Moving on from Young Offender Institutions:

Expectations, Adjustment and the Role of Social Support

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to investigate young offenders' expectations and actual experiences of release from custody in Young Offender Institutions. Young offenders' selective use of social support in making this transition, including the 'blocks' they perceived to seeking or making use of it, were also explored.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with young male offenders about their views and experiences, both prior and subsequent to release. A total of sixteen participants took part in 'pre-release' interviews, held approximately two weeks prior to their release from a YOI. Eleven of these also went on to conduct follow up 'post-release' interviews, approximately two months after their release.

Qualitative analysis of interviews yielded a number of core themes, and the results are broken into three sections. The first documents young offenders' experiences of waiting for release. The second concerns processes inherent to their adjustment to release: namely, processes of 'reflecting and re-evaluating', 'reconnecting' with the outside world, 'changing' and 'locating the experience'. The third section describes young offenders' use of social support and the blocks they perceive to actively seeking or making use of support. These include 'intrapersonal', 'interpersonal' and 'contextual' blocks.

The findings of the study are discussed in relation to psychological literature pertaining to offending, mental health and social support. Implications of the study for practice in Young Offender Institutions and Youth Offending Teams, are highlighted.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

With young people responsible for an estimated 7 million crimes a year (Bailey, 1999), the rehabilitative needs of young and juvenile offenders are significant at both an individual and societal level. Reform of the youth justice system has represented one of the key targets of the current government (Joyce Quin, M.P., 1998), including an emphasis on early intervention. Whilst the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) outlines a number of community-based orders and interventions for dealing with young offenders, a number of young people continue to be incarcerated in Young Offender Institutions across England and Wales.

As Sir David Ramsbotham, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons asserts, “the limited period in which young people are imprisoned raises two important questions: ‘in what frame of mind are those people going to leave custody? Following on, ‘what are you going to do with them to try and alter that frame of mind?’” (Ramsbotham, 1998, p.9). Traditionally empirical research and interventions have tended to focus largely on the offending behaviour of such individuals. Whilst such work is clearly an essential undertaking, authors such as Bailey (1993) have called for a broader consideration of the impact of sentencing - not only on individuals’ propensity to re-offend, but also on their evolving physical and mental health profiles as young adults.

The need for a wider perspective is further highlighted by recent studies which have found the rates of mental health problems in young offenders to be high. These findings are perhaps unsurprising. Adolescence has been conceptualised as a time of
adapting to many changes, and as providing opportunities for growth and
development (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Although many manage these challenges
successfully, others do not, and the frequency of psychosocial problems including
criminal behaviour, suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, depression and alcohol and
drug abuse have been said to peak around this period (Royal College of Psychiatrists,
1995).

The current study aims to investigate juvenile and young offenders’ (YOs) anticipated
and actual experiences of release from custody in Young Offender Institutions
(YOIs), their adjustment to release and the social support they receive in making this
transition. Such a transition is clearly an important one, with potentially far-reaching
ramifications for the individual in terms of both re-offending and broader psychosocial
functioning. Although it remains debated, social support has frequently been identified
as a potentially important buffer against the effects of stress - facilitating healthy
adaptation to a range of transitions. Thus it would seem to be important to study
YOs’ use of social support in relation to the transition of release, including the blocks
they perceive to seeking it.

The design was qualitative in nature, involving in-depth interviews with young people
about their experiences and views. Paul Boateng, M.P. has highlighted the
government’s view of the importance of listening to what young people in the criminal
justice system have to say (foreword in Lyon, Dennison & Wilson, 2000). The paucity
of literature relating to this topic further necessitated such an exploratory approach.
Introduction

The review of the literature that follows will consist of sections addressing the following topics:

- An introduction to youth offending, including the nature of adolescent offending and the manner in which YOs are dealt with under current criminal justice law and policy;
- The psychological literature on youth offending - including what is known from criminological literature about the risk factors associated with youth offending, factors associated with the persistence versus desistance of such offenders, and theorising about the mechanisms by which such factors exert an influence;
- The mental health problems of young offenders, documenting recent studies investigating the rates of comorbidity and possible explanations of the apparent association.
- What is written about young offender institutions, including what is known about the institutional environment and its potential impact.
- The transition of young offenders back to the community subsequent to release. This will include findings on rates of recidivism of young offenders released from custody, and the need to consider outcome more holistically will be discussed. Rice, Herman & Petersen's (1993) model conceptualising the impact of life events and challenges on developing adolescents will also be presented. This can be seen to provide a useful lens through which to consider the potential impact of such a transition on young offenders.
- Social support - including the nature of social support, its potential role as a buffer against the effect of stress and individual differences in the use of social support.
- The need for the current research, including the specific research questions to be addressed and the potential implications of the study.
**YOUTH OFFENDING**

*The Nature of Youth Offending*

Before proceeding with the current literature review, some comment would seem necessary on the nature of youth offending. How common is offending in young people? What kind of offences do they commit? Is the offending of adolescents just a phase they grow out of?

Any adequate discussion of the prevalence of youth offending is inevitably complicated by a number of methodological issues plaguing research. Definitions may vary, historical trends - sometimes difficult to interpret - may exist, and different sources of information may be subject to various biases and distortions (Rutter, Giller & Hagell, 1998). Official statistics in particular may vastly underestimate the amount of criminal activity amongst young people. Furthermore, rates of under-reporting may vary substantially dependent on the nature of the offence in question. As Rutter et al (1998) point out, a more adequate picture may be built by combining different sources of information, including official statistics, self-report data and victim surveys.

It should also be noted that the vast majority of research pertains to male offenders. Comparatively little is known about the development of offending and the course of criminal careers of young women. In view of the extreme paucity of research pertaining to female young offenders, the current literature review will concern itself predominantly with the findings for male offenders only (unless otherwise stated).
In spite of these difficulties it seems clear that most young people may be involved at some point in various illegal acts, such as under-age drinking, minor shoplifting or the use of illicit 'soft' drugs. Indeed, self-report studies estimate that such antisocial behaviour occurs in 50-80% of juveniles under the age of 18 (Rutter et al, 1998). Some of these behaviours may result in informal or transient contacts with the police, although most are said to be less serious than would merit recording in official statistics.

Even so, a significant minority of adolescents do go on to be dealt with by the youth justice system. The last publication of Criminal Statistics by the Home Office in 1997 documented that 120,100 young offenders aged 10 -17 were cautioned or found guilty of indictable offences that year - representing 24% of the known offender population (Criminal Statistics, Home Office 1997). Of these, the vast majority were male. Similar figures for young adults (aged 18-20) included a total of 85,600 cautioned or convicted of indictable crimes - representing 17% of all known offenders.

Whilst these figures represented a drop since 1987, the Home Office attributed this to the increased use of informal methods of dealing with young people who offend, rather than a drop in actual levels of criminal activity for this age group.

Regarding the nature of offences typically committed by young people, police figures consistently suggest that much of juvenile crime consists of theft-related offences, including burglary. Violent crimes, including sexual crimes, on the other hand are relatively rare.
In order to examine the development and course of young people's criminal careers, the well known 'Cambridge study' followed a large sample of inner London males longitudinally, from the age of 7 through early adulthood (Farrington, Lambert & West, 1998, cited in Rutter et al, 1998). The study found that the average criminal career began between the ages of 14 and 21, ending around the age of 26 (in cases where more than one offence was committed) with an average of 4.6 offences leading to conviction. Roughly equal proportions of all participants' offending was said to be committed across age periods of 10-16, 17-20 and 21-32 years.

Considerable heterogeneity was, however, noted concerning the life course and patterns of individuals' offending. Given the widespread nature of antisocial behaviour in young people, and the range of behaviours involved, this is perhaps unsurprising. In spite of many attempts to introduce categories of offender in response to this heterogeneity, little agreement was reached prior to the 1990s (Rutter, Giller & Hagell, 1998). Nevertheless, several authors have drawn an essential distinction between what Moffitt (1993) termed 'adolescent-limited' and 'life-course persistent' antisocial behaviour. Moffit (1993) believed the former to be much more common and this view has been confirmed by self-report data (Rutter et al, 1998). Regarding the latter, Rutter et al (1998) suggest that an additional subgroup be distinguished, whose antisocial behaviour shows a marked tendency to persist into adulthood and is associated with hyperactivity.

In spite of these often accepted distinctions, Rutter et al (1998) have warned that caution should be taken to avoid over-interpreting apparent subgroup differences found in criminal career studies. They argue that for the distinctions to be truly
meaningful it would need to be demonstrated that groups differed in ways other than overall levels of risk exposure. Some longitudinal evidence would also seem to suggest that the so-called adolescent-limited group may actually persist with their criminal behaviour and antisocial lifestyle habits, including heavy drinking, illicit drug use and brawling (Nagin et al, 1995, cited in Rutter et al, 1998). Nagin’s study suggested that the group had simply restricted their antisocial behaviour to forms with a lower risk of detection and consequently a reduced risk of jeopardising their jobs and marriages.

Such debates aside, it seems clear that a great many adolescents who offend do persist in their behaviour, well into adulthood. This further reinforces the need for effective interventions at an early stage.

Young Offenders, the Law and Policy

Brief comment would therefore seem necessary at this stage regarding the manner in which such young people are dealt with under the current youth justice system. According to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, children in England and Wales are deemed criminally responsible from the age of 10 and as a result become subject to criminal law from this age.

Youth Offending Teams - established by April 2000 within each local authority - are intended to provide the primary vehicle through which the aims of the Crime and Disorder act 1998 are delivered (NACRO, 1999). Differing from the previous youth justice teams, YOTs involve the co-operation of a number of local agencies, and
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include core staff from social work, police, probation, education and health disciplines.

The principal aim of the acts constitutes the prevention of offending by children and young people (NACRO, 1999). Towards this end, courts have a number of options for community-based orders that may be brought to bear on young people. These include parental bind-over, compensation and reparation orders, action plan orders, curfew, supervision and probation orders and community service orders, amongst others, as alternatives to custodial sentencing.

In spite of this emphasis, the courts nevertheless remain free to impose custodial sentences under certain, carefully defined circumstances (NACRO, 1999a). Broadly speaking, such cases include young people who have committed the rare crimes of murder or manslaughter (under section 53 of the Children and Young Person's Act, 1933), or other 'very serious' offences (defined as those for which adults can be sent to prison for at least 14 years). Under the current system, many of those detained will also be 'persistent young offenders', sentenced with the new Detention and Training Order (DTO). Half of the time for such orders (which are set at increments from 4 to 24 months) is served in a custodial setting. The remainder constitutes a period of supervision in the community by a YOT probation officer or social worker.

In line with the Children Act (1989), primary consideration should be given in courts of law as to the best interests of the child when sentencing. In ensuring this, magistrates will usually request a pre-sentence report, or other written or verbal report from social workers, probation officers or other YOT workers. Such reports
include comments on the suitability of different orders for the young person in question.

The total number of young offenders, serving a custodial sentence on a sampling date in 1997 (when the latest prison statistics were calculated), was 7,949 (97% of these were male). A further 2,973 were held on remand. Compared to figures for cautions and sentencing for indictable offences more generally, males serving custodial sentences showed a greater proportion of burglary, robbery and violent offences. A total of 748 Section 53 orders were also made in 1997 (NACRO, 1999b).

Thus, considerable numbers continue to be detained in YOIs and other secure facilities. Debate has often raged about the efficacy of such institutions in reducing the offending behaviour of young people, and the ethics of sentencing particularly younger adolescents to custody in such settings. Before turning to some of the literature on YOIs however, it would seem necessary to review what is known about how young people come to offend in the first place. In particular, it is important to consider what factors might predispose an individual to offend, the mechanisms by which these factors exert an influence and how it is that some seem to ‘grow out’ of offending whilst others persist.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE ON YOUTH OFFENDING**

*Risk Factors for Youth Offending*

A number of studies have investigated the variables associated with antisocial behaviour in young people. A major review of this literature conducted by Rutter,
Giller & Hagell (1998) recently concluded that a number of individual, psychosocial and population-wide factors would seem to influence the development of such behaviour. Adequate discussion of the review's findings is beyond the scope of the current text but the conclusions are briefly summarised below.

Individual features supported by the literature include hyperactivity, cognitive impairment, especially verbal and planning skills, and temperamental features, especially impulsivity, sensation seeking, a lack of control and aggressivity (Rutter et al, 1998). Whilst no single gene is thought to be associated with criminal behaviour, it seems that the normal variations of several different genes may be implicated, exerting their influence via their impact on such dispositional features. Finally, Rutter et al (1998) concluded that assertions of a distorted style of information processing, including a tendency to wrongly attribute negative intentions in others' behaviour, to misinterpret social interactions and to focus on aggressive behaviour by others are also supported.

Psychosocial risk factors supported in the literature include large family size, broken homes and teenage parenting in particular. Rutter et al (1998) however suggest that the risk associated with such family characteristics is more a reflection of their frequent association with factors such as family discord and ineffective parenting - including coercive or hostile parenting, abuse and neglect, ineffective parenting and poor supervision or monitoring - which are more strongly predictive of antisocial behaviour and associated with a more persistent course. Whilst their frequent co-occurrence has made it difficult to separate out the relative contributions of these
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facets or parenting, the greatest risk may arise from their presence in combination (Rutter et al, 1998).

