

# **Young People, Crime and School Exclusion**

## **A case of some surprises**

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### **Abstract**

During the 1990's the number of young people being permanently excluded from schools in England and Wales increased dramatically from 2910 (1990-91) to a peak of 12700 (1996-1997). Coinciding with this rise was a resurgence of the debate centring on lawless and delinquent youth. With the publication of *Young People and Crime* (Graham and Bowling, 1995) and *Misspent Youth* (Audit Commission, 1996) the 'common sense assumption' that exclusion from school inexorably promoted crime received wide support, with the school excludee portrayed as another latter day 'folk devil'.

This paper explores the link between school exclusion and juvenile crime, and offers some key findings from a research study undertaken with 56 young people who had experience of being excluded from school. Self report interview questions reveal that whilst forty of the young people had offended, 90% (36) reported that the onset of their offending commenced prior to their

first exclusion. Moreover, fifty (89.2% of the total number of young people in the sample), stated that they were no more likely to offend subsequent to being excluded and thirty one (55.4%) stated that they were less likely to offend during their exclusion period. Often, this was because on being excluded, they were 'grounded' by their parents.

**Key phrases:** *School Exclusion, Young People and Crime, Parenting*

### **School Exclusion and Crime**

An abundance of research evidence indicates that for most young people a brief incursion into delinquency will occur at some point during adolescence (see for example Rutter et al, 1998; West, 1967; McManus, 1987; Le Blanc, 1995; Young, 1999; Goldson, 2001). Yet, whilst offending by young people has long been considered more or less routine, the political reaction to this well attested 'reality' is not altogether surprising, with Goldson (2001:77) suggesting that any talk of normality is 'ideologically taboo'. The fearfulness of what this tells us about failures in social policy and moral uncertainties about 'the nation's future' doubtless play their respective roles. Symptomatic of this, the decade following the murder of James Bulger has seen a mass media panic that has largely dismissed offending by 'normal young people', preferring instead to focus on the drama of persistent offenders. Alongside a mood of outrage has been an increasingly prevalent actuarial approach to calculating the risk of offending, with the findings of longitudinal studies

identifying the factors common to those deemed to irredeemably - and often irremediably - bad. Indeed, as Pitts (2001:80) acknowledges, during the 1990's the Cambridge study became the 'big idea' in both youth justice and in crime prevention in Britain, providing the intellectual – and empirical - backbone for influential studies such as *Young People and Crime* (Graham and Bowling, 1995) and *Misspent Youth* (Audit Commission, 1996).

Coinciding with this debate on youth lawlessness, was an increasing concern with the numbers of school children who were being permanently excluded from school, which had risen from 2900 during 1990-91 to a peak of 12800 during 1996-97 (DfFE, 1999). Anxiety over the inadequacies of education provided for young people - a proxy no doubt for the less comfortable word 'control' - ultimately led to questions regarding how the excluded pupils were spending their time. Searle's (1994:37) views were typical of those expressed;

Many excluded children and young people are either sitting at home, doing very little to enhance their education, or wandering the city centres, shopping malls or local streets of inner city neighbourhoods, forms of crime, drug abuse and gang conflict.

Such concerns - together with the publication of *Misspent Youth* and *Young People and Crime* - saw the increasing saliency of the notion that school exclusion was by far and away the principal reason for the upsurge in youth crime. Both these studies appeared to suggest the existence of such a relationship. For example, Graham & Bowling found that three quarters of males and nearly half of the females who had been temporarily excluded, and all the males and over half the females who had been permanently excluded

