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Criminological Perspectives on School Exclusion and Youth Offending

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between school exclusion and youth crime and considers what criminological research can add to our understanding. The article first explores the history of the ways in which the criminological implications of school exclusion have been conceptualized, including the link between exclusion and young people's offending, and the so called 'school-to prison pipeline'. There is a long history of work in the UK and the US that explores how processes of school exclusion contribute to youth crime, the trajectory from the label of 'troublemaker' to more serious deviance, and how disciplinary polices can themselves lead to criminalization. As we show, the relationship is complex and establishing causality is difficult. We then consider more recent work on how school exclusion contributes to the vulnerability and exploitation of marginalized young people. Finally, we argue for understanding young people's lives, their educational experiences, and their involvement in offending, holistically and 'in the round', taking account of all their relationships and activities and employing contextual approaches to addressing these problems.

Keywords: Exclusion, youth offending, school-to-prison-pipeline, child criminal exploitation, contextual safeguarding.

Introduction

In criminology, school exclusion has been recognised as an important risk factor in the development of youth offending and the 'school-to-prison-pipeline' has been perceived as a fast-track trajectory driven by punitive responses to some young people's transgressions. Consequently, school exclusionary practices and policies have been conceptualised within an institutional framework, and as one of the processes of wider processes of social exclusion for some children and their families.

Despite a correlation between school exclusion and crime, the relationship is complex, and the different factors involved require unpacking. This article explores how school exclusion and youth crime interplay in some young people's lives and reviews some of the evidence from other studies. We show how it is difficult to determine the precise mechanisms at work or to evidence causality and that the relationship needs to be understood in term of how it intersects with other forms of structural disadvantage and discrimination. We argue that young people's lives, their educational experiences, and their involvement in offending, need to be understood holistically and 'in the round,' taking a contextual approach to addressing their vulnerabilities and problems.

Explaining the Relationship between School Exclusion and Youth Offending

School exclusion has been identified as a crucial event in some young people's lives and a critical component of their social marginalisation. Literature in the fields of education and criminology has acknowledged that both schooling and its disciplinary mechanisms, and the criminal justice system, can exacerbate and help reproduce socioeconomic, race, and gender differences. Numerous studies have identified that young people with particular characteristics are more likely to be excluded from school: being male, of Black-Caribbean origin, in local authority care, of lower socioeconomic background, having a special educational need (SEN), and having a mental health condition, all increase the likelihood (McCluskey et al. 2019; Hayden 1997; Williamson and Cullingford 2003; McCluskey 2008a; Briggs 2010; Meiners 2013; Strand and Fletcher 2014; Cole 2015.) Furthermore, young people experience accumulated disadvantage when the consequences of school exclusion intersect with poverty, poor health and housing, and difficult family circumstances (McCluskey et al. 2019: 1156).

Research across jurisdictions has shown that many young people within the justice system (Sanders, Liebenberg and Munford 2018) and a high percentage of adult offenders have been excluded from school (Ministry of Justice 2012; Halsey and de Vel-Palumbo 2020). Moreover, some studies have revealed that school exclusion can have life-long unfavourable consequences, including increased likelihood of criminal victimisation, involvement in crime, and imprisonment (Wolf and Kupchik 2017). A wide range of academic studies have identified a relationship between school exclusion and offending, finding both an increased likelihood of offending following exclusion and an increase in severity (Berridge et al 2001). McAra and McVie in the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, for example, found that pupils excluded from school at the age of twelve years old were four times as likely as other children to be jailed as adults (McAra & McVie, 2010.)

The link between exclusion and youth offending has been identified in a range of government and policy reports, for example the government's recent Serious Violence Strategy (Home Office 2018) has recognised school exclusion as one of the risk factors for involvement in serious violence. Research on the educational background of young people convicted of knife possession has indicated that knife possession is more prevalent amongst those that have been excluded from school (Ministry of Justice 2018).