Involvement with delinquent peers, which whilst more likely to be chosen by antisocial individuals, may also increase the chances of their persistence in offending. Mediated via their effects on parental depression and family conflict (which are often associated with ineffective parenting styles) poverty and social disadvantage would seem to indicate an increased risk. Finally, whilst experienced by much of the population, instability in work records and periods of unemployment may increase the likelihood of offending in those already high in risk. Unemployment would seem, perhaps predictably, to be associated with increases in acquisitive offending in particular.

Concerning population wide influences, Rutter et al (1998) suggest that rates of criminal offending may be dependent on the area in which people live. It would appear, however, that the social, as opposed to the physical, environment in such areas may be most influential in this respect (although the latter may affect opportunities for individuals to offend). Individuals growing up in areas characterised by a lack of social cohesion and informal community controls may be at an increased risk. Lack of employment opportunities, a collective feeling of low self-efficacy, and the availability of guns and drugs would also seem to exert an influence, although the exact nature of this remains unclear and may be indirect.

Finally, there is also some evidence, albeit limited, for an association with the qualities of schools. More specifically, the general social ethos of the school and the behaviour
of pupils populating it (e.g. bullying, delinquent behaviour etc.) may exert an indirect influence (Rutter et al, 1998). Small effects exerted by the media have also been noted and, whilst their interpretation is fiercely debated, Rutter et al (1998) conclude that there are nevertheless differences in rates of antisocial behaviour according to ethnicity.

Overall therefore, a considerable body of evidence has now been amassed regarding the factors which would seem to predispose to youth offending. Not surprisingly, few of these factors were found to be influential in isolation. Rather, their greatest effect was observed when risk factors existed in combination with one another. Furthermore, as Rutter et al (1998) note, there are huge individual differences in response to these risk factors - with some individuals seriously and lastingly affected and others showing more normal psychological development and social functioning in spite of their presence. Whilst more work is needed, some authors have thus turned their attention to factors associated with the apparent 'resilience' shown by some young people.

Rutter et al (1998) note that much of the apparent resilience evident in research may have resulted spuriously from crude measurements of risk (Rutter et al, 1998). Notwithstanding this problem, the overall evidence would seem to suggest that a lack of genetic vulnerability, higher IQ, positive temperamental features, a stable, warm, harmonious relationship with at least one parent in the context of overall family discord, parental supervision, good experiences at school (involving responsibility or success), a prosocial peer group, experiences opening up new opportunities, a sense of self efficacy, and a positive approach to planning and problem solving would all
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seem to constitute protective factors (Rutter et al, 1998). Similarly to risk factors, few of these factors were found to be influential in isolation, but exerted their greatest effect in combination with one another.

Interestingly, a qualitative study conducted recently (Liddle, 1998) found that young offenders confirmed the importance of many of the above factors in bringing about their own offending. The influence and interaction of these factors were however complicated. As Liddle (1998, p.8) commented “...most described a multi-faceted, complex series of events or factors which led them either to engage in criminal behaviour in the first place, or to accelerate their involvement in it. Respondents tended to recognise that while particular factors such as school or peer pressure were important, such factors usually interacted both with one another and with other factors, to ‘push and pull’ young people in different directions”. This highlights the need to explain how such risk factors work together in bringing about offending - to which the discussion now turns.

**Persistence versus Desistance of Young Offenders**

In considering the literature some years ago, Hollin (1992, p.69-70) noted:

“..whilst the findings of such longitudinal surveys [of risk] are important in describing the conditions associated with onset of criminal behaviour, they also demand an explanation of how they cause delinquent behaviour. In other words, we need a grand theory to explain the process by which the interaction between the young person and his or her environmental circumstances culminate in criminal behaviour”

Arguably, such a grand theory remains lacking. What is more, how such factors result in the development of offending behaviour is not the only question that needs to be posed. As noted already, whilst some individuals persist in their offending through
adulthood, others apparently limit their antisocial behaviour to adolescence. Clearly, this important variation also requires explanation. In response to this question, several possible explanations have been proposed in the literature:

One of the most popular concerns the possibility that the two groups differ simply in terms of the overall levels of risk to which they have been exposed. The most persistent recidivists may, for instance, show signs of disruptive and antisocial behaviour within the early childhood years. Such persistent behaviour further seems to demonstrate a greater association with hyperactivity and genetic factors, more difficulties in peer relationships, somewhat below average cognitive skills and poor scholastic achievement (Rutter et al, 1998). Others have suggested that those who desist early do so as a result of their weaker overall propensity and various biologically-related developmental changes. Finally, although somewhat limited, there is evidence to suggest that qualitative as well as quantitative differences may exist between the early predisposing experiences of the two groups. Peer group influences may for instance be more important in the case of adolescent-limited offenders (Patterson & Yoerger, 1997; Stattin & Magnusson, 1995 in Rutter et al, 1998).

An alternative approach to these questions, however, in line with the increased interest in more general life course research, has emphasised the need to understand antisocial behaviour from a perspective of developmental pathways. From this perspective, the mechanisms involved in discontinuities as well as continuities of development are both afforded importance.
Caspi & Moffitt (1993) were amongst the early proponents of this view (in Rutter et al, 1998). They suggested that adverse experiences may serve to accentuate, although rarely alter habitual behavioural patterns. Continuity in antisocial behaviour was thus seen to arise from the cumulative effects of risk experiences which are themselves influenced or indirectly selected by the individual. In one example of this, both incarceration and alcohol abuse were found to have an adverse effect on employment and consequently accentuated antisocial behaviour - even when measurement error, previous behaviours and risk experiences had all been taken into account (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

That some experiences may serve as 'turning points' for individuals, as a result of which major changes in behaviour occur, has also been increasingly recognised (Pickles & Rutter, 1991; Rutter, 1996; Sampson & Laub, 1993). As a general rule, experiences with a pervasive impact may be the most influential in altering behaviour. Lasting change as a result of more acute, short lived events or experiences that do not have long-term consequences is, in contrast, rare (Rutter et al, 1998).

Whilst methodologically-sound investigations remain lacking, some evidence suggests that marriage to a supportive partner, stable employment and military experiences may constitute turning points for offending individuals (Rutter et al, 1998). The exact mechanisms by which such experiences exert their influence remain to be agreed however. Hypotheses include that such experiences impose informal controls implicit to adult social bonds, that they may entail a change to the individual's peer group and social network and that they reduce the opportunities for crime due to alternative
involvements. A shift in internal cognitions may also be implicated, including changes to self image, attitudes and expectations (Rutter et al, 1998).

Overall, therefore, it would seem that later experiences tend to build on earlier ones - being selected and responded to actively by the individual - but that risk is not set in stone and a variety of alternative developmental trajectories may exist. Some of the risk factors identified previously will be responsible for individual differences in offending (e.g. early onset-hyperactivity), others will be involved in translating liabilities into acts (e.g. peer group influences), others will account for differences in overall levels of crime (e.g. availability of guns), others will relate to situational variations (e.g. environmental differences in the local area) and finally others will be responsible for the persistence or otherwise of behaviour over time (e.g. an unsupportive marriage to a deviant spouse).

As Rutter et al (1998) conclude, the many causal processes implicated are neither simple nor unidirectional. Rather, they involve indirect chain effects that may also reflect two-way interactions between underlying biological features and behaviour. Attempts to examine causal processes one link at a time, as opposed to those searching for a set of factors operating similarly throughout the causal chain, may prove the most beneficial in moving the field forward (Rutter et al, 1998).

Clearly, the processes involved at the time of individuals’ release from custody may represent one such important link in the chain of offending behaviour. Processes pertaining to mental health around this important transition point would also seem
important to investigate, in view of YOs’ vulnerability to mental health problems. To this vulnerability discussion will now turn.

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN YOUNG OFFENDERS

Rates of Mental Health Problems in Young Offenders

It has long been recognised that rates of mental health problems in adolescent populations are high. Indeed, as many as 1 in 5 children and adolescents are estimated to be in need of professional intervention for psychological problems at any one time (Rutter & Smith, 1995). Furthermore, it has been suggested that most diagnosed mental health problems may have their onset in the period of adolescence (Kosky, 1992; Steinberg, 1987). Depression would seem to be a common diagnosis in young people, although co-morbid conduct and/or anxiety disorders (Hunter et al, 1996) may mask the signs in many cases (Harrington, 1995).

This picture is arguably predictable. Adolescence has been conceptualised as a time of adapting to many changes, and as providing opportunities for growth and development (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Whilst many manage this successfully, others do not, and it has been argued that a ‘mismatch’ between the needs of developing adolescents and their experiences at school, home and other contexts may negatively influence psychological and behavioural development (Eccles et al, 1996). Such a mismatch may particularly impact negatively on young people who lack the resources to cope with the challenges facing them (Petersen & Hamburg, 1986). Thus, it may be the more socially and psychologically vulnerable adolescents who
experience difficulties and manifest psychological disturbances during this period (Leffert & Petersen, 1995; Rutter, 1995 in Coleman & Hendry, 1999).

In spite of these insights, it is only relatively recently that increasing attention has been paid to the mental health needs of young people who offend. Such studies remain few in number and differences in samples and methodologies make it hard to generalise across them. Evidence is nevertheless accumulating that the incidence of mental health problems in YOs may be high - particularly amongst persistent offenders and those who are convicted. Rates of substance misuse are similarly high (see Newburn, 1999).

In illustration, 19% of one sample of YOs appearing before a large youth court in Manchester were found to have ‘significant medical problems’ (Dolan, Holloway, Bailey & Smith, 1999). A total of 42% had a history of substance abuse (including alcohol, cannabis and solvent abuse), 9% a history of deliberate self-harm and 7% had psychiatric problems of a nature and degree that required immediate treatment (including psychotic illness, conduct and emotional disorders). Of note, the most vulnerable group with the most psychosocial difficulties were most likely to be placed in custodial remand (Dolan et al, 1999).

Following their conviction, Gunn et al (1991, in Bailey, 1999) found that a third of 16-18 year olds sentenced by the youth court could be diagnosed with a primary mental disorder, compared to less than a fifth in the general adolescent population. As part of a wider survey on the psychiatric morbidity of prisoners in England and Wales, the National Statistics office also produced estimates of mental disorder for young male offenders aged 16 to 20 years, remanded or sentenced to custody across all of
the prison establishments in England and Wales (Lader, Singleton & Mertzer, 1998).

This study revealed rates of personality disorders to be extremely high (predominantly antisocial personality disorder, although paranoid personality disorder was also prevalent) - in a total of 84% of remanded and 88% sentenced YOs. A total of 8% of remanded and 10% of sentenced YOs had suffered functional psychosis in the past year, and 52% of remand and 41% of sentenced YOs were considered to show neurotic symptoms above the threshold on the Clinical Interview Schedule- Revised, compared to general population estimates of 11% for this age group.

Suicide attempts were noted in about a fifth of Lader et al’s (1998) sample during their lifetime, many of these within the previous year. Rates of suicidal ideation were even higher. Some evidence also suggests that the risk of suicide may be significantly raised on entrance to custody. A substantial rate of suicide among offenders within the first month of their going to prison has been noted - 90% of these by hanging (Liebling, 1992).

Regarding rates of substance misuse, 62% of male remand and 70% of male sentenced young offenders had drinking habits in the year before coming to prison that could be considered as hazardous. More than 70% reported using at least one illicit drug in the year before coming to prison (including cannabis, heroin, methadone, amphetamines, crack and cocaine powder), with 57% of those on remand and 52% of those sentenced demonstrating some level of dependence (Lader et al, 1997).

Whilst figures quoted in studies are not always clear and few investigations have included comparison groups, Hagell (2001) concluded from her review of studies that
the prevalence of any psychiatric diagnosis ranged from 25-77% for those in the Criminal Justice System but outside of custody and 46-81% for young people in custody. Thus a conservative estimate based on these figures would suggest that rates of mental illness are at least three times as high for those in the Criminal Justice System compared to the general population (Hagell, 2001).

Concerning the relative frequency of different types of disorder, the overall picture showed similarities with that of the general population. Conduct and oppositional disorders may be amongst the most common for both the YO and the general adolescent population. Rates of anxiety and depressive disorders or substance misuse typically follow. Rates of personality disorder and psychosis on the other hand would seem to be low compared to those for the general population. Finally, rates of co-morbidity are typically high in YO samples (Hagell, 2001).

Some would argue that such high rates of mental health problems reflect in part the stress associated with a custodial sentence or the threat of it, and thus would be expected to dissipate after such a stressor is removed. In support of this hypothesis, Nieland, McCluskie & Tait (2001, cited in Hagell, 2001) longitudinally investigated whether stressful events experienced in custody (e.g. health problems, theft of belongings etc.) were predictive of later anxiety and depression. After controlling for symptomatology at the time of entry into custody, they found that this was indeed the case. Kosky, Sawyer & Fotheringham (1996), however, found comparably high rates of mental health problems in a follow up of their sample, one year subsequent to their release from custody. Rates of mental health problems were indeed 3-4 times higher
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than those reported in community samples, and were comparable to those of adolescents attending mental health clinics.