from school, were offenders (Graham & Bowling, 1995:42). Likewise, the Audit Commission (1996:66) found that 42% of offenders of school age who were sentenced in the youth court had been excluded from school. Both works were to be readily cited by academics and politicians, and references to both studies were to appear in virtually every piece of literature considering youth crime and the inevitable policy deliberations flowing from this. (See for example, Gilbertson, 1998; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Smith, 1998; Parsons 1999; NACRO 2000; Munn et al, 2001; Ball and Connolly, 2000; Pomeroy, 2000). However, closer scrutiny of the findings of both Graham and Bowling and of the Audit Commission's research in relation to exclusion and crime suggest their robustness may be questionable (Hodgson, 2001). Jones (2001:632), for example has observed that whilst *Misspent Youth* has been highly influential in youth justice policy in England and Wales, the findings are rarely criticised or evaluated but rather are more often than not taken as the final word on the matter. What has emerged then is a set of 'ethno-sociological' and common sense assumptions about what is going on in the moral lives of young people, with claims of a relationship between school exclusion and crime being driven more by the taken for grantedness of 'professional gossip' than sound empirical research (see Grimshaw and Pratt, 1984; Levitas, 1998; Jamieson et al, 1999). Indeed, whilst there is no doubt that some excluded school children are involved in delinquency, there appears to have been a concerted effort by the media and politicians to establish a link between school exclusion and crime (see also Hayden 1997:26). This sets up that easy victim of social ills – 'education' - as the villain of the piece, with all manner of images about excessively liberal

education and failures by teachers to exercise authority emerging as the real reasons for 'the trouble with kids' today. (see also Garland, 2001). Yet the basis of the generalisation that exclusion and crime are inextricably linked ignores the complexity of both issues. As a consequence, the results of any attempts to construct a causal - rather than declaratory - chain between the two can appear weak and vulnerable to criticism (Pomeroy, 2000:3; Berridge et al, 2001:47

### **The Research**

Research access to certain populations can vary considerably (see for example Cohen and Manion, 1994; Jupp, 1989:135), and given the relatively small sample sizes of research that focuses upon excluded young people (Graham and Bowling, 1995; Cohen et al, 1994), it can only be assumed that this is something that characterises this particular field of social research. The project that is reported on here is no different.

This research was undertaken with the view to assess the nature of the relationship between school exclusion and crime, by interviewing a sample of secondary aged school children who had experience of being excluded from school. In this sense it approximates to a replication study, looking to assess the adequacy of previous findings, and engaging with both the substantive and inferential aspects of work that has been reported on previously.

Early in the research process it became evident that the question of

access would prove to be the greatest initial challenge. Centralised exclusion data held within the county in which the research was to be conducted was not made available, and consequently the favoured approach which emerged was that of making individual requests for assistance to the 79 educational establishments that served the locality. Twenty two (27.8%) responded positively. Akin to the difficulties faced by Brodie (2001:16), maintaining communication with 22 establishments proved difficult as setting up the research was a protracted process stretching over two school terms. During this time a further nine schools withdrew from the project, citing reasons such as pending OFSTED Inspections, research overload and staff changes. Ten secondary schools and three Pupil Referral Units remained willing to participate in the research. In order to expand sample numbers other agencies that worked with excluded school children were contacted and the support of a voluntary agency, a further education college and a young person's drop in centre were all enlisted.

Parental consent was considered necessary and indeed was a pre-requisite of several of the establishments willingness to be involved.<sup>(1)</sup> To ensure anonymity the consent forms were to be returned to the agency or school with which the young person was connected and at no time did the researcher obtain identifying details from the young person. Whilst Pomeroy (2000:16) suggests the process of gaining parental consent affords the young person several opportunities not to participate in the study, in this research the young person would make the final decision whether or not he or she wished to be involved. In simple terms they "voted with their feet", and as

O'Keefe (1994:6) found during his research with persistent truants, it often proved difficult to "pin down" some of the potential respondents who missed interview appointments through truancy, illness or exclusion. This had to be tolerated, as for reasons of confidentiality, anonymity and security it had been decided that the research would be conducted at the school or agency through which the young person was located. As a consequence, a number of young people who had been given parental permission to participate in the research were never interviewed as they missed all prearranged appointments. A further opportunity to withdraw from the research was given to each young person prior to their interview when it was clearly stated that participation was voluntary. Later in the research process only one young person was to decline at this stage and by the end of the research a total of 56 young people had been interviewed, all of whom had been subject to some form of exclusion from school.