As summarised in government's Timpson Review of School Exclusion (2019), available evidence in the UK shows exclusion as a marker for being at higher risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of crime. In 2014 23% of young offenders sentenced to less than 12 months in custody had been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentence date (Home Office 2018). Although a link has been consistently found, the Timpson Review identifies the lack of

causal evidence: '… it would be wrong to suggest that we have evidence that exclusion of any kind causes crime or that preventing the use of exclusion would, in itself, prevent crime. There are many factors that may lead a child to becoming involved in criminal activity, and for some children these factors may well have been the cause for them to have been excluded from school.' (Timpson Review 2019: 8). Berridge et al also identified the complexity of the relationship between exclusion and offending:

'Given that exclusion should be reserved for only the most serious acts of misbehaviour, it is unsurprising that there is an overlap between those who are excluded from school and those who become involved in offending. However, relatively little is known about the way in which this relationship unfolds, and the mechanisms through which it operates. Both exclusion and offending involve complex social processes, and their incidence is affected by a wide range of factors. Any attempt to understand the interaction between exclusion and offending is, therefore, likely to be a complicated exercise.' (Berridge et al 2001: 1)

It is also important to note that both crime statistics and exclusion statistics are subject to complex processes of filtering and construction. Police recorded crimes necessarily only reflect those reported or detected, and recorded, as offences. Exclusion statistics reflect similar filtering processes, are subject to varying recording practices, and do not include more informal punitive sanctions, for example. Even a clear correlation needs to be understood with this caveat. However, evidence does show that exclusions are 'one indicator, among others, of a higher risk of exposure to and involvement in crime, and we should therefore fully consider the form and content of the education a child receives following exclusion, in efforts to prevent and tackle serious violence' (Timpson Review 2019: 8).

The contribution of criminological approaches

Developmental and life course criminologists have argued that the beginnings of children's criminal careers are not necessarily determined by school exclusion, although it remains one of the elements in their offending trajectories (see, for example, Farrington 1994 and 1996; Sampson and Laub 1993; Hodgson and Webb 2005: 21) and being excluded from school has been identified as an important risk factor (Ball and Connolly 2000; see also Williamson and Cullingford 2003: 310).

Some authors have argued that there is a direct relationship between school exclusion and later involvement in the criminal justice system, and an indirect link via contact with negative peers and delinquent behaviour that follows school exclusion (Sanders, Liebenberg and Munford 2018). Yet others have concluded that school exclusion does not, in itself, increase the probability of criminal engagement. As 90 % of their research participants stated that their offending began prior to having been expelled from school, Hodgson and Webb have concluded that attempts to establish a causal, rather than a declaratory, connection between exclusion and youth crime remain weak (Hodgson and Webb 2005: 14). Nevertheless, both groups of authors (those suggesting a causal association between school exclusion and crime, as well as those that are sceptical about causality) have stressed the importance of exploring the precise mechanisms through which school exclusion *could* lead to youth offending.

The ways in which exclusion might contribute to the onset of criminal behaviour can usefully be conceptualised through a number of criminological theories. Explanations are focused on different factors, including the damaging effects of school failure and losing the protective factors of education following exclusion; effects of exclusion on identity and the trajectory

from the label of ‘troublemaker’ to more serious deviance; and how disciplinary polices can themselves lead to criminalisation.

Some theorists identify the role of schools as key sites of socialisation and supervision, protective factors that are removed with exclusion. In their General Theory of Crime, Gottfredson and Hirschi argued that a child’s self-control was the most crucial factor in minimising their propensity for delinquency. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi, stable childrearing was pivotal for the development of self-regulation since the inability of a young person to delay gratification — and a consequent increased probability that they will become an offender — was, to a great extent, triggered by parental failure to monitor the child, notice their inappropriate behaviour, and prevent it (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 97). Hirschi’s earlier work identified schools as having an important role in developing elements of the social bond such as attachment and commitment to conventional life that would encourage conformity (Hirschi 1969). Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory of informal social control (1993: 19-20) highlighted the importance of social control from schools to preventing delinquency, along with families. Cohen and Felson’s routine activities theory (1979) argues that a crime occurs when there is a motivated offender, an appropriate victim, a suitable target, and when capable guardians are absent. In light of these theories and in the debate on school exclusion and youth offending, the excluded child might engage in crime when not being appropriately supervised by their parents, teachers or other capable guardians; when missing the socialising function of school; and may lack self-control and be motivated to commit an offense against an available target when the opportunity arises.

Social reaction theorists focus on the consequences of frequently ascribing the label of ‘troublemaker’ in an institutional context, which could be criminogenic in itself through its

impact on self-identity (Lemert 1972). In addition to these secondary deviance effects, excluding young people and pushing them on alternative educational pathways might further marginalise them and/or prepare them for occupations that are not in high demand in post-industrial countries, and could therefore be a contributing factor towards offending pathways either independently (Savolainen et al. 2013) or through young people embracing the street culture of similarly vulnerable peers.