In spite of these findings, the mental health needs of YOs have often been neglected (Kurtz, Thornes & Bailey, 1997). The recent establishment of YOTs under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (England and Wales) - including mandatory input from health professionals - can be seen as a reflection of the increasing insights into the links between adolescents’ substance misuse, physical and mental health and offending behaviours (NACRO, 1999a). Nevertheless, services are still poorly developed in comparison to those for adult offenders. As a result of the Reed Report’s assertion that mentally disordered offenders should receive care and treatment from health and social services (Department of Health and Home Office, 1992), for instance, a number of court diversion schemes have been established for adult offenders identified as mentally disordered. In contrast to this, diversion schemes for adolescent offenders have not been forthcoming (Dolan et al, 1999). The provision of secure psychiatric beds for adolescents remains similarly sparse.

Before considering the potential impact of Youth Offending Institutions on this already vulnerable group however, it would seem useful to consider why so many YOs experience mental health problems more generally.

*Explanations of the Association between Offending and Mental Health*

Several recent texts have noted the complexity of the association between mental health problems and offending behaviour in adolescents (Bailey, 1999; Kurz et al, 1997). Most notably, risk factors for the two phenomena show a marked similarity.
This gives rise to the possibility that the relationship may simply be correlational, rather than implicating any causal mechanisms. For instance, histories of child abuse and loss - well known risk factors for the development of mental health problems - were found in high rates among offenders who committed serious crimes of violence (Boswell, 1995; Bailey, 1996). In a similar vein, Rutter, Giller & Hagell (1998) have raised the possibility that antisocial behaviour and other forms of psychosocial disturbance may not represent truly distinct disorders, but rather different manifestations of the same underlying liability. Certainly there may be considerable overlap in the constructs associated with mental disorder and criminal behaviour - most evident in case of conduct disorder.

Alternatively, mental health problems and criminal behaviour may be causally related in some way. For instance, it might be the case that - in some instances - mental health problems in young people lead them to criminal behaviour. This is most clearly illustrated in the case of the young person who begins to commit robberies to fund his increasing drug habit. The young man whose outbursts of aggressive behaviour mask his depression following a bereavement might also be seen as an example of this.

Conversely, antisocial and criminal behaviour may increase the risk of mental health problems in young people. This notion is in keeping with a number of general population epidemiological and longitudinal studies which have demonstrated that early antisocial behaviour may also increase the risk of later emotional disturbance in early adulthood (e.g. Ferdinand & Verhulst, 1995; Lewinsohn, Rohde & Seeley, 1995; Rutter, 1991; Rutter, Maughan, Meyers, Pickles, Silberg, Simonoff & Taylor, 1997 in Rutter et al, 1998). The risk of anxiety and depressive disorders is in
particular found to be increased and does not simply reflect earlier co-morbidity of emotional problems and conduct disorder in childhood (Rutter, 1991; Rutter et al, 1997).

As Rutter, Giller & Hagell (1998) pointed out, the operative causal mechanisms responsible for this increased risk of emotional disturbance remain to be established. Nevertheless, they most likely involve aspects of the antisocial lifestyle and its effects on the individual's overall social situation. Such effects might include job troubles, poor marital relationships and falling out with friends (Robins, 1978 in Rutter et al, 1998). Indeed, a longitudinal community study - following individuals between the ages of 10 and 28 - revealed that antisocial behaviour in childhood was associated with a several-fold increase in the likelihood of acute chronic negative life events and experiences of the kind hypothesised by Brown & Harris (1978) to precipitate the onset of depressive disorders (Champion, Goodall & Rutter, 1995).

A similar increase in the risk of later suicidal behaviour has been observed following antisocial behaviour in early life (Achenbach et al, 1995; Harrington et al, 1993). Interestingly, the latter's follow up of a child psychiatric clinic sample through to the age of 32 showed that an increased risk for suicidal behaviour was not due to the occurrence of major depressive disorders in adulthood. Rather it seemed to reflect the impulsive and antisocial lifestyles of such individuals. That substance misuse may be implicated in such cases has also been raised (Lewinsohn et al, 1995; Gould, Schaffer & Davies, 1990).
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However the findings are explained, such longitudinal studies (using a variety of community and clinical samples) highlight the development, continuity or exacerbation of mental health problems in many antisocial young people over time. This reinforces the notion that the high rates of depression and anxiety typically found in remanded and imprisoned YO samples are not simply a transitory phenomenon that might be expected to dissipate subsequent to their release. Rather such concurrent mental health problems might be expected to persist and the need to treat - or better still prevent - such problems is therefore clear. At present however, the particular risks to mental health at the time of release from custody remain unclear and require elucidation if interventions are to be devised.

We now turn to what is known about YOIs in order to consider the possible impact of custody on such vulnerable young people.

YOUNG OFFENDER INSTITUTIONS

The difficulties faced by the YO adjusting to a sentence in a YOI may be considerable, and relatively little is known about the process. Equally little is known about the impact of the prison experience on individuals’ psychosocial functioning - particularly in the long term. Much of what is written remains speculative or anecdotal. What follows therefore documents what is written more generally about the institutional environment of YOIs, and particularly the associated problems of bullying, self-harm and suicide frequently noted.

Whilst no empirical evidence exists, it has often been argued that the ethos in YOIs may be different from that of adult establishments (Biggam & Power, 1997).
Certainly, many inmates may be experiencing their first period of incarceration, involving the loss of contact with family and friends, in some cases for the first time. The YO may also experience a number of potential stressors in the institutional context, including a loss of liberty, social isolation and a lack of stimulation amongst others. The extent to which these are experienced will of course be affected by the nature of the regime of the institution in question. For some, nonetheless, it seems plausible that they may experience the removal of some stressors to an extent - such as conflictual family relationships or unemployment. Such potential benefits have however rarely been considered in the literature.

**Bullying in YOIs**

The problem of bullying in custodial facilities has been afforded the most space in the psychological literature to date, although it has been noted that even this phenomenon has been neglected until relatively recently (Connell & Farrington, 1996). Bullying has been defined as including acts of physical violence, threatening and teasing, extortion, stealing or destruction of possessions, ridiculing, name-calling and social exclusion (Connell & Farrington, 1996), although confusion is sometimes evidenced in the literature between this and more general experiences of violence in prison settings.

Regarding data on the prevalence of assaults, the 1991 National English survey found that 15% of prisoners under the age of 21 had been assaulted by another prisoner in the previous 6 months (Walmsley, Howard & White, 1992). Investigating bullying in Young Offender Institutions more specifically, Beck (1994) found that 22% indicated that they had been victimised in their current institution and of the 9% who admitted bullying, nearly half had also been victims. Those with little prison experience were
said to be most likely to be victimised. Overall, the study supported the notion that young offenders might begin their institutional careers as victims, shifting to become bullies as they become more experienced inmates and have more friends to gang up with.

A study by Connell & Farrington (1996) similarly documented inmates assertions' that bullying took place as part of the process of initiation within the institution by more 'senior' inmates - as a kind of 'rite of passage'. Whether the bullying of a new inmate continued depended largely on the victim's response to it, although the reputation he brought with him from previous facilities was also said to be influential. Bullying in this study was more generally seen by the young offenders as a normal part of life in custody - helping to establish and maintain the 'hierarchy' and 'jail respect' of individual bullies.

Unsurprisingly, bullying has been found to be most likely to occur at times when surveillance was at a minimum and the probability of detection was consequently low (McGurk & McDougall, 1991). The prevalence and frequency of bullying in custody may vary considerably - both within and between institutions - and are said by inmates to be greatly affected by the group dynamics and characteristics of individual offenders (Connell & Farrington, 1996). Facets of the institution's subculture may also exacerbate the problem. For instance, subcultures in youth custody settings have been noted to be strongly disapproving of 'informers'. This clearly acts to discourage many victims from disclosing the bullying and may result in greater ostracization and persecution for those that do (Marshall, 1993).
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**Self Harm in YOIs**

The high rates of self-harm and suicide in many prisons also remains a high profile problem. Indeed, it has been found that around a third of self-injuries and up to a quarter of suicides in prisons occur amongst prisoners under the age of 21 - in spite of fact that this group represent just under a fifth of the overall prison population (Liebling & Krarup, 1993).

It has consistently been found that suicides are more prevalent among remand prisoners (e.g. Dooley, 1990), although Crighton & Towl (1997) have suggested that this reflects a more general vulnerability of inmates around the time of reception to institutions. Indeed, 10% of deaths were found to occur within the first 24 hours of arrival at an establishment, with those serving sentences over 18 months presenting an increased risk (Crighton & Towl, 1997). Similarly, self-injurious behaviour has been found to be more likely in the first week of imprisonment - possibly as a result of the feelings of trauma, isolation, shame and embarrassment often experienced by prisoners in the first few days of incarceration (Livingston, 1997). Of concern, the limited range of methods available for self-injury in the prison setting may result in YOs selecting potentially more lethal alternatives (e.g. hanging) for lack of choice (Wool & Dooley, 1987; Home Office, 1990).

Suicidal ideation may be triggered by bullying, fears of sentence or conviction, fears about another prisoner or anxieties about family, friends and partners - all potent within the institutional context of YOIs (Bailey, 1993). A similar picture emerges for self-harm - whereby bullying (Power & Spencer, 1987), boredom and frustration (Liebling, 1991, in Livingston, 1997) in the prison context have been found to be
important contributory factors. With regards to personal characteristics which may render a young person more vulnerable, one study of suicidal YOs found that the group showed a higher level of background deprivation and were unable to cope with or make constructive use of their sentence compared to their non-suicidal peers (Liebling, 1991; Liebling & Krarup, 1993). The most vulnerable inmates were said to be commonly found in the worst situations in the prison - having no job or activity in the prison, being unable to relate to peers within the institution and receiving little contact from family.

Within such a context self-harm may represent a coping strategy for individuals - resulting in strict observations of them, and so protecting them from further harassment (Power & Spencer, 1987). On the other hand, it has been noted that the use of the strip cell as a means of suicide/self-injury prevention and the accompanying isolation experienced can be extremely aversive to young people (Liebling, 1991). As Johnson (1978 in Bailey, 1993) points out, such a measure may undermine the habitual coping efforts of young male offenders. Whilst adolescent males typically rely on escape and avoidance strategies, segregation forces considerable unstructured time on young people to reflect on the problem at hand and their inability to deal with it.

Thus whilst the self-injurious behaviour of adolescent males in YOIs shows links with mental health variables including depression, hopelessness and substance abuse (Livingston, 1997) it has been argued that, for many, such behaviours are not reflective of a psychiatric condition. Rather, Bailey (1993) has emphasised the role of the social milieu of the YOI in exacerbating the problems of suicidality, self-harming
and bullying. As such, intervention to ameliorate such problems should be aimed at an institutional as well as individual level (Bailey, 1993).

The YOI Experience

One of the few studies regarding the general YOI experience from the perspective of young people themselves is that of Lyon, Dennison & Wilson (2000). In their study, YOs spoke of their experience of prison as a ‘separate world’, disconnected from their lives outside. Many referred to having felt degraded and alienated during their first experiences of prison in particular, to the strains placed on families in maintaining contact and to their ambivalence regarding relationships with other prisoners and staff. Many felt that they had to grow up fast in prison as a result of such experiences.

Thus the institutional experience may be an extremely stressful one for many already vulnerable individuals. Comment is less frequently made however about potentially positive aspects of the YOI experience for adolescents. These include the benefits derived from a number of innovative programmes developed in individual institutions to address problems commonly associated with offending behaviour (Sir David Ramsbotham, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 1998). Young people in Lyon et al’s (2000) study similarly viewed the education and rehabilitative courses they received in a generally positive light (Lyon et al, 2000). Other non-specific benefits may potentially be derived from the social networks established by institutionalised adolescent offenders (Clarke-McLean, 1996) and the development of positive relationships with staff (Lyon, 1998).
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Clearly the possible effects of such an institutional experience on YOs in the longer term requires further elucidation. Related to this is the influence such an experience may have on adjustment subsequent to release. Bailey (1993) has drawn attention to the possibility that survival tactics learnt by some in YOIs (such as alienation and a lack of trust) may prove extremely unhelpful if transferred to new environments on release. Nothing would seem to have been written from an empirical point of view, however. The transition to be made by YOs subsequent to release is nonetheless an important one - with potential ramifications for the individual in terms of both re-offending and broader psychosocial functioning. Thus what little can be said about the transition, on the basis of current literature, will now be explored.