This research aimed to elicit mini-life histories, focusing on information about the young person, their home and family background, as well as their educational and exclusion experiences and their offending history. As the official records relating to the young person's offending history were not available to the researcher the extent and nature of the young person's involvement in crime would only be derived from self-reported data. Given that the Audit Commission (1996) estimates that approximately 2% of crimes lead to guilty verdicts in criminal courts, this would allow the research to more closely examine the associations between exclusion and criminal behaviour than would reliance on 'official' data alone. Consequently, unlike the research

conducted by Berridge et al (2001:47) this research does contain the same caveat pertaining to the "actual" incidence of offending. Whilst it is acknowledged that self-reported measurements have biases and limitations of their own, (see for example Graham and Bowling, 1995; Hansen, 2003), such as memory, deception and interpretation, in the minds of some they can be considered as a "superior method" of measuring juvenile delinquency (Juby & Farrington, 2001). Moreover, irrespective of the associated problems with self-report studies they have been found to be relatively accurate (Junger-Tas et al 1994: 383)

The interview schedule was designed after reviewing the research instruments used in previous research with young people (Hagell and Newburn, 1994., Graham and Bowling 1995 and Junger-Tas et al, 1994). Consideration was given to a number of alternative research tools, though after piloting it was decided that the researcher would conduct tape recorded interviews that would fully transcribed later. Such a method would not only prevent potential problems of interviewee literacy hindering the research but would also provide a wealth of both qualitative and quantitative data. The idea – echoing the familiar claim for authenticity in data capture - would allow for preservation of the young person's explanations and descriptions of their behaviour (Jupp, 1989:68).



## Findings<sup>(2)</sup>

### Characteristics of the Sample

The sample consisted of forty five (80.4%) male and eleven (19.6%) female pupils, with the mean age being 14.2 years and a modal age of fifteen (73.2% of the sample were aged 14 years or over)<sup>(3)</sup> The majority (54 or 96.4%) of the young people in the sample described their ethnicity as "White" <sup>(4)</sup> Every young person in the sample had been subjected to fixed term or permanent school exclusion, with the mean age of first exclusion being 12.1 years. The modal number of fixed term exclusions experienced by the sample was two, whereas the mean number of fixed term exclusions was 5.9. The maximum number of fixed term exclusions self reported by any one pupil was twenty six.

Nineteen males and six females (44.6% of the total sample) had experienced permanent exclusion from school. Of these 16 (64%) had been permanently excluded once, seven (28%) had been permanently excluded twice from school and two respondents had been permanently excluded from three or more schools. 75% (42) of the individuals in the sample self reported truancy from school and of the 14 individuals who claimed never to have truanted, only one had been subject to 6 or more fixed term exclusions. Indeed, a statistical association was found between truancy and number of fixed term exclusions (chi-square 4.76, df = 1 Fisher Exact One Tailed Test <.05).

The majority of the young people in the sample lived with two adult carers. Nineteen (33.9%) of the sample lived with both of their natural parents, 29 (51.7%) living with their mother, (18 lived with their mother and her partner) and four (7.1%) of the sample lived with their father, (two lived with their father and his partner). Information provided on the home circumstances for a number of respondents appeared similar to findings reported by Ofsted (1996:10) who presented the excluded pupil's home situation as being "a grim catalogue of misery", indeed thirty six young people stated that they were living with a relative/parental partner who had been arrested, nine (16.1%) of the sample had experience of living in care (5) and a large proportion of the young people (70%) stated that they had had some form of contact with social services (see similar findings by for example Parsons, 1996; Brodie and Berridge, 1996; Brodie 2000). As with other exclusion research (see for example Berridge et al, 2001; Harris et al, 2000; McManus, 1987) there seemed to be a high incidence of familial poverty amongst the young people in the sample with 65% of the young people who were located via educational establishments (school, PRU or college) being eligible for free school meals. Overall 25% of the total sample resided in households with no working adult.(6)

67.9% (38) of the sample stated that they drank alcohol regularly with 24 stating that they drank on at least a weekly basis. 38 (67.9%) of the respondents in the sample regularly smoked cigarettes and 28 (50%) of the sample stated that they had tried cannabis (26 used on at least a weekly

basis). 19 (33.9%) young people self reported using drugs other than cannabis.<sup>(7)</sup> It is then, the looming presence of social and familial dislocation that begins to emerge as the defining characteristic of these young people's lives rather than the single predictor of exclusion.