As far back as the 1950s, Albert Cohen identified school as a source of 'status frustration' for disadvantaged young people, arguing that is was imbued with middle class standards and preoccupied with academic achievement (Cohen 1955). Since some children were unable to follow these demands, Cohen argued that they resolved their anxiety through 'reaction formation' that could result in their exclusion and in establishing ties with gangs, permeated with values alternative to those of the school milieu. The pressures put onto students by the education system and the injustice they felt generated defiance (Cohen 1955: 84, 133-136). Similarly, but in the context of contemporary urban London, Briggs (2010) has argued that excluded young people are more likely to engage in street culture with other equally marginalised peers that they perceive as sources of support. According to Briggs, peer groups become a sanctuary for educationally disaffected young people, and the socio-cultural circumstances of gang-involvement then shape their perceptions about the world and their life chances within it. As adapting to the 'street code' makes it less likely that young people will engage in normative behaviour and activities, including education and employment, crime becomes a viable option to gain respect and prestige (Briggs 2010: 11, 17-18). At the same time, young people that are excluded from school cannot access support systems that would normally be in place within the school environment (e.g. drug prevention programmes, leisure

and sports activities, youth clubs) making them further susceptible to victimisation and marginalisation (see, for example, McCrystal, Higgins and Percy 2006).

The metaphor of the school-to-prison-pipeline stands for all the processes through which pupils whose behaviour violates disciplinary rules are filtered out of the educational environment and channelled into the youth justice system (Sanders, Liebenberg and Munford 2018: 3). The school-to-prison pipeline has been conceptualised as an escalation of trouble and stigma across a range of different locations, including welfare-oriented institutional contexts. While studying how young people negotiate formal and informal orders that impact on the development of their offending identities in Scotland, McAra and McVie (2012: 353) have shown that schooling is one of the 'regulatory practices' that impel delinquency in some young people more than in others and propel pupils of different backgrounds in divergent directions. McAra and McVie have found that young people's deviant pathways emerge before their contact with youth justice officials, and particularly in schools. The same children are continuously labelled 'troublemakers' by teachers and often find it impossible to shrug off these labels, even in cases of subsequent appropriate and conforming behaviour or high academic performance. Also, these labelling processes seem to be based on the reputation and socioeconomic status of certain families, rather than only on the gravity of the pupil's challenging behaviour, and often result in school exclusion (McAra and McVie 2012: 356-357).

McAra and McVie's study has shown that formal labelling continues through the targeting of young people from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds as 'usual suspects' by police, and an ongoing 'filtering process' which drives these young people further into the youth justice system (McAra and McVie 2005 and 2007: 337). This trajectory, however, does not depend only on the seriousness of their offences, but also on prior system contact and

circumstances that they cannot control, including their social disadvantage. Repeated institutional interventions (including school exclusion) based on external elements that are outside of a young person's control, lead to additional surveillance and reinforce deviant labels which become entrenched, making desistance less likely (McAra and McVie 2007: 334-339).

The findings of contemporary research conducted in educational and justice settings shows that troublemaking identities and disparities in treatment according to the personal characteristics of some young people could be reproduced through the exclusionary practices of schools, law enforcement, and the youth justice system, although as McAra and McVie (2012) have argued, in theory individuals can manage and transcend such institutional effects. Schools, law enforcement agencies, and other formal settings are closed environments, where the same personnel continuously work with young people. As the school ethos and the institutional working cultures of the justice system might be imbued with stereotypes about young people's reputation and the transmission of deviant behaviour, this could contribute to 'path dependency,' which makes it harder for some young people to negotiate new identities and so break free from offending trajectories (McAra and McVie 2012: 348-371).

School exclusion could therefore be said to play an important part in guiding some young people towards justice system involvement. A more radical approach might construct schools as locations of intervention, diverting children away from the potential harms of entering the youth justice system. More specifically, schools could act as points that disrupt the transitions of youth into the system by avoiding exclusionary responses, adapting their learning environments, and meeting the needs of young people that manifest in emotional and behavioural difficulties (Sanders, Liebenberg and Munford 2018: 13-14). The next section of this paper will demonstrate that school cultures in the US and England still display punitive

and exclusionary tendencies and are far from achieving more inclusionary aims. We will argue that in order to reverse this trend, young people's lives, their educational experiences, and their involvement in offending should be understood holistically and 'in the round', taking into account all of their relationships and activities.