MAKING THE TRANSITION OF RELEASE FROM YOI's

Rates of Recidivism

Home Office statistics suggest that the rate of reconviction for 14-16 years olds are extremely high. Of those discharged from custody in 1996, 85% were re-convicted within two years of their release (NACRO, 2000). Indeed, Sampson & Laub’s (1993) analysis of Glueck’s data (in Rutter et al, 1998) suggests that the fact of imprisonment made it more likely that young people’s criminal activities would persist. This appeared predominantly attributable to the adverse effect of prison on employment prospects. Although based on adult learning disabled offender populations, there has been some suggestion that the risk of recidivism to be highest in the year immediately following discharge or release (e.g. Day, 1988 in Day, 1993).
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Whilst limited, there is also some evidence to suggest that the regimes of different institutions may play a role in determining the likelihood of re-offending. For instance, Ditchfield & Catan (1992, in Rutter et al, 1998) compared similar groups of section 53 offenders (those with particularly serious offences) in YOIs and local authority community homes. The latter placed greater emphasis on maintaining family contacts, provided greater opportunity for contact with the wider external community and better work training and educational activities. At the follow up of these samples, 2 years post discharge, it was found that the latter group showed a lower rate of recidivism, with a lower rate of violent offences in particular.

Although more lasting benefits can be hard to achieve when individuals leave institutions and return to their previous environments, Rutter et al (1998) summarised the evidence pertaining to the effects of institutional characteristics more generally in their review. They concluded that institutions most likely to have beneficial effects on antisocial behaviour include those where the overall ethos is pro-social, educational and work training activities are good, the development of a more positive and supportive social group is facilitated, and there are opportunities to exercise responsibilities and personal decision making in ways that foster self-efficacy. As they noted however, “Many prisons stand out as particularly likely to be damaging as judged by these criteria” (Rutter et al, 1998, p. 364).

The Need for more Holistic Outcomes

Thus, whilst some reductions in rates of re-offending have been demonstrated under some circumstances, it seems clear that as a general rule YOs leaving YOIs remain at a high risk of re-offending - particularly in the early months subsequent to their
release. The continued investigation of rates of recidivism and factors which impact upon them would therefore seem a necessary undertaking. The general need to consider outcome more holistically is also beginning to be recognised, however. As Bailey (1993, p.355-356) asserts:

"Both the Children Act 1989 and the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (England and Wales) suggest the need for further exploration of the circumstances of young offenders remanded to security, sentenced to youth custody or experiencing a community placement as an alternative to residential care. This should lead to the rescrutinisation of programmes within and outside residential settings and particularly a comparison between child care, education, health and penal settings, focusing on far more broad-based outcome measures than reoffending; looking towards the overall quality of life of adolescents leaving establishments; their future education, vocation, avocation, nature of relationships with family and peers and their evolving physical and mental health profiles as young adults."

Whilst sparse, some studies have highlighted the more general vulnerability of offenders on release from custodial settings. As mentioned, Kosky et al (1996) found high rates of mental health problems and substance misuse in young offenders subsequent to release. In addition they noted high levels of continuing social disruption. Many lived in refuges, reflecting their continuing poor relations with parents. Furthermore, the vast majority were unemployed, with less than a third having experienced any period of employment since release from custody. Whilst further longitudinal studies are needed to elucidate changes in YOs' stress levels throughout the course of their contact with the Youth Justice System, it seems reasonable to assume that leaving a YOI may represent a crucial time for young people. At such a time they may be particularly vulnerable to either developing or exacerbating pre-existing mental health problems.
From the literature pertaining to adults, it has also been found that offenders released from prison may be at an increased risk of mortality subsequent to release (Harding & Fryc, 1988; Harding, 1990), commonly from overdose (Seaman, Brettle & Gore, 1998). Similar results are beginning to emerge for adolescent offenders, with murder found to be a common cause of death in one US sample - particularly among YOs with a history of gang involvement, drug arrests or institutional violence (Lattimore, Linster & MacDonald, 1997). More generally, there is evidence to suggest that difficulties experienced pre-sentence tend to persist. In the case of mentally ill adult offenders, for instance, problems in criminological and psychiatric domains were found to persist subsequent to release, with high rates of recidivism and psychiatric admissions reported (Lynette, 1992). Whilst caution should always be exercised in extrapolating findings from adult offenders directly to young offenders, these findings would nevertheless seem relevant.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study to date providing insights into YOs' experience of release is that of Lyon et al (2000). In their study, commissioned by the Home Office, Lyon et al (2000) investigated the experiences of young people in prison relating to three areas: life leading up to prison, experiences of custody and hopes, fears and plans for the future. Across these broad domains, Lyon et al (2000) investigated the views of both male and female young offenders during discussions of focus groups held in 10 different prisons. In drawing out YOs' opinions regarding the third domain - of particular relevance to the current study - the researchers guided the young people in groups towards thinking about how prison prepares them for release, whether or not they would be able to stay away from re-offending, possible ways to prevent young people from offending, whether they had plans for housing and
In talking about the transition from custody, some YOs in the study talked of their dependence on prison and their feelings of being 'like a lost sheep' subsequent to their release from previous sentences (Lyon et al, 2000). YOs were also concerned about the difficulty they might experience in avoiding re-offending. They felt in particular that peer pressure and their possible return to drink and drugs might be primary reasons for their re-offending on release. Their return to estates where criminal activity was rife, a lack of employment and the need for money were also viewed by young people as placing them at risk. In relation to this vulnerability, YOs criticised the lack of preparation for release, and voiced the importance of support following custody. Finally, the provision of adequate benefits, education and gaining qualifications and subsequent employment emerged as vital if offending was to be avoided in the future, although the idea that only the young person had the power to effect change in his/her life also proved dominant.

That YOs' transition on release is being made at quite a crucial stage of development clearly needs to be recognised. Whilst the traditional view that adolescence is, by definition, a stage of inevitable trauma and disorder is no longer accepted (Coleman & Hendry, 1999), it is agreed that for a minority it may be experienced as a stressful period. Certainly it is generally recognised that any individual may undergo a variety of events, changes and transitions during the adolescent period, some of which may be negotiated relatively easily, while others may be experienced as stressful (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). How the changes associated with release from a prison sentence are
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experienced and negotiated by individuals in such an already turbulent life stage remains unclear and is the focus of the current study. Whilst Lyon et al's (2000) study clearly represents an important first step, conclusions drawn by the study in relation to this were limited by a number of factors - which will be commented upon in a later section. Before commenting further however, it would seem helpful to consider Rice, Herman & Petersen's (1993) conceptualisation of how adolescents cope with life's challenges more generally.

A Developmental Model of Coping with Adolescent Challenge

Rice, Herman & Petersen (1993) have devised a developmental model of how adolescents cope with the challenges that face them on the basis of their longitudinal research. The model, depicted below, assumes a developmental trajectory, whereby prior adjustment determines the impact of life experiences on mental health and vice versa.

Rice et al (1993) delineate three categories of potential stressors that may be experienced by the individual. 'Normative' life events include those experienced by the majority of young people, such as pubertal development, peer pressure, changing or leaving school. 'Non-normative' events - for example bereavement, illness, the break up of friendship and parental separation - by contrast are less commonly experienced than normative events, or occur at less predictable points in the life course. Finally, an individual may experience 'daily hassles', defined by Kanner et al (1981) as the frustrations and irritations which stem more generally from transactions with the environment.
Correlations between life events and mental health problems have consistently been found in the literature, but tend to be modest (see Thoits, 1983). Whilst relatively minor in nature, life hassles may have a cumulative impact on mental health, accounting for a greater proportion of variance in outcome than life events. Furthermore, they have been demonstrated to mediate the impact of more major events (Dumont & Provost, 1999).

Figure 1: Rice et al’s (1993, p. 236) developmental model of coping with the challenges of adolescence

Overall, the model proposes that all changes experienced during the developmental transition may interact and the number, timing and synchronicity of such events are key features for the individual. The more potential stressors around at the same time, the more difficulty the individual might be expected to experience in dealing with them. The model also assumes that various external and internal resources may moderate both the effects of major life events on the frequency of associated hassles, and the effects of all the different types of challenges on adjustment. External resources include different sources of social support, such as parental and peer
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support. Internal resources include such factors as the individuals’ adaptive coping responses, intelligence and perceived control and self-efficacy (Rice et al., 1993).

Finally, the manner in which the adolescent meets the challenges during a developmental transition not only influences his or her adjustment in that instance, but also in future instances, as his/her personal and social resources are developed and shaped.

Clearly, a number of challenges may face a young person leaving a YOI. Being sentenced to a criminal offence is in itself arguably a non-normative event. On being released, YOs may be faced with the task of avoiding re-offending, and may need to make particular changes in their lives towards this end. They may also be faced with the task of re-integrating themselves into the social systems they have been removed from during their sentence. These include family, education/employment, and peer systems, along with romantic relationships. Many YOs may be young fathers, and some may even have acquired this status during their sentence.

The exact nature of these challenges, the difficulty or ease with which they are managed, and the resources drawn upon by the individual in the process remain unclear however. The current study thus fills a gap in investigating both the anticipated and actual experiences of YOs on release - in so doing elucidating more clearly the nature of the challenges faced by them at this time. The external resources drawn upon by YOs during this transition are also investigated - namely their use of social support, and the equally important blocks they perceive to seeking and making use of it.
SOCIAL SUPPORT

*The Concept of Social Support*

Considerable conceptual disagreement is evident in the literature on social support and this inevitably complicates any adequate discussion of the nature and role of social support. Indeed, the vast majority of studies pertaining to the subject have failed to even define their use of the concept. One helpful definition has been provided by Dumont & Provost (1999, p.345). They suggest that social support ‘is a multidimensional concept that includes the support actually received (informative, emotional and instrumental) and the sources of the support (friends, family, strangers and animals)’. In this way it can be considered as structural or functional. Most commonly, studies have focused on either one or the other of these facets and have failed to integrate the two. Complicating the picture still further, the distinction should be drawn between the overall availability of social support to the individual and the extent to which he or she actively seeks or accepts the help offered by others. The potential importance of these distinctions also remains unclear.

Concerning the functions of social support for adolescents in particular, Piko (1998) identified five factors from adolescents’ responses to the *Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviours*. ‘Emotional support’ was said to focus on the emotional reinforcement of the individual, by expressing esteem or respect and listening to the individual’s private feelings. ‘Informational support’ reflected the passing on of information from the support provider to the recipient (e.g. the provider suggests something, talks to the respondent about some topic of interest, tells them what he/she did in a similar situation). ‘Task-oriented guidance’ was similar to
Informational support, differing only in that it included a clear expectation or goal-setting relevant for the recipient - assisting him/her in a better understanding of the specific task or situation. ‘Rational-material’ support concerned giving or loaning of money. Finally, ‘practical support’ also focused on the more tangible dimensions of social support. However, this factor emphasised practical assistance of a non-material nature (e.g. taking care of the recipient’s possessions while they are away).

With these possible functions in mind, the findings regarding the impact of social support on the individual’s functioning during times of stress will now be discussed.

**Social Support as a Buffer against the Effects of Stress**

The generally protective role of social support in acting as a buffer against the effects of stress and reducing the likelihood of mental health problems, particularly depression, is now well established (e.g. Aro, Haenninen & Paronen, 1989; Aro, 1994; Herman-Stahl & Petersen, 1996). Conversely, a lack of social support may actually increase the risk of developing depression, and has consistently been noted in suicidal adolescents (Morano, Cisler & Lemerond, 1993; Crocker & Hakin-Larson, 1997; Windle & Windle, 1997). Of note, Biggam & Power (1997) examined the role of social support in YOs’ coping with incarceration. They found that YOs’ relationships with staff in the prison were important predictors of their levels of anxiety, depression and hopelessness.

Several studies have also investigated how social support may facilitate adjustment to important transitions. Particularly in the U.S., the importance of family support in facilitating the transition from high school to college has been demonstrated (e.g.
Compas et al, 1986; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Using clinical samples, studies have also demonstrated that supportive relationships may predict adolescents’ adaptation to discharge from residential treatment (e.g. Wilson & Lyman, 1983; Wells, Wyatt & Hobfoll, 1991).

As Holahan, Valentiner & Moos (1995) note, however, studies tend to be correlational rather than causal, and there is a need for future studies to include corroborating reports of functioning from other informants. The complexity of both the social support construct and its role as a buffer against psychopathology have also been discussed. In particular, the mechanisms by which social support buffers against the effects of stress continue to be debated.

In this regard, several authors have postulated that social support may exert an indirect effect via its influence on various protective factors. Social support has, for instance, been found to be associated with increased positive self-esteem (Coates, 1985; Short, Sandler & Roosa, 1996) Observing that coping strategies and social support may share important functions, Thoits (1986) has also argued that social support be considered more as ‘coping assistance’ in an individual’s attempts to manage stressful situations. For example, informational support in the form of advice from a confidant may increase an individual’s active problem-solving attempts.

On the balance of evidence however, it would seem that social support buffers against the effects of stress via both direct and indirect mechanisms - the latter through its support of adaptive coping responses (Holahan & Moos, 1991; Holahan et al, 1995). According to Holahan et al (1995), the relative strength of such direct and indirect
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paths may vary according to the level of stressor - the latter assuming greater importance under circumstances of increased demand.