### **Offending**

By means of a self-report questionnaire it was established that forty (71.4%) of the total sample admitted to having committed a criminal offence. Of the forty individuals who self reported offending twelve had not been caught for their misdemeanours, whilst 28 (50% of the total sample) had been arrested and subsequently cautioned or prosecuted as a result of their offending behaviour. All of the 40 individuals self reported onset of offending prior to the age of fourteen, with 20% (8) stating that their offending commenced prior to being aged ten. Whilst it is difficult to accurately estimate the age of onset of offending <sup>(8)</sup>, it would appear that the mean age of onset for boys in this sample is probably aged ten (mode being 12), with the mean age of onset for the girls being 12 and the mode being 13. Of the 40 individuals who self reported offending behaviour 90% stated that the onset commenced prior to their first exclusion.<sup>(9)</sup>

Finally, on reviewing the nature and severity of the crimes self reported by young people, it soon becomes apparent that one quarter (ten) could be regarded as having little or no involvement in crime,<sup>(10)</sup> or at least an involvement in crime that may nowadays – given the mitigations of modesty of

cash values - be taken as somehow less 'serious'. Although these ten respondents self report crime, the nature of their offending amounts to crimes such as petty shoplifting (value of goods less than £10), minor criminal damage or assault occurring during a playground scuffle.

### **Exclusion and Crime**

47 (83.9%) sample members stated that being excluded from school did not have an impact on the likelihood of them offending. As two respondents stated:

It doesn't make any difference if I'm in school or not. It's just if I'm bored or want some money. (Male, 15)

Crimes got nowt to do with whether I am excluded, it's just like if you need the money you do it. (Male 14)

Of the remaining nine sample members, two believed that exclusion led to an increase in the likelihood of them offending, whereas seven stated that they were less likely to commit a crime after exclusion. However, it did not appear that it was the censure of exclusion as such that led to the decrease in a likelihood of offending, but the threats of care, court or permanent exclusion that often accompanied their exclusion:

... this last exclusion has changed me. I don't get into trouble anymore. I don't know why... they said next time I will have to leave the school. (Male, 15)

Cos I have been suspended three times, they've said that's it... if I get suspended again I'm out the school for ever, that's what's stopped me misbehaving. (Male, 15)

Of the two respondents who claimed that their offending levels had increased since the exclusion, the reasons offered for their increase in offending appear to reflect the concern's noted earlier by Searle;

I've done more stuff since I have been expelled than when I was in school...there's a lot more opportunities when you aren't in school...you're just out there on your own so there's more chance you might do summat. (Male, 15)

When you are off school there's not many things to do so you try different things, like drugs...I wouldn't say that exclusion makes you take drugs or owt...it's just when you are bored and you've got nowt to do you try new things...(Male,15)

However, whilst others claimed that exclusion had no affect on their level or nature of offending - they were already 'at it 'anyway - they did believe that their being excluded could result in crime because of boredom:

If you are excluded, then you are bored...you are forced to commit crime. I don't ...I did more crime when I was in school...but I've had years to commit crime with all the time I had off when I was skiving. It's probably just a coincidence that I don't commit crime now. (Male, 15)

Yeah, like say when you have been kicked out of school and like then you have nowt to do have you...I haven't got nowt to do or nowhere to go so... you do whatever don't you? (Female 15)

Whilst there was no statistical significance between the number of fixed term exclusions and the level of self-reported offending (Fisher Exact Test One tail  $p = 0.2$ )(11) a significant statistical association was found between self-reported

offending behaviour and permanent exclusion ( $p < 0.01$ ) with 23 (92%) of the 25 who had been permanently excluded from school self-reporting offending behaviour.

### **Grounding**

The sense that the parents of excluded pupils – whatever the various social and economic challenges they might face – are indifferent to the fact of their child's school performance is not borne out, at least by our data. On being excluded a majority of individuals in the sample were sanctioned by their parents. Grounding – restrictions on unsupervised activity, particularly during the evenings - appeared to be the most "popular" sanction with thirty one pupils (55.4%) being grounded by their parents (or guardian) during their period of exclusion from school. Of these, thirteen were grounded for the whole of their period of exclusion whereas eighteen were grounded during school hours during their exclusion period. Of the remaining pupils in the sample most reported "being shouted at" but were not subject to any formal punishment from their parents or guardians.