In the US context, Simon highlights the criminalization of schools in some parts of the country through the media and what he calls 'fortress tactics', which include mandatory drug testing, metal detectors, searches, and surveillance systems (Simon 2007: 208), so their very image symbolises the link between schools and justice responses to youth deviance. At those schools, metal detectors are placed at entrances, security staff outnumber the teachers, police searches are regular (Simon 2007: 207-211) and pupils' behavioural problems are addressed as 'quasi-crimes' (Simon 2007: 207-218), which results in draconian sanctions like referring students to 'punishing rooms' and school exclusions (Simon 2007: 207-218). The practices outlined by Simon reflect an official punitive turn in resolving pupils' misbehaviour and extreme examples of criminal justice infiltrating the education system. He uses the term 'penal pedagogy' as a metaphor for the range of innovations that the schools have adopted which are borrowed directly from criminal justice (e.g. zero-tolerance approaches and in-school detention).

Kupchik, Green and Mowen (2015) similarly argue that 'American policy discourse is predominantly punitive, harsh punishment strategies are favored, and policy makers have centralized decision-making power outside of the classroom.' In contrast, they suggest, 'English policy discourse about and policy responses to student misbehaviour focus more on reducing social exclusion, improving student behaviour, and returning the locus of control over rule enforcement to teachers.' (2015: 11) Nevertheless, Kupchik, Green and Mowen's (2015: 11-16) research has shown that formal differences in school management discourses between

the two countries play out quite similarly, as their disciplinary strategies on the ground result in near-equal exclusion rates and similar rates of overrepresentation of disadvantaged pupils.

Corrective practices in England's educational settings may be less punitive than some of the more extreme examples in the US, but English settings do demonstrate a similar exclusionary tendency. It could be argued that educational punishment and disciplinary practices, including exclusion, could thus be — together with policing, detention, immigration enforcement, housing and social services — conceptualised as one of the 'tentacles' of the carceral state (Meiners 2013: 263-264).

A number of empirical studies have attempted to study the effects of exclusion on offending using large data sets and to disentangle some of the factors at work. Hirschfield (2018) provides a comprehensive review of empirical assessments of the effects of schools and school experiences on crime across a range of domains including the damaging effects of school failure, a broad range of punishments including exclusion, and the effects of the 'school-crime crackdown' and policing. As Hirschfield shows, studies have identified numerous direct and indirect pathways through which enhanced school policing and punishment may increase levels of crime and criminalization, described by the popular term 'the school-to-prison pipeline'. As he argues, documenting dispositive and cumulative effects of school sanctions on criminalization is challenging, and that one of the toughest hurdles is isolating the effects of school-based sanctions from the behavioural problems that generally precede and succeed them. Hirschfield cites the work of Fabelo et al. (2011) which attempts to minimise the confounding influence of misbehaviour by controlling for a range of other official risk indicators and modelling the effects of discretionary suspensions, which tend to be given in response to a wider range of behaviours. This study found that discretionary suspensions or expulsions nearly tripled the risk of juvenile justice involvement in the next academic year.

Hirschfield also cites work by Mowen & Brent (2016) which used national survey data in the US and controlled for time-varying offending frequency, observing that suspension and dropout each independently predicted the risk of arrest (Mowen & Brent 2016). Hirschfied points to the difficulty of disaggregating the influences of closely interrelated endogenous school factors because 'the constructs of greatest interest to most criminologists who study schools and crime are tangled in a web of proximate, reciprocal influence' (Hirschfield 2018: 163) Hirschfield proposes an ambitious research agenda with a range of methods that might promote stronger causal inferences to make criminological research on the school-crime nexus more timely, policy relevant, and rigorous, but also acknowledges the importance of qualitative research on young people's experiences to inform this programme of work.

Twenty years ago, a study by Berridge et al (2001) investigated whether, and to what extent, permanent exclusion from school had an independent effect upon the offending careers of 343 young people in six local authorities in England. They found that a substantial proportion of permanently excluded young people, 178 of 297, were involved in crime. Their qualitative interviews explored the impact of exclusion on the lives of the young people and suggest some of the processes that might be at work:

'permanent exclusion tended to trigger a complex chain of events which served to loosen the young person's affiliation and commitment to a conventional way of life. This important transition was characterised by: the loss of time structures; a re-casting of identity; a changed relationship with parents and siblings; the erosion of contact with pro-social peers and adults; closer association with similarly situated young people and heightened vulnerability to police surveillance' (Berridge et al 2001: vi)

However, the study also notes that the young people were also were subject to many non-school risk factors that have been identified as associate with persistent involvement in crime (Farrington 1996) and that a high number also experienced other forms of social disadvantage.