Further debate has centred around whether the use of social support is beneficial in all, as opposed to some, cases. For instance, notable inconsistency in outcome has been found in studies where the effects of peer and familial social support in reducing the likelihood of substance misuse and behavioural problems have been explored (Wills & Cleary, 1996; Bender & Loesel, 1997; Buysse, 1997; Frauenglass, Routh, Pantin & Mason, 1997). More generally, Frydenberg (1997) has highlighted that seeking support from one's network may be associated with healthy adjustment in some contexts, but not in others, where it may rather reflect dependence on others. Perhaps related to this, some evidence suggests that obligatory social ties (e.g. parents, spouse) can produce negative consequences which may cancel the positive consequences for self esteem (e.g. Gove, Style & Hughes, 1990 in Piko, 1998).

As a result of such controversies, authors such as Piko (1998) have called for a new direction in thinking and research - towards examining more carefully the costs as well as benefits of social relationships. The general hypothesis is that the most efficacious type of support is that which matches the target individual's needs/wants, which in turn may be influenced by factors including age and gender. Thus we now turn to what is known about individual differences and preferences with regards to the use of social support.
Individual Differences in the Use of Social Support

Perhaps one of the most consistent findings in the literature has concerned differences in the extent to which males and females seek social support as a coping strategy. Specifically, a number of studies have documented how females are more likely to turn to social support than males (e.g. Frydenberg, 1993, Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991; Patterson & McCubbin, 1987; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1990). Regarding the coping strategies adopted by males and females more generally, research would suggest that adolescent boys are more likely to use physical recreation, ignore, avoid and keep problems to themselves. Adolescent girls, on the other hand, are more likely to use social support seeking, wishful thinking, tension reduction strategies, self blame and worry (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; 1999; Halstead, Johnson & Cunningham, 1993).

There is also some evidence to suggest that boys and girls may differ in terms of the types of social support they receive. Piko’s (1998) factor analytic study found that adolescent girls tended to receive more emotional, informational and practical support, while adolescent boys received more rational-material support. Interestingly, the study also found that task-oriented guidance showed a significant, non-supportive relationship with the frequency of psychosomatic symptoms among boys.

Explanations for the gender difference in the use of social support have tended to focus on differences in social constructions of sex roles and consequent expectations - whereby men are viewed as ‘instrumental’, rational and independent and women as ‘expressive’, emphasising their supportiveness and emotional orientation (Bem, 1974).
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Following on from studies investigating the use of social support in the context of more general coping efforts, studies of help-seeking behaviour have examined in more detail such variables as who adolescents do turn to for support, and for what types of problems. Such studies have found adolescents to be highly selective in who they ask for support. Similarly to the findings in adults, for instance, studies have found that support from professionals is rarely sought - even when adolescents are extremely distressed. Rather adolescents most commonly turn to peers or family (Whitaker et al., 1990), and who they approach seems to be largely a function of the type of problem encountered (e.g. Seiffge-Krenke, 1993; Wintre & Crowley, 1993).

In addition to characteristics of the problem, an individual’s age and gender may also influence his/her choice of support. With regards to the latter, males have been found to be less likely to ask their peers for help compared to girls, and are more likely to ask their parents. With regards to the former, younger compared to older adolescents are more likely to turn to family members for support (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). Of relevance, it has been suggested that support structures may undergo dramatic changes during the period of adolescence, as individuals begin to move away from parents and develop more peer-based orientations (Vaux, 1985). In spite of adolescents’ pursuit of independence, however, parental acceptance, empathy and support have been argued to remain essential foundations for developmental progress (Avison & McAlpine, 1992; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Powers et al, 1989).

Regardless of such general trends, much individual variation exists and the situation is generally complicated. Frydenberg & Lewis (1993) concluded on the basis of their study that boys and girls used social support selectively, and that there was a complex
Introduction

interplay between the personal, situational and mediating factors that determined the coping strategies used by adolescents. For instance, the issue of trust emerged as an important determinant of whether young people would turn to others as a source of support in their study. Within this context, boys were noted to have less trust in others and a consequently greater reluctance to turn to others for support. The individual’s confidence to confront, and the consequences for him/her following a confrontation, were also important determinants of whether the strategy was used again in future situations. Similarly Boldero & Fallon (1995) suggested that individuals’ decision making regarding help seeking represented a complex social-cognitive process, influenced amongst other things by age, gender and the type of problem experienced.

Thus, in summary, the support adolescents receive from different sources, and their reasons for seeking or rejecting it, would appear to be complicated. The situation for YOs leaving YOIs may be particularly complex. Firstly, in terms of structure, YOs may be exposed to a greater diversity of social systems than the majority of their non-offending peers. These include continued contact with probation officers and members of the newly established YOTs. Furthermore, a number of YOs may lack continuing and stable sources of support from more traditional sources such as family. Many will return to live in care or in hostels on release, with potential implications for the support they can expect to receive. For those who do return to live with parents or partners, relationships may have been affected by the separation caused by the young person’s imprisonment in a manner difficult to predict. The influence of peer support in the case of delinquent individuals is known to be complex and potentially negative in its effects on the individual’s antisocial behaviour. Finally, the types of support YOs
draw on, the benefits they accrue from doing so, and their selective use of different sources of support for different purposes also requires elucidation.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Need for the Current Study

In the light of the aforementioned literature, there would seem to be a clear need to develop our understanding of the difficulties faced by YOs in adjusting to life back in the community subsequent to release from YOIs. Of relevance to an understanding of YOs' adjustment to release are the distinct, but related, issues of how YOs feel about leaving YOIs, and how they feel about returning to the community, including the difficulties they anticipate and actually experience in successfully reintegrating.

Any explanation of YOs' adjustment to release must necessarily include an understanding of the difficulties faced by YOs in avoiding re-offending from a more criminological perspective. A broader understanding of their experiences, elucidating the impact of these on more general mental health and well-being is also necessary, however. Whilst the two would seem perhaps inseparable, the latter has arguably been neglected in much previous research. Furthermore, there is a particular need to consider such a process in the light of the general literature on adolescent development.

Clearly Lyon, Dennison & Wilson's (2000) study of the experiences of young people in prison (documented previously) represents an innovative and valuable contribution to the area. Nevertheless, it is felt that the study falls short of fully addressing the
question on the basis of both what it sets out to achieve and the methods it employs towards this end, for the following reasons:

1. Commissioned by the Home Office, the study was geared towards issues relating to the development and maintenance of young people's offending behaviour, their experience and perceived impact of the criminal justice system and ways to reduce the offending of young people. Whilst a number of issues raised related potentially to mental health (e.g. experiences of substance use, experiences of bullying in prison), no attempt was made to consider how individual YOs attempt to deal with and make sense of their experiences from a more psychological perspective. Rather the focus of the report was on providing recommendations for more generalised policy in the youth justice system. The current study is set within the context of psychological literature and attempts to produce a more psychological account of adjustment to release.

2. The study's objective to inform generalised policy was perhaps reflected in the researchers' use of focus groups rather than individual interviews in gathering data. However, in view of the potential influences of peer pressure (Shucksmith & Hendry, 1998) and the associated need for peer acceptance, it might be expected that the use of focus groups artificially inflated the cohesion of young people's views and discouraged them from expressing views which they feared may have stigmatised them within the group (e.g. those contrary to the 'macho image'). In the current study it was therefore felt important to investigate individuals' experiences and attitudes in greater depth, and on an individual basis, in the hope of minimising such influences.
3. Lyon et al’s (2000) study included both male and female focus groups. Whilst female offenders have often been neglected in the literature, the study was perhaps weakened by its failure to consider possible gender differences in analysing the findings. The current study recruited solely male participants, circumventing this difficulty.

4. Lyon et al’s study selected participants randomly from the prison population (excluding those on remand) and thus included individuals at a variety of stages within their sentence. Whilst such a selection procedure was appropriate for their study, it meant that young people either spoke about their expectations of release as a more distant event, or spoke retrospectively about their experiences from previous sentences. In contrast to this, the current study focused on those about to be released from their sentences and followed these same individuals up later in the community. This provided a much clearer insight into young people’s experiences of release and the potentially subtle changes that occurred for them over the two-month follow up period.

Finally, the current study was designed to further investigate YOs’ use of social support around the important transition of release. Lyon et al’s study highlighted this as an important issue raised by young people themselves, although again possible gender differences were not commented upon. The extent to which YOs feel supported during the transition of release may clearly be an important variable in facilitating their adjustment, and protecting against the effects of stress experienced. In relation to this, the extent to which YOs seek support from different sources for
different reasons, the nature and outcome of the support they receive, and obstacles they perceive to their seeking it were all considered important to elucidate.

**Potential Implications**

It is hoped that the findings will both help raise awareness and inform the development or improvement of interventions aimed at facilitating the emotional adjustment of offenders in returning to the community on release. This could include the incorporation of insights derived in the development or improvement of pre-release courses, staff training to raise the awareness of issues faced by YOs in leaving YOIs, and other interventions aimed at mobilising or enhancing sources of support in the YO's social system. Furthermore, such research could inform the development of measures which could be used routinely in assessing YOs' adjustment to release, and also in the evaluation of pre-release interventions. Elliott, Fischer & Rennie (1999) have highlighted the use of qualitative data in informing the development of quantitative questionnaires based on informants' own language.

Such developments could help serve an important clinical need in the prevention of the development or exacerbation of mental health problems in YOs returning to the community subsequent to release. It is possible that such developments could further exert an indirect influence on the likelihood of re-offending in cases where the mental health problems of the YO are implicated in their offending behaviour.
Introduction

**The Approach**

The study was qualitative in nature. Interviews were conducted and analysed using the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA - Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). The phenomenological approach to qualitative research attempts to understand how participants themselves make sense of their experiences and the meanings those experiences hold for them. The benefits of using qualitative approaches for investigating psychological phenomena which have not been well researched previously have been highlighted by a number of authors (see Hammersley, 1996).

**The Research Questions**

Thus the specific research questions addressed in the study were as follows:

1. What characterises YOs' anticipated and actual experiences of release? In particular, what difficulties do they experience in adjusting to release?
2. What use do YOs make of social support in making the transition of release?
CHAPTER 2: METHOD

ORIENTATION OF RESEARCH

The aim of the qualitative approach to research is to ‘understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage and live through situations’ (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999, p.216), with a particular emphasis on revealing the meanings constructed by individuals of their experiences. There are a number of different qualitative approaches, which differ somewhat in the specific methodologies they have developed, and the explicit and implicit philosophies on which they are based (Elliott et al, 1999; Henwood, 1996). Nevertheless, all share their common origins in non- or post-positivistic approaches to understanding human behaviour. In other words they seek to revise and enrich understandings, rather than to verify or test previous conclusions and theory (Elliott et al, 1999).

Given their ‘discovery-orientated’ approach, qualitative approaches may be particularly appropriate for investigating psychological phenomena which have not been well researched previously (Elliott et al, 1999). In view of the paucity of empirical or theoretical literature available relating either to the adjustment of YOs leaving YOIs, or their use of social support around this time, a qualitative design was therefore employed in the current study.

It has been argued that qualitative approaches may contribute to the development of psychological theory in several ways (Turpin et al, 1997). Firstly, the data may provide the basis for new theory to be generated. In relation to this, one of the aims of the current study is to explain YOs’ experiences of release with respect to the
processes of adaptation they may be seen to go through. Qualitative approaches may also be adopted as ‘a tool to explain frameworks’, or to help confirm or challenge already existing theoretical frameworks in conjunction with more quantitative methods. In this respect, the current study aimed to test out and build on what is currently stipulated about social support in the literature, in application to the specific case of YOs being released from prison. In particular, it aimed to elucidate YOs’ selective use of social support and their perceptions of the benefits of this in adjusting to release.

The particular methodologies of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999; Smith, Osborn & Flowers, 1997) were used in analysing the data gathered. Grounded in phenomenological philosophy, such an approach does not attempt to produce an objective statement of events, but rather endeavours to understand how participants make sense of their experiences and the meanings these hold for them. The approach also recognises the research process as a dynamic one (Smith et al, 1999) whereby access to the participant’s perspective ‘depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher’s own conceptions and indeed these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity’ (Smith et al, 1999). An interpretative element is thus also inherent to the approach.

**Personal Perspective**

In view of the inevitable influence of the researcher on the interpretative process, several authors have attested to the importance of authors laying bare their theoretical orientations, anticipations, relevant personal values, interests and assumptions (Stiles,
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1993; Elliott et al, 1999). Thus, brief comment on the researcher's interest in the study will be made here.

Having had my first clinical experiences working with mentally disordered offenders in a maximum security setting, I soon became aware of how difficult it can be for individuals to change during the later stages of their criminal careers. My interest in working with young offenders - who were at an earlier stage in their lives and arguably more amenable to change - thus grew.

My particular interest in the transition facing young offenders being released from prison was sparked outside of my work as a psychologist, however. I had spent a period visiting young people in a YOI (the YOI from which participants were eventually recruited). During the conversations I had with young offenders about their forthcoming release during these visits, the great significance of release for them was often evident. In spite of their declarations that they were looking forward to it, some appeared to feel at least an element of anxiety. I therefore became increasingly intrigued about how young offenders experience their release, including difficulties they may face away from the confines of the YOI.