The imposition of parental sanctioning (i.e. grounding) appeared to be much more prevalent amongst children at the beginning of their exclusion career. Table (i) indicates that those individuals who had been excluded up to five times on a fixed term basis were much more likely to be grounded than those who had been excluded six or more times.<sup>(12)</sup>

Insert TABLE (i) here

Similarly, Table (ii) indicates that those children who were subject to a permanent exclusion was less likely to be sanctioned by their parents.

Insert TABLE (ii) here

Amongst the young people who were not sanctioned, 84% self reported offending. Similarly most appeared likely to have also been permanently excluded from school (see table iii) and to have been arrested (see table iv).

Insert TABLE (iii) here

Insert TABLE (iv) here

A further statistical association was found between permanent exclusion and number of arrests amongst those individuals who were not sanctioned during their exclusion ( $p < .05$ ) as indicated in table (v).

Insert TABLE (v) here

Of the 31 children who were grounded during their exclusion only three (9.7%) stated that they had tried drugs other than cannabis as opposed to 7 (28%) of the children who were not grounded. Whilst there was no statistical significance at the 5% level present between parental sanction and use of drugs other than cannabis ( $p = .06$ ), a statistical association was found between being sanctioned and using cannabis ( $p < 0.05$ ). In addition to increased drug use respondents who were not sanctioned during their

exclusion were more likely to consume alcohol on a regular basis and smoke cigarettes than their non sanctioned counterparts.

## Discussion

Whilst a majority of pupils in the sample self reported crime, almost one in three (28.6%) did not self report *any* offending behaviour. Moreover if the self reported crimes of the ten individuals that reported crimes with a value of less than £10 are excluded the level of criminality in the sample reduces to 54%. Both self reporting levels suggest that self reported criminality in this sample is lower than that found in other research undertaken with excluded school children. For example, Graham and Bowling (1995) found that crime was almost universal amongst school excludees; Hayden and Martin (1998:323) found that all of the 26 young people who had experience of fixed term or permanent exclusion from school reported involvement in at least one of a listed criminal or nuisance activity; and Powis et al (1998:249) found that 94% of their sample of 86 excluded pupils had offended. Whilst, it is acknowledged that the present findings do indicate a high level of self-reported delinquency with 40 of the sample self reporting offending behaviour (all values), it is perhaps worth comparing this to the findings of the Cambridge Study where 89% of study participants admitted to committing at least one indictable offence between the ages of 10 - 14 years (Farrington, 1996).

Irrespective of the level of offending in the sample it would appear that



exclusion is not the primary causal factor for the onset of criminality. Whilst 40 respondents admitted committing a crime, 36 (that is 90% of those that admitted committing crimes) stated that the onset of their offending commenced prior to their first exclusion, with only two (5%) stating that their offending behaviour commenced during or since their first school exclusion. This seems to indicate that, within this sample at least, the onset of a young person's career in crime is not necessarily *determined* by exclusion. What it does point to is that exclusion is probably one amongst a number of variables present in a young offenders life (see for example Farrington, 1994,1996; Hayden and Martin, 1998; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Audit Commission, 1996; Social Exclusion Unit 1998; Berridge, et al 2001).

As Hayden and Martin (1998:318) concede:

It is a complex task to identify whether offending behaviour generally precedes an exclusion, or precipitates offending behaviour. In some cases offending behaviour is clearly the reason for exclusion, for example theft, assault or drug dealing. In other cases exclusion is related to a range of problematic but not criminal behaviours, as well as non-attendance.