Intersecting forms of structural disadvantage and systemic discrimination

Almost thirty years ago, Carlen, Gleeson and Wardhaugh (1992: 46) argued that controlling truancy and behavioural transgressions in school had become — together with other marginalising practices like crime control, neighbourhood ghettoisation, poor public housing, lack of facilities, unsatisfactory welfare and healthcare provision — part of a wider 'civic exclusion.' They argued that rules on school attendance and discipline, as well as family and crime control policies, merged discourses of the decline of discipline with those of parental failure and the general moral malaise. As a consequence, social policies — including, but not limited to those on school exclusion —were shaping practices on the ground, so that schools, social care, law enforcement and the judiciary regulated the children of the underprivileged (punitive path) and contained or diverted the transgressions of the well-to-do (welfare path). Similarly, Levitas (2007) uses the term 'deep exclusion' to describe how people are excluded in a number of different ways operating across a range of domains including employment, education, health, housing, neighbourhoods and crime, resulting in severe negative consequences for wellbeing and life chances. In criminology, the concept of 'cumulative disadvantage' (Sampson and Laub 1997) describes how dynamic processes – including those of official sanctions – systematically erode conventional bonds and compound marginalisation. Conceptualising these processes as multi-dimensional and cumulative draws our attention to the importance of understanding school exclusion and youth offending as part of wider processes with entrenched, long term effects.

Race is of particular importance to understanding systemic disadvantage and discrimination: ‘The main pathways and risk factors for young people into the youth justice system all record high levels of ethnic disproportionality: from school exclusions, the care system, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and first contact with the police.’ (Young Review/Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) in Lammy Review 2017: 17) In particular, Black and mixed ethnic young people are overrepresented in school exclusion (Timpson Review 2019) and the criminal justice system (Lammy Report 2017). There is a need for more research exploring how Black and mixed ethnic youth could be subject to harsher punitive measures, criminalization, and more subtle forms of discrimination. For example, Perera (2020) has argued that Black youth are subject to institutionalised processes of discrimination and exclusion, including heightened processes of surveillance and securitisation, an exclusionary pedagogy that neglects collective histories of colonialism and migration in curricula, and a range of interlocking factors that lead to over-criminalisation. Wroe (2020) identifies racialised notions of criminality and racialised risk narratives that are operationalised by the state and reproduce limiting and deficit-based criminalising responses to young people. As she argues, it is important to interrogate how rapidly evolving safeguarding responses to problems such as county lines might be informed by such narratives and evaluate any disproportionate impact (Wroe 2020)

Vulnerability and exploitation

Recent developments within criminology and within the youth justice field have emphasised the vulnerability of young people who commit crimes and patterns of child criminal exploitation, including ‘county lines’. Excluded young people have been found to be more often involved in gang-related activity, as well as recruited and exploited for 'county lines' criminal activity (Glover Williams and Finlay 2018; National Crime Agency 2019). This

approach understands young people as victimised rather than just as perpetrators and focuses on their exploitation by adults.

A recent report by the Just for Kids Law charity similarly found that teenagers who are excluded from school are more vulnerable to getting caught up in gang violence and 'county lines' as well as – vice versa – that children who have experienced criminal exploitation will be more prone to school exclusion and will be disproportionately affected by it due to decreased supervision by parents and schools, exposure to gangs, and unmet needs (Just for Kids Law 2020). The report suggests that the Department of Education rewrite statutory guidance on exclusion so that schools and headteachers have to consider alternatives to exclusion in young people that have been criminally exploited before proceeding with this sanction. Furthermore, Just for Kids Law have acknowledged that the behaviour of young people that have been criminally exploited may well generate serious concerns for schools. Namely, pupils that are victims of criminal exploitation or trafficking will often be in possession of weapons and/or drugs. However, and according to Just for Kids Law, the zero-tolerance approach of schools to such disciplinary breaches is understandable when a student has engaged in criminal activity knowingly and wilfully, but not when they have been coerced and exploited. In case of the latter, school exclusion would amount to punishing a child for a safeguarding issue or for their own victimisation. Just for Kids Law have therefore proposed the Government update statutory guidance so that alternatives to school exclusion have to be sought in children who have been victims of criminal exploitation or are at risk of becoming criminally exploited (Just for Kids Law 2020: 2-3). However, limiting the duty of schools to reconsider exclusion only in young people that have been coerced into crime is unsatisfactory and ignores the lived experiences of some children, particularly those that are multiply disadvantaged. More specifically, the analysis in this paper so far has indicated that the links between social marginalisation, youth

crime, and victimisation might not be unidirectional and may be complex. In addition, the boundary between exploitation/victimisation and offending/culpability may be somewhat blurred and many young people may not fit neatly into these categories. Studies have found that young people who are exploited may be both victims and perpetrators of harm (Wroe 2021; Firmin 2020; Coliandris, 2015; Moyle, 2019; McClean et al, 2020) and responses need to be designed with this tension in mind.

