behaviours. Adolescence has been described as a period of heightened stress (Spear, 2000). This was probably mainly due to the dynamic processes occurring at the time of development, including the need for independence, physical maturation, increased salience of social and peer relationships and the reduction of parent relationships, and the on-going process of brain development within the young person Blakemore (2008). This period of an adolescent's development stage has been referred to as a period of 'storm and stress', and this development stage in adolescence is a major impact in the understanding process and relationship building with the young person. This conflict of ideas and perceptions of what is unimportant to young people might be significant to an adult. This can be reflected in the perceptions of young people and their behaviour. Collins (1990) stipulated that certain areas of adolescent conflicts may be understood by asking whether and how interactions violate expectations of the young person. Smetana (1988) suggested that many of these conflicts reflected greatly because of differences of opinion and how these differences are defined, such as the differences between right and wrong. Trevor's frustration at not physically having the time to "chitty chat", as Trevor referred to his amusing casual description of interaction, may seem important at this stage to understand each other and build the relationship.

*'It can be quite stressful in meetings with young people, whereby I am introducing conflict to try and get*

*get young people to see , erm, one of the points I am trying to get across, I will challenge young people*

*if they are not compliant, or attitude beliefs or whatever. 4: 93-97.*

From this extract, Trevor mentions that he does invite conflict within meetings with a young person if he feels that the young person is not engaging and being entirely compliant with Trevor. Although at first, it may seem a rather strange thought of introducing conflict into meetings with young people, Trevor through experience has utilised this technique and feels comfortable with conflict and does not appear to have doubts or reservations or fear of harm from the young person. As mentioned previously Trevor refers to his 'toolbox' of various methods he can call upon to interact with the young person to get his point across and engage the young person.

### ***The Superordinate theme 4 – Reminiscing***

#### ***4.1, Personal Achievement,***

#### **Subordinate theme 4.1 Personal Achievement**

*“Yeah, absolutely, absolutely because erm.. you have got to spend time reflecting on your own practice erm, how can you improve for the future erm , and you have got to spend time reflecting on what has gone good and what has gone bad and the reasons behind that erm, so I am not unique, I do self- reflect and try to improve overall practice. There are opportunities ad there are various training days and various bits and bobs of training and we have a practitioner’s forum, so there are opportunities within this particular YOT, for collective reflection. At the moment we are looking a peer erm reflection, for the want of a better word, where the idea is that each person, voluntary it has to be stated, will take on a peer mentoring type role for other people, so peer mentoring can actually raise the standard of people’s confidence. 17: 410-432.*

Trevor was open and honest in his narrative about self-reflecting because he is conscious of the fact that through reflection, the only way to be effective is through learning from experience. (Boud, Cressey & Docherty, 2006) developed the concept of productive collection at work which is an approach to collective reflection and aims to enhance personal engagement and meaning in work environments. According to Boud (1995) all assessment including self-assessment is made up of making decisions about the standards of performance expected and then acting upon the decisions by way of making judgements about the quality of the performance in relation to their standards. This reflects well in Trevor’s narrative where he is realistic and realizes he is not unique but wants to improve overall practice for the benefit of the whole YOT practice and for the positive impacts it will transfer to young people, to reduce the cycle of offending . Brew (1995) states that engaging people in the formulation of the criteria for self- assessment helps them to cement understanding of what relates to positive outcomes such as engagement and reducing conflict.

## **Discussion**

Working in a public sector environment does require a certain amount of acceptance of agency policies (Eadie and Canton 2002). Although a historical culture has been a prominent feature since the formation of youth offending teams during the establishment of The Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Eadie and Canton (2002) postulated that the occupational culture in youth offending is embedded in the requirements of the job and this reflects saliently in its policy and practice.

The findings from the study indicated some of the issues mentioned are a large part of the work dynamics, and depending on personality and experience, coping mechanisms are dependent on the person , although impact the same on them.

In considering the relevance in the findings of the study, it may be suggested that although young people pass through the youth justice system, they are still young people and a clearer and better understanding of their complex needs in their transition into adulthood have resonated throughout the transcripts intertwined with the theme of the journey of Trevor and the impacts both positive and some negatives. Building on the positives within practitioners and service users, as early as 1970’s work with probation officers (Andrews, Keissling, Russell & Grant, 1979) stated that pro- social modelling had become recognised as a key skill in the supervision of offenders and other service users working with involuntary clients Trotter (1999). Practitioners can reinforce pro social modelling simply by smiling, attentive listening and the use of praise when positive actions are carried out. Trotter (2004) found that child protection workers working with young people in the criminal justice system reported better practitioner and client satisfaction and positive outcomes.

Although a single case study was carried out, in no way would it be wise to generalise the findings from this case study, however a brief insight into Trevor’s world as a case manager has given a greater awareness of the relationship between practitioner and young offender. As

is often the case, certain occupations like youth offending practitioners are only perceived and occasionally perceptions are misguided and taken out of context in this area of ambivalence towards youth offending practitioners, and not the portrayal of an exciting job within the criminal justice field.

In contrast to the environment of a busy youth offending environment, when conducting the interviews with Trevor, he was calm and relaxed and the relationship building and trust of which he was so enthusiastic about was evident from the beginning of the interviews, and also the trusting manner seemed evident during the interviews. Conroy (2003) stated that in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the researcher must establish an atmosphere of comfort and trust is paramount for the fullest disclosure of their experiences, of which this was achieved during both sessions with Trevor.

The implications for future research could begin with using a case study sample of a female participant (practitioner), in order to gain an understanding of experiences of a female practitioner working within a youth offending team and explore the 'fusion' (Burnett and Appleton, 2004) of professional shared expertise within the YOT. Blanchette (2001) found that although criminogenic needs between males and females are broadly similar but their importance and association may differ between genders. From this a different set of themes may emerge but together some rich information may emerge regarding gender based offending. It is also worth noting that according to (Dowden & Andrews, 2004:204) very little research has been carried out regarding effective staff practices into the use of the delivery of interventions with young people in the youth justice system.

Although it was anticipated that there would be more negative impacts and incivilities from the young people attending the YOT, Trevor highlighted the fact that there some concerns from the young people or involuntary clients Trotter (1999) by their risky behaviours, however Trevor felt confident enough to bring conflict into sessions with young people, however he stated that some practitioners were 'stand offish' in their approach and these were the practitioners who were more likely to have clients who breach their orders. Although a single case study was adopted in favour of other qualitative methods, it may be argued that a bias effect may occur with the transcripts, however this was not the case, so replication of this method would highlight possible problems, or as a precaution, a small pilot study could be utilised to check this.

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## Appendix A

### **Abbreviations**

ASSET- A structured assessment tool used by YOT's  
CDA 1998- Crime and Disorder Act 1998  
CJS- Criminal Justice System  
COMPASS- Provides treatment for drug/alcohol abuse  
HMIP- Her Majesties Inspectorate of Prisons  
IPA- Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis  
MAPPA- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement  
PSR –Pre Sentence Report  
ROSH- Risk of Serious Harm  
YJB- Youth Justice Board  
YOT- Youth Offending Team