As with the findings reported by Hayden and Martin (1998) and Graham & Bowling (1995:42), differences in the type and rate of offending between those who had been permanently excluded from school and those who had been subject to a fixed term exclusion were also found in this sample with permanently excluded school children being significantly more likely to be involved in delinquency than their fixed term excluded peers. Given that the average length of time a permanently excluded pupil spends out of school is

approximately 23.2 weeks (Mitchell, 1996:124);<sup>(13)</sup> and maximum permitted length of fixed term exclusion is 45 days per school year, it may be tempting to suggest that the longer the excluded pupil spends in an unstructured environment the greater the likelihood that he or she will offend. Indeed, Graham (1998:104) states that research has shown that those who spend considerable periods of time away from their home in unstructured and unsupervised activity "on the streets" are more at risk of engaging in criminal activities (see also Hansen, 2003). As permanent exclusion is the ultimate sanction used "as a last resort" for misbehaviour, it is the very ones who require supervision for whom weeks of unstructured and unsupervised time are the ideal means for making mischief. With this being the case it would be expected that offending during school hours by excluded pupils would form a large percentage of recorded juvenile crime. However, in the year that the fieldwork for this study was undertaken 7720 recorded offences were committed by juveniles in the county area where the research took place (Hodgson, 2001). Of these 557 were committed during school hours of which a total of 149 (or 1.9% of recorded juvenile offences) were committed by 83 pupils who were either subject to a fixed term or permanent exclusion at the time of their arrest. Such data possibly challenge exclusion as a primary cause of school time crime. Further support for this claim comes from the findings of research conducted on behalf of the Youth Justice Board. This revealed that permanent exclusion was responsible for only 1.6% of the total number of school days missed by secondary school pupils and concluded that "...the contribution of authorised absence to predicting the juvenile crime rate is about eleven and a half times as great as that of permanent exclusion."

(ECOTEC, 2001:9)

The theoretical rationale that supports the basis of claims that excluded school children may have a propensity to offend is derived from routine activity theory which focuses on the question why people do *not* commit crime as opposed to why they *do* commit crimes. According to Cohen and Felson (1979a), for a crime to occur there needs to be a motivated offender; a suitable victim or crime target and absence of capable guardians. Whilst it is assumed that people will offend if they are sufficiently provoked or enticed into doing so, conversely they will not offend if somehow they are prevented from doing so. In the school exclusion and crime debate, lack of supervision by teachers, parent or guardian frees the excluded school child from the gaze of the immediate "capable guardian" and if the child is motivated to commit crime and targets are available then crime may follow. Consequently the key to "conformity" is seen as supervision and surveillance. Whilst school would normally play a central role in the development of this bond, once excluded from school an individual may increasingly feel alienated and detached from society and hence is more likely to embark upon a criminal career (Wikstrom, 1995:28). Moreover, adolescents that are more removed from adult supervision (either proximal or distal) have been found to be more susceptible to pressure from their friends to engage in antisocial activity and as Downes and Rock (1998:246) point out, weakened family controls often result in young people taking to the streets which itself can lead to delinquency. But because of this, the contributory role of parental involvement in the young person's moral integration within society becomes especially crucial.

The relationship between parental supervision and offending has been extensively discussed in previous research (for example, Wilson, 1980, 1987). Indeed Smith and McVie recently concluded that, "Offending and other problem behaviours are very strongly correlated with measures of parental supervision" (Smith and McVie 2003:172). Research also indicates that the parents of delinquents are less likely to be aware of their child's whereabouts or activities (Graham and Bowling, 1995; Rutter & Giller, 1983), and Hayden & Martin (1998:321) go as far as to suggest that; "The single most important factor in explaining criminality is the quality of a young person's home life, including the level of parental supervision."

Consequently, for over half of this sample the imposition of parental sanction and increased levels of parental surveillance could lead to a reduction in offending during the period of exclusion as they were "grounded". This would appear to be the case particularly amongst those individuals who self reported crime and were truanting from school without their parents' knowledge. On exclusion the parent became aware of their child's absence from school and through grounding this resulted in increased levels of surveillance and supervision. Thus, contrary to common sense assumptions, in certain instances school exclusion may actually reduce or indeed prevent offending. This reflects the increasingly influential evidence-based approach to understanding social action - that under certain circumstances and in the face of certain precipitating possibilities, activity that once was seen as irrevocably predictive of consequential misfortune might in fact have beneficial

results (see Pawson and Tilley, 1997). So it is that under specified conditions and with particular offenders, prison might in fact work. Likewise with the young people at hand here, the reaction for parents and carers to their charge's transgression is not necessarily the throwing in of the towel, but an active attempt to redeem waywardness through demonstrable attention to the fact that something has gone wrong. That these parents and carers may be without reserves of social capital to enlist in this campaign makes it especially noteworthy.