A Holistic and Contextual Approach to Young People's Lives

We would suggest that the relationship between crime and school exclusion needs to be considered contextually, taking account of what Beckett, Homes and Walker (2017) describe as 'interconnected conditions', avoiding binary constructions of responsibility, and 'demonstrating the relationship between young people's agency and the constrained contexts they navigate' (Wroe 2021) In her 'contextual safeguarding' approach to child sexual and criminal exploitation, engagement in criminal gangs and youth violence, bullying, radicalisation, and victimisation, Firmin (2020) has argued that young people's lives are not linear paths of endless choices. According to Firmin, approaches that hold young people accountable if and when they do not decide wisely are oversimplified and pathologising. As young people are often simultaneously engaged in crime, coerced into it, and victims of offending and/or exploitation, a less blaming social model of consent is needed even in juvenile offenders that have abused and harmed others, and/or seem to be 'getting something' out of their offending behaviour (Firmin 2020: 12-35).

For every young person, adolescence is a time of rapid brain development, risk-taking, a wish for autonomy, and a lack of experience. These four dynamics come together and often play out

away from the gaze of the school and the home, and it is important to recognise that what happens in extra-familial settings also informs the young person's sense of safety and belonging (Firmin 2020: 18-20). Similarly, McAra and McVie (2012) have argued that the school and the youth justice system are just two networks in a young person's life, so the relationship between them should not be conceptualised in isolation, but in the context of their familial and peer relationships, that could, together, contribute to and/or exacerbate the vulnerability, exploitation, and marginalisation of some young people.

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, McAra and McVie (2012) have explored the ways in which formal and informal orders shape the development of offender identities. McAra and McVie have shown that the formal orders (such as those enforced by schools and the police) and informal orders (such as the practices dictated by peer associations) reflect each other in respect of their main imperatives, imbued with inclusionary–exclusionary cultural dynamics. In particular, official orders discriminate between young people based on categories such as social class and general suspiciousness. On the other hand, unofficial orders such as those in peer groups, differentiate between youths according to expected gendered norms of behaviour, territoriality, and respecting group rules. Based on these findings, McAra and McVie have concluded that being excluded from either the formal or informal set of orders might diminish the ability of a particular child to make informed and rational decisions, act autonomously, or negotiate the outcomes of their choices. As a consequence, a young person can be constrained by formal and informal social orders, which renders them more likely to engage in offending behaviour and adopt identities that make them subject to harmful consequences. In a similar manner, Firmin has argued that a child's challenging behaviour should never serve as an indicator of who they

are, but as a reflection of the world that they live in, so it should always be interpreted within this wider social context (Firmin 2020: 14).

A holistic contextual approach to understanding a specific young person's behaviour pre-, in the processes of, and post school exclusion is therefore important to prevent exclusionary practices from functioning like 'bias laundering routines' (Ward 2015; cited in van Eijk 2017: 474) through which schools would recycle children's vulnerabilities into risks. Namely, school exclusion could play out discriminatorily when conceptualised as a response to emotional and behavioural difficulties, and thus seemingly neutral, but actually sidelining and/or individualising the causes of troubling behaviour that are largely socially and culturally conditioned, as well as similar for both child perpetrators and victims of offending, exploitation and/or neglect.

For similar reasons, McCluskey et al. (2019) have proposed that school exclusion policies always examine the possible impact of exclusion on a pupil's life chances, particularly when they are already disadvantaged. Given the known adverse implications of school exclusion for some groups of children, McCluskey et al. have argued that schools should adopt alternatives (e.g. early intervention and/or restorative practices) that reduce the need to exclude a young person from school. In addition, schools should invest their resources and time in fostering better teacher-pupil relationships, as well as cooperating with partner agencies to develop a contextual understanding of the causes and consequences of school exclusion, their intersections, and their impact on a young person's trajectory after they have been excluded (McCluskey et al. 2019: 1147-1156).