I expected that YOs might find it difficult to talk about their feelings and was concerned about the quality of data I might therefore obtain. In the event of conducting interviews, however, I was surprised by the insight and honesty many demonstrated.
OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

Two related semi-structured interview schedules were devised and implemented in conducting the study. The first of these - the 'pre-release interview' - took place prior to participants' release (approximately 2 weeks prior to their release date). This interview questioned participants about their feelings and expectations relating to their imminent release, and their use of social support around this time. The second - the 'post-release interview' - constituted a follow up of participants in the community, approximately two months after their release. This interview similarly probed participants' actual experiences of adjusting to release, and their use of support, with any difficulties encountered over this period. Analysis of interview data according to the methods of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis resulted in the identification of a series of themes expressed by participants overall.

Information on a range of background and demographic variables was also gathered from participant files at the YOI from which participants were recruited. This provided further descriptive information on participants which also allowed for some evaluation of the extent to which the sample was representative of the general YOI population.

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Juvenile offenders (aged 15-17) who were serving their sentences in a Young Offender Institution (YOI) in South East England were recruited as participants for the study. Before describing the recruitment process however, some comment would seem necessary on the YOI at which the research was conducted and changes that
were taking place within the institution at the time the study was conducted. This is in keeping with Elliott et al’s (1999) recommendation of situating the sample of qualitative research projects.

**The YOI from which participants were recruited**

A total of 39 such YOIs exist across England and Wales. In the months leading up to the study, the Government had stipulated that ‘juvenile’ (aged 14-17) and ‘young’ offenders (aged 18-20) be separated within such institutions by April 2000. In attempting to set up the study, the researcher contacted three geographically accessible YOIs, located in the South East of England. Of the two which were willing to co-operate with the proposed research, one had recently been designated to house solely juvenile offenders, whilst the other had been designated to house solely young offenders. On investigation, the third was found to be inappropriate for the study, having been designated solely for remand purposes. This meant that individuals detained were awaiting trial and sentencing.

The decision was therefore made to limit the research to the YOI housing juvenile offenders, with which the researcher had also had previous contact. Whilst on one level the results of the research might have been more generalisable had it been conducted across two institutions, the difference in the average age of individuals within the two institutions would have confounded any differences evident between the two prison regimes. Differences also exist for juvenile and young offenders in terms of the provision of supervision on release. The former are supervised by local authority Youth Offending Teams, whereas the latter are typically supervised by adult probation services.
The described changes meant that many young people were transferred between various institutions in the months leading up to the study, and the YOI at which the study was conducted was in a state of change - having recently acquired the status of a solely juvenile training establishment. At the time of conducting interviews, therefore, the majority of those detained within the institution were of juvenile status. Whilst many had been transferred elsewhere, however, a proportion of those over the age of 17 had simply been transferred to an alternative wing of the institution, in view of their imminent release dates and the unnecessary disruption a move to a different institution would cause at that point in time.

Thus the final sample included a mix of predominantly juvenile, but occasionally young offenders, who were suitable and available for interview during the three-month period over which pre-release interviews were conducted. All of the final sample were however of juvenile status at the point of their sentencing and as a result all but one were being supervised on their release by the Youth Offending Teams responsible for them at the time of their conviction. Terms being used somewhat loosely and interchangeably in the field however, the more generic term of ‘young offenders’ will be applied to participants throughout this report.

Staffing problems at the YOI during the course of the study would also seem worthy of mention at this point. In line with the general shortage of prison officers in juvenile establishments, and the high cost of living in the area in which the YOI was situated, there was a considerable shortage of prison staff at the time the study was conducted. This meant that the YOI had been forced to reduce the number of hours during which
inmates were unlocked from their cells, with a consequent impact on participants and their peers. Staff morale was also said to be low as a result.

Such recruitment problems had further impacted on the YOI's 'Case Work' department, which was feeling the stress of an increased work load as a result. Replacing the Personal Officer scheme operating in other YOIs, each inmate is allocated a case worker at the institution. Case workers (the vast majority of whom come from a prison officer background) are responsible for liaising with YOTs to produce and carry through a sentence plan for the individual, as well as attending to any problems that might arise for inmates during their sentence. In spite of these difficulties (shared by many other such institutions) the YOI at which the study was conducted has a generally good reputation as a training institution with a progressive ethos.

Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher spent some days at the establishment by the arrangement of the Governor. During this time a variety of staff spoke about their roles, and the researcher was introduced to the regimes and general workings of the institution. Mays & Pope (1995) have highlighted the importance of qualitative researchers familiarising themselves with the milieus they are to study.

Recruitment of Participants for Pre-release Interviews

Potential participants were identified from a database at the YOI prior to the study, on the basis that they met the following three criteria:
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a) at the time of their release they would have served at least three months within a YOI (it was considered that the inclusion of offenders detained for shorter periods than this might have diluted the findings);

b) their expected date of release fell within the three-month period over which pre-release interviews were conducted for the project;

c) they were to be supervised by a probation officer or YOT worker in the community on their release in a geographical location reasonably accessible to the researcher (this included predominantly locations in greater and inner London).

Twenty-five potential participants were identified through this process. Of these, one was eliminated from the proceedings at this stage on the advice of his case worker at the YOI that he was too “disturbed and potentially violent” to take part in such an interview. The remaining 24 participants were sent a letter describing the research and asking whether they might be interested in taking part (see Appendices A & B). Letters were sent via individuals’ case workers, who had previously agreed to deliver them and read the details to any potential participants who were unable to read. In the letter, potential participants were asked to let their case workers know whether they were willing to meet with the researcher. If they agreed, a meeting was subsequently arranged to take place on one of 6 possible days agreed with the prison that the researcher would attend.

Of those to whom letters were sent, it was found that 6 had been granted early release without the researcher’s knowledge and were thus not available for interview. One potential participant indicated that he did not wish to take part in the study, and one was not allowed to take part, having been put on report by officers on his wing on the
Method
day his interview was scheduled. Thus of the 24 potential participants to whom letters were sent, a total of 16 eventually took part in the initial pre-release interview. Of these, one individual who came for an interview was found to have a considerable amount of his sentence left to serve (his release date having been incorrectly entered on the data base used). Whilst the interview was nevertheless conducted in respect of his co-operation, data for this individual was not included in the final analysis.

Finally, an additional individual who had served a particularly long sentence was approached and agreed to participate later during the course of the study. This was in part to compensate for the fact that many of those identified as potential participants, who were released early and had thus not taken part in the study, were those who had been serving longer sentences. Furthermore it was felt that interesting differences were emerging between the accounts of those with longer sentences compared with individuals with much briefer sentences and it was felt that further examples of the former were required. Such 'theoretical sampling' is described in many qualitative research texts (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996).

Follow up of Participants for Post-release interviews
All of those who took part in the initial pre-release interview agreed at that time to be contacted approximately two months later about their potential participation in the post-release interview. Participants were informed at that time that they would be contacted via their Youth Offending Teams or Probation Service.

In setting up post-release interviews, participants' probation or YOT workers were sent a letter about a month after participants' release dates (see Appendix C). These
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were followed up with phone calls to YOT workers, during which their assistance in setting up interviews was requested and any questions they had about the study addressed. The rights of participants to refuse a further interview was however stressed to YOT workers. A first step was therefore for YOT workers to ask participants during one of their routine meetings whether they would still like to take part. Having gained participants’ agreement, post-release interviews were then arranged with the researcher via YOT workers to take place in an interview room on the YOT premises. As far as was possible, interviews were arranged to take place either immediately before or after participants’ routine supervision meetings at the YOT, or in some cases YOT workers suggested that the interview could take place instead of an agreed supervision meeting. This ensured minimal inconvenience to participants and, similar to the visits area in the YOI, provided a quiet, private interview location familiar to them.

Of the 16 participants who completed pre-release interviews (not including the individual whose data was excluded from the analysis) two were found to have been remanded in custody for further more serious offences at the time of follow up. The institution at which one of these individuals was held refused the researcher’s request to meet with him. Access to the other was however permitted by the institution in which he was detained, and the interview therefore took place on this site. One of the participants interviewed at the pre-release stage declined to participate in the follow up. His YOT worker indicated that he was suffering ‘personal difficulties’. One participant did not take part in the follow up due predominantly to insufficient cooperation on the part of his YOT worker in arranging the follow up. Another participant’s YOT worker informed the researcher that the participant’s whereabouts
Method

was unknown, since he had breached his supervision order and failed to attend court when he had been summoned to do so. Finally, one individual agreed to take part in the follow up, but failed to attend the meeting arranged because he was intoxicated and had 'forgotten' about the interview. When attempts were made to arrange an alternative meeting time, this individual’s YOT worker related that he had subsequently ‘lost interest’ in completing the follow up. Thus a total of 11 participants from the 16 who took part in the pre-release interview also took part in post-release interviews. This represented 69 % of the original sample.

THE SAMPLE

Details of both the full sample of 16 participants and the follow up sample of 11 of these participants are included in the tables 1 to 4 below. As shown in table 1, the mean age of participants in the total sample was 17.3 years, ranging from 16.2 years to 18.2 years. Two of the participants had turned eighteen by the date of their release, and were thus officially classified as young offenders, rather than juvenile offenders. The mean length of time served in custody by participants at the time of their release was 8.6 months (ranging 3-28 months). A quarter of the total sample had served a previous custodial sentence.

Table 1: Participants’ ages, the duration they had served in custody at the time of release and the number who had previous experience of custodial sentences for the total and follow up samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Mean age in years (range)</th>
<th>Mean months served in custody (range)</th>
<th>No. experienced custodial sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample (N=16)</td>
<td>17.3 (16.2 - 18.2)</td>
<td>8.6 (3 - 28)</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up sample (N=11)</td>
<td>17.5 (16.2 - 18.2)</td>
<td>9.8 (3 - 28)</td>
<td>4 (36%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In analysing participants' interviews, for the purposes of classification, participants were considered to have served 'short' sentences if they had spent up to three months in custody at the time of their release. Those who spent from four up to twelve months were classified as having served 'medium' sentences. Finally, those who had served more than twelve months in custody at the time of their release were classified as having served 'long' sentences. Numbers of participants falling into each of these categories are depicted in table 2 below.

Table 2: Number of participants serving 'short', 'medium' and 'long' custodial sentences for the total and follow up samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>No. serving 'short' sentences</th>
<th>No. serving 'medium' sentences</th>
<th>No. serving 'long' sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample (N=16)</td>
<td>6 (38%)</td>
<td>8 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up sample (N=11)</td>
<td>4 (36%)</td>
<td>5 (45%)</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning the type of index offences committed by participants, depicted in table 3 below, these included offences of a violent nature against persons, burglary, theft and robbery.

Table 3: Participants' index offences for the total and follow up samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>No. index offence of violence</th>
<th>No. index offence of burglary</th>
<th>No. index offence of theft</th>
<th>No. index offence of robbery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample (N=16)</td>
<td>3 (19%)</td>
<td>3 (19%)</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td>6 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up sample (N=11)</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
<td>2 (18%)</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population of YOs in custody*</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* from NACRO statistics for the male YO population (aged under 21) in 1997
From a comparison of the distribution of different types of offences committed by the sample with official statistics available on the population of incarcerated male YOs (also included in table 3), it appeared that the current sample’s index offences included a relatively high proportion of theft and robbery. The discrepancy appeared attributable to the lack of index offences pertaining to drugs in the current sample. The reason for this remained unclear.

As shown in table 4, approximately a third of the sample had documented psychiatric histories. These included a case of ‘severe conduct disorder’, several of self-harm and/or suicidal behaviour, a case of PTSD and one which was noted but remained unspecified. Whilst the Pre-Sentence Report of one participant had recommended that a full psychiatric assessment be conducted, there was no evidence pertaining to this.

By far the majority of participants had documented histories of substance misuse. Misuse of cannabis, crack cocaine and alcohol were frequently documented. One individual had also misused solvents and another cocaine. For half the participants, substance misuse had been documented in their Pre-Sentence Reports as being implicated in their offending.

Table 4: Number of participants with documented psychiatric histories, substance misuse and the number for whom their substance misuse was documented to be implicated in their offending for the total and follow up samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>No. with documented psychiatric history</th>
<th>No. with documented substance misuse</th>
<th>No. for whom sub misuse implicated in offending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample (N=16)</td>
<td>5 (31%)</td>
<td>14 (88%)</td>
<td>8 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up sample (N=11)</td>
<td>4 (36%)</td>
<td>9 (82%)</td>
<td>6 (55%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, whilst file evidence rarely documented participants’ ethnicity, visual categorisations by the researcher suggested that the sample included 6 individuals who were Black, Asian or mixed race (representing 38% of the total sample).

Overall, it was considered that pre-release and post-release samples were reasonably comparable in terms of age, index offences, length of sentence, previous experiences of custody and documented psychiatric and substance misuse histories. Thus there was little evidence to suggest that those who took part in the follow up differed in any significant way from the total sample on the basis of these characteristics.