The data also suggest that a child or young person who is permanently excluded from school and is not sanctioned by their parents or guardian is more likely to offend. Conversely of the 16 young people who did not self report offending behaviour, twelve (75%) were grounded during their exclusion. This finding supports the well attested claims that ineffective parental supervision is associated with a young person becoming involved in delinquency (Farrington, 1994, 1996; Rutter & Giller, 1983; Sampson and Laub 1993) and are akin to those of Wilson's (1980) study which centred upon a "chaperonage index." Measuring the degree of protection a family afforded their child, she revealed that the level of chaperonage sharply distinguished between delinquents and non-delinquents. Those young people who were part of families who exercised strict chaperonage were significantly less likely to commit crime.

## **Conclusion**

The information drawn from this research indicates that the easy academic and policy assumptions regarding school exclusion and crime are questionable. It lends support to the findings of Hayden and Martin (1998) who suggest that the clear causal link that is assumed to characterise the relationship between school attendance and offending behaviour is not based upon particularly robust research evidence.

From the data derived from this study it would seem that there is a high level of self reported criminality, although given the claims regarding the universality of offending amongst young people then this perhaps is not too surprising. As Young (1999) quite rightly points out, perpetrators of crime and disruption may actually be "normal young people" lending support to the Home Office's (HMSO, 1968:7) claim of nearly fifty years ago: "It is probably a minority of children who grow up without ever misbehaving in ways that may be contrary to the law". We make this point because of the importance in stressing – again - that problems at school and school exclusion are therefore not a pre-requisite for offending. A Holdaway et al (2001) noted, 61% of young people who were "Finally Warned" and referred to Youth Justice Board Schemes were in mainstream school as were 70% of young offenders who were in mainstream school in the YOT Pilot Evaluation. Similarly, initial and not widely published results from Youth Inclusion Programme Evaluation indicate that crime rates still fell in areas where the programmes were operating despite truancy and authorised absences increasing amongst project participants (Morgan et al, 2001).

Whilst the age of onset of offending within this research sample is much lower than that reported in other studies (e.g Graham and Bowling, 1995), perhaps what is worth re-iterating is that for 90% of the young people who self reported crime the onset of their offending commenced prior to their first exclusion from school (14). This is consistent with the findings of Berridge et al (2001:37) who state;

If it were assumed that there were a causal relationship between permanent exclusion and the onset of offending occurring, we might reasonably expect the onset of crime to follow permanent exclusion shortly afterwards....however...in many cases there is a considerable gap between the two events..

Indeed, whilst the majority of young people in the sample stated that being excluded did not lead to an increase in their rate of offending, paradoxically - and reiterating what we think is a point worthy of further statement - for a number of young people, the increased levels of parental supervision accompanying their period of exclusion in fact removed – or at least limited - any potential offending opportunities.

Whilst research continues to draw attention to the correlation between education and offending (see for example, Parsons et al 2001; Hansen, 2003), the data presented here demonstrates that school exclusion does not immediately and necessarily precipitate young people into crime, suggesting that more emphasis should be placed upon supporting parents during their child's exclusion period. This is reinforced by findings from other studies which indicate that that less skilled parents inadvertently reinforce their

children's anti-social behaviour through parental conflict, poor supervision and failing to provide effective punishments for transgression (see for example, Sampson and Laub 1993; Farrington, 2001). As has been often identified in 'traditional' criminological research – research findings and perspectives that are undergoing something of a revival despite the whiff of 'transmitted deprivation' that surround them - effective parental supervision is a protective shield against delinquency (eg Farrington, 2001; Wilson 1987:291). With greater co-operation between parents and schools – supporting the one and not lambasting the other - youthful crime may see the reductions that have been longed hoped for.