While the first section of this paper has shown that the links between school exclusion and youth crime are not necessarily causal, the second part has illustrated that the school and the justice system are but two networks in a complex web of influences in a young person's life. A child's behaviour is not guided or limited merely by the school, law enforcement, the youth justice system, and/or other expanding 'tentacles of the carceral state' (Meiners 2013), but is also constrained substantially by tentacles of the family, peer groups and other informal orders, all of which constitute contexts a young person responds to. As — in these contexts — the lines between youth marginalisation, offending, victimisation and exploitation are blurred, a more comprehensive understanding of young people's passing of time, their educational experiences, and their involvement in crime is needed.

While the 'school-to-prison pipeline' has served as a useful metaphor to conceptualise the trajectory of young people with disciplinary problems from the educational setting into youth justice, the ways in which emotional and behavioural difficulties in children emerge, deteriorate and/or improve are multidimensional, rather than linear. In other words, the lived experiences of young people at risk of school suspension, youth offending, and victimisation — as well as their families — are often unstable and interrupted by unforeseeable events. Consequently, their lifeworlds and ability to plan might not resonate well with the expectations of agencies that perceive time as linear, and adolescents as agentic future-predicting subjects.

When exploring temporality in relation to cognitive-behavioural rehabilitation programmes for juvenile offenders, Rajah, Kramer and Sung have stressed that, for most people, involvement in offending and other forms of deviance usually present a break from otherwise normative life experiences. The behavioural transgressions of vulnerable youth are often not isolated incidences, but events that are meshed together with other aspects of their social marginality,

so institutional strategies that promote expeditious shifts to conformity are not adapted to their pathways and therefore usually ineffective (Rajah, Kramer and Sung 2015: 186-193). Responding to a child's emotional and behavioural problems with a threat of excluding them from school or intervening within the youth justice setting with treatment programmes that are imbued with normative conceptions of time and agency may sideline precisely those socio-familial circumstances that initially triggered the child's misbehaviour, and/or institutional involvement. Such strategies are therefore less likely to aid desistance from troubling behaviour or improve the conditions in families with the most complex and ingrained difficulties.

When exploring shifts within education, children's services, and welfare more broadly, Edwards's (2010) has found that agency contact based on linear understandings of young people's behavioural and emotional difficulties, and their ability to improve their misconduct, is socially decontextualised and thus prone to exacerbate their problems, rather than addressing them. To capture the complexities of some domestic and extra-familial situations and their impacts on the child's attitudes, she suggests that professional interventions adopt a cyclical concept of time and respond to, rather than sideline, socioeconomic difficulties. She advocates that practitioners and their clients should thus engage in what Engeström (2008:194) has called 'negotiated knotworking' that is flexible and tolerant to momentary lapses, but seeking consensus about what is best for the child in the long run (Edwards 2015: 60-71).

Negotiation and interpersonal communication has been identified as central to a broader restorative approach that could move policing boundaries of acceptable behaviour in schools (McCluskey et al. 2008b: 213), and Edwards has argued for the pursuit 'negotiated justice' when practitioners interact with their clients to find appropriate solutions to the problems in question. Negotiating fair interventions requires that professional assessments are aligned with

interpretations of other professionals as well as the lay perceptions of clients about their own difficulties. This approach has the potential to generate a mutual, and thus deeper, qualitatively different understanding between the interacting parties about what is really important in resolving a case (Edwards 2015: 1-17, 49-60, 87), including a matter of disciplinary breaches in school, delinquency and/or youth crime.

However, negotiating fairer institutional practices, instead of perceiving justice as rigorous equality of treatment also requires a view of human agency as a relational, rather than a strictly individual phenomenon. From the practitioners' perspective, relational agency limits their capacity to define and approach the problem — including the child's challenging behaviour within the educational environment — solely from their own professional viewpoint. Rather, every specialist is required to engage with the outlooks of other practitioners involved as well as to acknowledge the voices of their clients to find common knowledge about the problem or dispute. In so doing, practitioners are mobilised to find the most viable solution for a particular client and are more likely to take into account their complex needs (Edwards 2015: 1-17, 61-78). A relational understanding of agency is also more sensitve to context and therefore beneficial from the clients' point of view, as it makes resolving the trouble in question — including disciplinary problems in school — a shared responsibility of all the parties involved in the professional intervention, rather than being only a pressing matter of the child or their parents' personal accountability.