**ETHICAL APPROVAL**

The study’s design was reviewed and received the approval of the Joint UCL/UCLH ethics board following a couple of minor amendments (see Appendix D). At the time of conducting the research, no formal ethics board was set up at the YOI concerned. Written approval was therefore sought and granted by the Governor who considered the ethics of the study in consultation with the Principal Psychologist at the institution (see Appendix E).

In designing the study, particular consideration was given to ensuring that potential participants did not feel pressured to take part and that the interview process was respectful to their position. By the very nature of the criminal justice system it seemed likely that many if not all of the potential participants might have had to attend meetings with professional adults in the past that were against their will. Whilst it was felt most practicable and polite to organise interviews via participants’ YOI case workers and YOT key workers, a special attempt was made to ensure that these
professionals understood that the young people were under no obligation at all to take part. This message was conveyed both in formal correspondence and telephone conversations with YOT workers and in meeting with case workers at the YOI prior to conducting the study.

The issue of confidentiality was also directly addressed with participants, who were reassured that information would only be shared if the researcher was concerned about the young person’s risk of harm to himself or others. The occasional disclosure of offending represented a particular ethical dilemma for the researcher. In view of the importance of gaining honest feedback from participants on their struggles with this subsequent to release, the researcher was open to such general disclosures. Disclosure of specific details of offences was discouraged, however, in view of the laws around the reporting of crime.

On a couple of occasions during post-release interviews, when the researcher felt that a young person was distressed and unsure how to handle a particular situation, discussion and advice with regards to the issue was offered at the end of the interview as appropriate. For instance, one participant appeared concerned at his follow up that he had become re-addicted to crack cocaine, but was reluctant to disclose this to his YOT worker. His reluctance and his anxieties about approaching substance misuse services directly were therefore discussed at the end of the interview.

THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
Parallel semi-structured interview schedules were developed for interviews with participants both prior and subsequent to release. Interviews were developed on the
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basis of both the relevant literature and informal discussions with a variety of staff members at the YOI. An initial version of the pre-release interview was conducted in 3 pilot interviews. On the basis of these and feedback from the Joint UCL/UCLH Ethics Board, small revisions were made to the final schedules.

The interview schedules included questions and prompts to enquire about the following domains (see Appendices F and G for full schedules):

- Introductory discussion, in order to establish rapport and gain some information regarding participants' backgrounds to put their experiences of release in context;
- Thoughts and feelings YOs experience prior/post release about leaving YOIs;
- Difficulties YOs anticipate/actually experience in returning to life in the community;
- The sources, nature and quality of social support YOs draw on in making the transition from YOIs to the community;
- Blocks to seeking social support, or gaps in the support YOs perceive in relation to making the transition from YOIs to the community.

PROCEDURE

Pre-release Interviews

Interviews took place in the visits area of the YOI, which, whilst open-plan, tended to be quiet and private during the weekdays on which interviews were held. Movements officers escorted participants to and from the visits area, but were not present during the interviews themselves.
Method

Before proceeding with the interview, the study and its procedures were briefly reiterated to potential participants, who were given the opportunity to ask any questions they might have and decline to participate if they wished. If they were happy to proceed, participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix H) to indicate this and were asked if they would consent to having the interview audio-taped (none of those who agreed to participate refused this). The semi-structured interview was then conducted and tape-recorded. Interviews lasted between half an hour to an hour, most typically lasting about 40 minutes.

At the end of the meeting, participants were thanked for their participation. Participants were also asked about how they had found the interview and whether it could have been made more comfortable for them in any way. The empowerment of participants has been identified as an important aspect of qualitative research (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1989). None of the participants made negative comments about the interview in response to these questions. A few indicated that they had found it quite enjoyable to take part in something off the wing. Others were interested in how the results might be disseminated and used. Of further note in this respect, several YOT workers commented that participants appeared happy and in one case enthusiastic to take part in subsequent follow ups. This would also seem to indicate that they found the process acceptable, if not rewarding in some way. Finally, participants were asked if they would be willing for the researcher to contact them about two months later via their probation or YOT worker, to request their participation in the follow up interview.
Method

Post-release interviews

As noted, post-release interviews took place in designated interview rooms on the YOT sites. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were reminded about the focus of the study and given the opportunity to ask any further questions. As in the initial interview, the post-release semi-structured interview was then conducted and audio-taped.

At the end of the meeting, participants were again thanked for taking part and were asked whether they would like a summary of the findings to be sent to them on completion of the project. All indicated that they would.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of Individual Interviews

In analysing the data, audio-tapes of interviews were first fully transcribed. Similarly to the idiographic process of analysis outlined by Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999), which begins with individual cases and slowly working up to more general categorisation or theory, interviews were then analysed according to the following stages:

1. Looking for themes

Each interview was initially analysed individually. In analysing interviews, transcripts were read a number of times, using one side of the margin to note down key words or phrases (‘meaning units’) that captured the essential essence of the text. An example of this from an extract of one participant’s pre-release interview follows:
I: So how are you feeling about going?

P: Well, I don’t know yeah…. I don’t know if I’m supposed to be happy or anything… but really I can’t really explain how I am feeling, because I’m not really feeling anything. Like to me it’s just I’ve been through a phase, I’m coming out of there. That’s all it is really, it’s nothing big. It’s just the next step of the ladder, that’s all it is. That’s the way I see it.

Comments, including attempts to summarise, draw connections and associations were also made, along with more preliminary interpretations. These were documented as illustrated below using an extract from another participant’s interview - in the opposite margin:

Re-interpretation of girlfriend’s failure to visit to re-establish a sense of personal control

Development of paranoia?

I: And have you got a girlfriend?

P: Yeah. But she don’t come. I don’t want her to see me in jail. I swear, because I’m in jail she could be doing things behind my back. I tell my friends to keep an eye on her.. I don’t care anyway.

Finally, all comments and identified meaning units were re-read to identify themes which appeared to run throughout the interview. In most instances themes were highlighted that appeared to encapsulate the essence of a number of similar meaning units - particularly if the meaning units recurred across different areas of questioning. The potential clinical importance of concepts expressed was also borne in mind in delineating themes however.

2. Producing a table of themes for each interview

In the first instance, a list of an interview’s emerging themes was compiled and examined for connections and clusters. Particular attempts were made to identify superordinate concepts or themes which helped to order the data.
On the basis of this, a final table of themes which seemed to encapsulate the participant's major concerns was then drawn up for each individual interview. This table included superordinate and subordinate themes as appropriate.

3. Producing a master list of themes for the group

The above stages were repeated for each interview separately. A master list of themes was then constructed including superordinate and subordinate components apparent across interviews. A list of relevant extracts for each theme and sub-themes was also compiled during this stage of the analysis. Initial passages of text were referred back to repeatedly during this process, in order to both check interpretations and elucidate the nuances of themes across accounts. This stage involved perhaps the greatest amount of interpretation by the researcher, and required a certain amount of selectivity. Factors such as the prevalence of themes within the data, the richness of associated passages and the potential relevance of themes (e.g. to the mental health and well-being of participants) were taken into account during this process.

In addition to this, in selecting themes some consideration was given to the target audience of the research. Several authors have commented that qualitative research should be applicable and of use to parties beyond those who participated (e.g. Stiles, 1993, Lincoln & Guba, 1990). Thus in the master list themes were retained which would be of interest and relevance to YOI and YOT staff working with YOs, even if these were somewhat unrelated to the original research questions. More generally, efforts were made to document themes in an accessible and jargon-free manner to facilitate the understanding of a non-psychologist readership.
Finally, reliability checks were made at all stages of the process by an ‘analytical auditor’ (Elliott et al, 1999). Specifically, the supervisor of the project made checks of the analyses of 5 interviews (3 pre-release and 2 post-release interviews) to ensure that themes produced from the data were credible and warranted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The list of master themes and accompanying list of extracts were also audited by this individual. The few minor differences of opinion arising from these checks were discussed and resolved. The final agreed list of themes and extracts provided the basis for the written account.

VALIDITY CHECK

In addition to the reliability checks described, an attempt was also made to validate the final account. A number of authors have recommended that some form of ‘member validation’ be conducted (e.g. Stiles, 1993; Elliott et al, 1999; Smith, 1996). Most commonly, this involves presenting accounts constructed back to participants for their comments, elaborations and reflections. As Elliott et al’s (1999) paper acknowledges however, on occasion it may not be viable to seek validation from original participants. In the case of the current study, it was felt that to seek feedback was inappropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was felt somewhat impracticable as the majority of participants would no longer be under the supervision of YOTs. Furthermore, the reading difficulties common in many YOs may have hindered their ability to provide feedback on the account.

In place of this therefore, two YOT workers offered their comments on the account. One of these - a social worker who regularly supervised YOs released from YOIs - offered feedback on a preliminary analysis of the data, having approached the
researcher for information about the findings on hearing of the research. Feedback from the second - a Forensic Psychologist who held the post of mental health representative in a YOT - was requested on completion of a draft of the written account. Smith (1996) has suggested that member validation may be of use at a number of stages during the project, as was reflected by the current procedure.

The notions of ‘fit’, or ‘resonation’ have often been used to judge the success of the final account, as has its judged comprehensibility (Elliott et al, 1999). Thus, the YOT workers in question were asked in particular for their comments with regards to:
1) the extent to which they judged the account to fit what they had observed of their clients’ experiences of release and use of social support;
2) any relevant observations they could make of their clients’ experiences or reactions not covered by the account;
3) their opinions regarding the potential utility of the account.

The final account follows.
## RESULTS

### OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND THEIR FREQUENCIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAITING FOR RELEASE</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Experience of Waiting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No big deal</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Control</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Preparation</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarked</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional and Cognitive Reactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation and restlessness</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipation and excitement</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of feeling</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Summary of themes and their frequencies relating to the experience of waiting for release

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCESSES OF ADAPTING TO RELEASE</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting and Re-evaluating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-evaluating Relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships inside aren’t the same</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realising who cares and who’s important</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns for family and friends</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising relationships</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining Offending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The route into offending</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to offend</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control and responsibility</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating the Impact of the Sentence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributing meaning</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediators of the sentence’s impact</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions regarding Re-offending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence about abstaining</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking confidence</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for the Future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific solutions</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific solutions</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Summary of themes and their frequencies relating to the first process of adjusting to release - ‘reflecting and re-evaluating’

---

1 Themes are termed ‘frequent’ if evidenced in more than 2/3 of accounts, ‘medium’ if evidenced between one and two thirds of accounts and ‘infrequent’ if evidenced in less than one third of participants’ accounts (proportions having been derived from the total number of pre-release or post-release interviews as appropriate)
Results

### PROCESSES OF ADAPTING TO RELEASE

**Reconnecting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Emotional and Cognitive Reactions to Release</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disbelief and sinking in</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness and elation</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reconnecting with the Physical Environment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altered perceptions</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little things that have changed</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reconnecting with the Social Environment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling visible</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regaining confidence in basic social skills</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-establishing relationships</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-establishing basic Routines and Skills</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Summary of themes and their frequencies relating to the second process of adjusting to release - ‘reconnecting’

### PROCESSES OF ADAPTING TO RELEASE

**Changing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taking on New Roles and Lifestyles</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work and college - no problem</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties finding and retaining work</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New responsibilities</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoiding Old Roles and Lifestyles</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-offending</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to stealing</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to fighting</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to drugs</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting in trouble again</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Summary of themes and their frequencies relating to the third process of adjusting to release - ‘changing’

### PROCESSES OF ADAPTING TO RELEASE

**Locating the Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Continuum - Forgetting versus Remembering</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forgetting versus remembering</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a balance</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negotiating Identity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking on a criminal identity</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Influencing the Process of Locating</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The process of reflecting and re-evaluating</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of reconnecting</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of changing</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Summary of themes and their frequencies relating to the fourth process of adjusting to release - ‘locating the experience’

---

1 Themes are termed ‘frequent’ if evidenced in more than 2/3 of accounts, ‘medium’ if evidenced between one and two thirds of accounts and ‘infrequent if evidenced in less than one third of participants’ accounts (proportions having been derived from the total number of pre-release or post-release interviews as appropriate)
## Results

### SOCIAL SUPPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Social Support</th>
<th>Frequency¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from prison officers</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from case workers</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from YOTs</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from family</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from friends</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blocks to the Use of Social Support</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal blocks</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal blocks</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual blocks</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Summary of themes and their frequencies relating to social support

---

¹ Themes are termed 'frequent' if evidenced in more than 2/3 of accounts, 'medium' if evidenced between one and two thirds of accounts and 'infrequent' if evidenced in less than one third of participants’ accounts (proportions having been derived from the total number of pre-release or post-release interviews as appropriate)
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

OVERVIEW

The analysis of both pre-release and post-release interviews according to the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis yielded a number of core themes or categories. Whilst pre- and post-release interviews differed in their contribution to particular themes, the final account will not be structured around this division. Rather, adjustment to release appeared to be a more dynamic and continuous process than such a division would imply - whereby participants’ reflections at the pre-release stage were inextricably linked to their later experiences in the community.