## TABLES

**TABLE (i) *Number of fixed term exclusions by sanction***

	grounded	not grounded
< 6 fixed term exclusions	26	13
6 or more fixed term exclusions	5	12
Total	31	25

chi-square = 6.65; df = 1; p < 0.01

**TABLE (ii) *Permanent exclusions by sanction***

	grounded	not grounded
permanently excluded	8	17
never permanently excluded	23	8
total	31	25

chi-square = 9.97 df= 1; p < 0.01

**TABLE (iii) *Permanent Exclusion by self- report offending controlling for sanction***

Not Sanctioned

	offends	does not offend
permanently excluded	17	0
never permanently excluded	4	4
total	21	4

chi square = 10.12 df= 1; Fisher Exact Test One Tail p < .01

**TABLE (iv) *Permanent Exclusion by arrest controlling for sanction***

Not Sanctioned

	arrested	not arrested
permanently excluded	14	1
never permanently excluded	3	7
total	17	8

chi-square = 11.06 df= 1; Fisher Exact Test One Tail p < .01

**TABLE (v) *Permanent Exclusion by number of arrests controlling for sanction***

Not Sanctioned

	< 3 arrests	3+ arrests
permanently excluded	3	5
never permanently excluded	20	3
total	23	8

chi square = 7.58 df= 1; Fisher Exact Test One Tail p < .05

## Notes

**1** Most of the schools required that parental consent was obtained for all the pupils irrespective of their age. During the research it emerged that the college and voluntary agency which worked mainly with young people aged 15 or 16 were less rigid. Although parental consent forms were supplied, providing a consent slip had not been returned which withheld consent, they were happy to let the young people decide if they wished to participate in the research.

**2** For the full research findings see Hodgson (2001)

**3** This is consistent with the findings of Munn et al (2000) who found that the peak age of both fixed term and permanent exclusions is 14/15. It also corresponds to longitudinal research, which generally shows a peak age of first offence between the ages of 13 - 15 years (Farrington (1994). See also Graham & Bowling (1995:23) who found that the mean age of onset of criminality for both males and females is 13.5 years.

**4** Two of the young people described their ethnicity as "Black" and the remaining 54 described themselves as "White British". Although the final sample was essentially self selected it is not statistically representative of the ethnic composition of school excludees within the area. Whilst the two Black respondents represented 3.5% of the total sample Black young people accounted for over 16% of fixed period exclusions and 24% of permanent exclusions in the City area and 7% and 12% in the County. The sample was however roughly representative with regards to gender in that whilst females accounted for 18% of fixed term and 14% of permanent exclusions across city and county areas they comprised 19.6% of the sample.

**5** As compared to five per thousand (0.5%) of children nationally (Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Truancy and School Exclusion* (Cm 3957) TSO.

**6** Home Office (2000:1) statistics report that during 1995-96 one in three children grew up in poverty and that one in five households have no family member in work.

**7** A similar level of alcohol, cigarette and drug use was found by Powis et al (1998: 250-252) in their sample of 14-16 year old excluded school children. 70% had used alcohol in the month prior to interview (of whom 8% were

using alcohol on at least two occasions per week); 66% of their sample smoked cigarettes; 79% of her sample had used cannabis and 38% had used drugs other than cannabis.

**8** In response to the question "When did you start offending?" a number of respondents could not recall their exact age but were able to state that their offending commenced prior to reaching the age of ten years.

**9** This compares with Berridge et al (2001) who found that of 178 excluded school children who had committed crime that had been recorded, 61 had committed their first offence prior to their exclusion; 13 within the same month as their exclusion and 104 subsequent to their exclusion.

**10** Most of the offending that was of an acquisitive nature was shoplifting of sweets and confectionery, with a value of the stolen items being substantially less than £10. It is common place to set a "minimum inclusion level" in self-report studies, for example, in their research Graham and Bowling (1995:105) did not include thefts of goods up to the value of £5. Likewise, Flood-Page et al (2000:4) also set a minimum inclusion level of £5 and "excluded trivial offences".

**11** There was however a statistical association between the number of fixed term exclusions and the number of times a respondent self reported being arrested. ( $p < 0.05$ )

**12** The mean number of fixed-term exclusion found in the sample was 5.9.

**13** The Advisory Centre for Education (2001:1) cites research findings which indicate that the average time spent without any formal education provision amongst a group of 80 young people who had been permanently excluded was four months.

**14** As compared to the findings of Berridge et al 2001

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