Edwards therefore proposes that subjects such as vulnerable children and their carers should not be understood either as completely independent, or as determined by their structural position. She argues that people can only control the effects of broader socioeconomic and cultural influences on their behaviour to some extent, so their agency should always be

evaluated in each particular case, rather than being compared to the effectiveness of an ideal-typical individual (Edwards 2015: 81-82). Her perceptions of justice and agency are relevant when schools want to develop a broader understanding of the triggers and implications of school exclusion, their overlaps, and their consequences for a young person's life post exclusion.

Similarly, Firmin (2020: 53-55) has argued that practitioners in the realm of child protection should adopt ecological models of the young person's behaviour that aim to understand all of the networks that children are engaged with, as well as the social norms that they must abide by to achieve a sense of belonging and safety. More specifically, Firmin (2020:22) has suggested that statutory agencies take into account a young person's personality traits on one side, and their familial and peer relationships on the other, and grant them economic, social and cultural capital. As adolescents encounter many risks in the intra- and extra-familial settings, all of these contexts need to be considered in addressing their behavioural and emotional difficulties, including their transgressions in school. However, ecological approaches to behavioural problems are often incompatible with the working practices of statutory institutions that sideline community-level circumstances informing an individual's actions. According to Firmin, responses to young people's difficulties often still focus only on the child and their parents, so they remain blaming and fail to disrupt the additional sources of harm that often occur outside the family (e.g. grooming; sexual and criminal exploitation; coercion into drug trafficking etc.).

In cases of exclusion, schools relocate the child with challenging behaviour, but do not attend to the circumstances — either within the school's ethos, the family or the community — that will make this particular young person, and others experiencing similar difficulties, vulnerable

to exclusion in the future, thereby displacing the problem without contextually resolving it (Firmin 2020: 39-42). From a contextual safeguarding perspective, school exclusion remains a simplistic and myopic response that fails to challenge the sources of harm in a young person's life, but, rather, expects children to have personal capacity and make safer future-focused decisions with limited social capital and in potentially harmful 'social fields' (Firmin 2020: 51-53), which may include offending and criminal exploitation.

Edwards and Firmin's insights therefore have much to contribute to criminological perspectives on school exclusion and youth offending. First, they clarify that children's marginalization, behavioural problems, and victimization, should not be conceptualised as separate categories, but addressed holistically and conceptualised as interdependent. Secondly, the responses of schools and the youth justice system need to avoid focusing merely on the child and their parents, but should target the individual, family, peer and territorial sources of harm – the contexts of young people's lives (Firmin 2020: 139-143). To achieve these aims, contextual work with children and their families should be located at the intersections between education, youth justice, child protection and safeguarding, rather than focusing only on school discipline, community safety, and crime reduction. Responses of schools and the youth justice system will be enhanced by building on partnerships with other sectors, and particularly community-level organisations. Lastly, the success of school exclusion and crime reduction frameworks should be measured both on an individual level and in context of tackling wider social problems that impact young people's lives (Firmin 2020: 94).

In these tasks, young people should not be perceived as worthy of assistance only if they are known to be victims of abuse and exploitation. As the personal, familial, and social sources of harm are similar for both youth offenders and victims of crime, young people's behavioural

and emotional difficulties should always be addressed as safeguarding issues, rather than dealt with merely as disciplinary problems and offending behaviour (Firmin 2020: 59). Further research in the fields of education, criminology and social work is needed to explore and critically consider how to identify and disrupt routes of harm while, at the same time, avoiding the profiling of young people according to their backgrounds and personal characteristics (Firmin 2020: 58, 243-244).

Conclusion

There is much to be gained from recent work that understands young people's lives contextually and has a full picture of their vulnerabilities, both in conceptualizing and understanding the relationship between school exclusion and crime, and in designing interventions and support to address these pathways. The mapping of adverse social fields that damage young people's trajectories, and the potential damaging effects of punitive state interventions, should help us to better understand the contexts in which their behavioural and emotional difficulties occur, rather than targeting and further penalising already marginalized individuals and families. Further empirical research is important: quantitative analyses can help us to disentangle some of the factors at work, but deeper qualitative exploration is important to understand the lived experience of young people and the complexities in their lives. Although precise mechanisms are not always fully understood, there is comprehensive evidence of the damaging effects of school exclusion and a strong association with offending, supporting the use of school exclusion as a last resort, and the need for carefully designed programmes of support acutely sensitive to the contexts of young people's lives.

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