The following account will be broken into three main sections, themes relating to which are summarised in Figures 2 to 7 ( pp., 78-80 ). The first section concerns participants’ experiences of ‘Waiting for Release’ during the last few weeks of their custodial sentence.

The second section - ‘Processes of Adjustment’ - relates to processes which emerged as integral to participants’ adjustment to release on their return to the community. Four main processes are identified within this section, including ‘reflecting and re-evaluating’, ‘reconnecting’, ‘changing’ and ‘locating the experience’.

The last section relates to the ‘Social Support’ participants received in adjusting to release. This includes the roles participants’ informal and professional networks played in providing support and factors which precluded participants from seeking support (comprising intra-personal, inter-personal and contextual ‘blocks’).
Themes within these sections will be described and illustrated using quotations from participants’ interviews. (Quotes are labelled with participants’ ID numbers and either the letter ‘i’ or ‘f’. An ‘i’ denotes that the quote is taken from a participant’s initial, pre-release interview. An ‘f’ denotes that it is taken from the follow up, post-release interview)

**WAITING FOR RELEASE**

“All you have to know if you’re in there is one day you’re going to come out. That’s all you have to know. Because you won’t be locked up for ever doing your sentence. You’ll be out one day. Your one day will come. And just think every second is a second less. Every minute is a minute less. Every hour an hour less.” (7f)

Understandably, the day of their expected release appeared significant for all participants interviewed on at least some level. Their experiences of waiting for the big day varied considerably however, as did their emotional and cognitive reactions to these experiences.

**The Experience of Waiting**

No big deal

About half of the participants during pre-release interviews spoke as though their imminent release simply was not a big deal or a problem to them in any way. As the comment below demonstrates, some of these individuals felt that little would have changed, that things would be the same with friends and family when they returned home and that plans they had made for college courses and work would keep them out of trouble. As a result, these participants saw little cause for concern. As one noted:
Results

"[Things will be] just the same... It's only been a few months. Not that long... If I'd had longer it might have changed. But that's it like - the only thing I think's changed is the phone numbers and that's it." (5i)

Some showed an awareness of what release might be like based on previous experiences of custody. With the exception of one, (who had served only a brief period on remand previously) all of these individuals reported having experienced some sort of difficulty on release from their prior sentences. They felt, however, that second time round they would be relatively unaffected by the experience, or at least they would know what to expect. One commented "...You see I done it before now, and I don’t think it will affect me" (4i).

Uncertainty

Whilst many felt that release would not be a problem to them, a theme of uncertainty was evident in others' accounts at the pre-release interviews. This uncertainty focused on several areas.

At the most fundamental level, a number of participants were uncertain about whether, or when they would be released. A few commented on their concern regarding the possibility of gate arrest - whereby they could be arrested at the gate, on the day of their release, for charges which had not yet been brought. A comment from one during his post-release interview clearly illustrated how this uncertainty had impacted on him:

"I was just like thinking oh please.. 'cause I didn’t want to get gate arrested.. 'cause I spoke to [YOT worker] before and she said that I might have warrants out. And I thought I might get gate arrested, and I just wanted to walk out, see my dad and go home." (14f)
Results

Although it had not been confirmed with him, another individual had clearly resigned himself to the idea that he would be back imminently "There's loads of charges on me." (8i).

Others were uncertain about where they would be living subsequent to release. Several of these were expecting to live in a hostel, which had yet to be 'sorted'. Having had his 16th birthday in prison, one had recently been told he was no longer eligible to return to his previous children's home and commented how he'd be homeless when he got out. The majority of these participants openly voiced their concern about where they might end up - often disliking the idea of a hostel. Having stated that his father did not want him back home, one attempted to rationalise his situation: "He's willing to have me back, but he just wants to see what I can do for myself" (8i).

More generally, the majority of participants expressed at least some uncertainty about what release might be like. Some were unsure what it would feel like being out in the community again after so long - especially if they had never been away from their areas and families before. One individual was concerned that his estate had totally changed since he had been inside, 'outsiders' having moved into the area.

Others expressed more specific uncertainties, including what it might be like re-establishing relationships, "well what are my friends going to be like and all that" (14i). A few were unsure whether people who didn't know them so well might view them differently now they had been inside. A number of participants however knew others who had been to prison, and at least one felt this would help:
Results

"Well they're really into crime and that anyway. They've all been to prison before. So, they don't care anyway. It's like 'Yeah, [Pl5's] done his sentence. Come on let's go for a smoke'. That's what they are like." (15i).

Whilst some expressed this more explicitly than others, a number were uncertain or anxious about whether they would be able to stay out of trouble. Finally, a couple with longer sentences expressed uncertainty about how the world itself might be on their release:

"Everyone says its more different, it's more violent out there, you have to be this and that..." (2i)

Lack of control

Participants' sense of a lack of control regarding the future was also evident in their accounts - particularly in relation to decisions about where they would live. Some participants seemed to be passively waiting to hear - feeling somewhat in the dark - as they relied on professionals to sort things out for them. In the occasional case, decisions appeared to have been made by family or professionals, contrary to the wishes of the young person. When asked whether he had expressed his concerns about returning to his grandmother's to his YOT worker, one explained:

"Yeah I tell them. But he just keeps on that 'You go down there. Will be best for you. Best for you.' What he thinks and what I knows is just two different things. I tells him that every time." (9i).

Lack of preparation

Perhaps related to their sense of uncertainty and lack of control, a smaller number referred to the lack of preparation for release. Some commented how release was generally not talked about - at least not in any depth. Whilst one had completed a resettlement course, and a period of home leave prior to release was seen as generally
beneficial for those who were eligible, some participants felt that little had been offered to help them prepare. As one commented during his post-release interview:

"Yeah - the day before I went to see the doctor, and all he asked was 'are you alright?' And he just checked how much I weigh, and that was it basically. That was it..." (14f)

Unmarked

More generally, it was often apparent at post-release interviews that participants' departures had been somewhat unmarked, bar the necessary routine procedures.

Participants rarely commented without prompting on the goodbyes they had shared with staff. Only one participant mentioned his case worker - to say that he had only seen him to say hello to in the corridor prior to his release, "and that was it" (3f).

Concerning the goodbyes of prison officers, experiences seemed to have been mixed. A couple of participants spoke positively of staff's behaviour, relating that they had been told to 'stay on the good track' or 'take care'. A couple of others seemed to feel quite neutral about their experiences - one commenting that staff didn't really say goodbye, but "they sort of said 'see you later!'" (14f). Occasionally, experiences were more negative however. One individual provided a particularly extreme example:

"They were right rude.....Told me to 'Fuck off, get out of here. Go back home'... Some of them were joking but some of them were serious. I used to be rude to them. But I didn't give a toss. I was out of there." (6f)

A greater number spoke of the goodbyes they shared with other inmates on their wing. Even if they described positive experiences in the days leading up to their release, all participants related somewhat snatched, final goodbyes. This was predominantly a result of the YOI's standard procedure of 'discharge bang up' - whereby individuals remain locked in their cells during their last evening, missing their
usual period of ‘association’ in order to ensure their safety with other potentially jealous inmates. One participant’s experience on the morning of his release was typical:

“I went round some people’s flaps and tapped on the doors... ‘see you later!’” (10f).

Participants did not appear particularly bothered about the nature of these experiences - one pointing out that the release of inmates was simply an everyday occurrence at the YOI. That release was relatively unmarked for the majority seemed clear however and may have held some significance for their subsequent adjustment.

**Emotional and Cognitive Reactions**

Participants also described the emotional experience of waiting for release. A number of reactions were evident as release grew nearer.

**Preoccupation and Restlessness**

Half of the participants explicitly described being preoccupied and restless as their release dates approached. Time seemed to drag. Only one individual said that he had not thought about it much. A few noted that they had been unable to sleep during the preceding nights as a result of this preoccupation - “I was just thinking and thinking” (7f). A couple seemed to be churning over what they would do when they got out.

One participant’s restlessness seemed to be more diffuse however:

“I was all in a muddle if you see what I mean. I couldn’t sit down or anything if you see what I mean...” (9f)
Anticipation and Excitement

"Every day there's a smile on my face. Like every, single day. 'Cause normally, if you came on the wing in the morning, you'd see everybody's heads are like down. Until the last few weeks before they're going home - then everyone's happy like...talking about it every day - 'yeah I got three days left', 'two days left'....then one more!" (7i)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, half the participants described a sense of anticipation or excitement about release. For many their excitement particularly centred on being reunited with friends and family, or what they would like to do on release. The comments of a few implied that their anticipation had been long-standing throughout their sentence - that they had thought about their release every day of their sentence.

Ambivalence

A similar number of participants also expressed mixed feelings about release - their accounts expressing at least a degree of ambivalence. Whilst they expressed a desire to leave, their ambivalence seemed predominantly linked to the sense that they'd become accustomed to prison, to the difficulties they anticipated on adjusting to release and the regrets they felt about leaving friends inside. One described poignantly how a 'depression' had come over him, shortly after he had heard that he had been granted parole after 2 years inside. He was unsure as to the reason for this, but put it down to the stress he had experienced in waiting to hear if he'd been granted parole:

"I don't know - it's probably emotions or something isn't it" (17i).

Fear

A few described their feelings as 'fear'. As one individual, who had also served a particularly long sentence, said "I'll be honest with you, I'm scared of leaving. I'm
scared of going really..” (9i). His fear related to how alien the outside might feel to him now. Another participant described fears of not “fitting in” on his return home. The third was concerned he “might even get shot” - his anxiety seemingly fuelled by the shooting of his cousin shortly after his release.

Lack of feeling

“Well, I don’t know yeah.... I don’t know if I’m supposed to be happy or anything... but really I can’t really explain how I am feeling, because I’m not really feeling anything” (2i)

Finally, a few made reference to a lack of feeling. Whilst one minimised the significance of release to him, given that he had been inside only briefly, for the remainder their lack of feeling may have served as a defence against their expressed uncertainties regarding release.

PROCESSES OF ADAPTATION

REFLECTING AND RE-EVALUATING

“When you’re actually in your cell at night you think why did I do it? Why?... Every night you always think that... You’d never go to prison - I know that - but if you did I guarantee you’d sit in your cell every night and think to yourself ‘why?’... Every night.” (9i)

The first main process which emerged as significant for young offenders’ adjustment to release was labelled ‘reflecting and re-evaluating’. Particularly during the period they spent in prison, participants seemed to spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on and re-evaluating their lives - often for the first time. This included reflecting on and re-evaluating their relationships, their offending, their sentence and their futures.
Results

Given that participants were specifically asked about their reflections on such matters, it was perhaps not surprising that 'reflecting and re-evaluating' emerged as a dominant theme. However, it was often apparent that participants had spent at least some time reflecting on their circumstances prior to interviews and that the reflections they offered were rarely made spontaneously. Furthermore, as the above quote illustrates, a number commented spontaneously that they had spent a lot of their sentence thinking about their lives and where things had gone wrong.

Most who commented seemed to view the time they had spent thinking as a good thing. A few, however, expressed the need for a balance - too much unstructured thinking was detrimental. In particular, one commented that he'd got "too much time to think" and seemed in a state of confusion and unrest as a result:

“To be honest, I don’t know what I feel any more... I used to know where I was and what I wanted, but now I don’t know” (11i).

Whilst the accounts of the vast majority demonstrated that they had reflected to at least some degree, participants varied in the extent to which they had thought things through. Some seemed to rely more heavily than others on avoidant styles of coping, and these individuals’ responses sometimes lacked substance in comparison to those of their peers. It was also noted that individuals with longer sentences tended to have reflected to a greater degree than those with brief sentences, although again much variability was evident.

Only one participant showed an almost complete lack of reflection on his circumstances. This individual spoke during his pre-release interview of the obsession he had developed for watching television, to the extent that he never even left his cell
during periods of association. The reason for his exception remained unclear however. Whilst his pre-sentence report had recommended a mental health assessment be carried out, and information on his educational history alluded to 'probable learning difficulties', it was unclear whether the relevant assessments had in fact been conducted.

Re-evaluating relationships

Almost universally, participants seemed to have reflected on and re-evaluated their relationships with friends and family during their time in prison. Whilst not always commented on by participants, a number of factors may have contributed to this. For some, being sentenced to prison had resulted in their living away from home for the first time (including away from family, friends and their local area). The environment of prison may have been experienced as difficult for participants, particularly initially during their sentences. Both the limited time available for participants to make phone calls, and the restriction of visits to a maximum of one every two weeks may have further increased the salience of contact with friends and family outside. Indeed a number commented on the importance of visits to them.

That prison was located at a distance from their homes may have made visiting difficult for the families and friends of some participants however. It was also common for individuals to have been transferred between institutions during their sentence, and this may have increased the strains on their social networks. All participants had spent their time on remand in a different institution and some had experienced transfers in addition to this. One, in particular, had been moved between a total of four institutions during his sentence. Somewhat ironically, this mirrored the
Results

Instability he had experienced prior to prison - whereby he had moved between multiple foster placements as each broke down. He minimised the impact of this on him however - "Like going on tour innit!" (15i).

At least a few participants appeared used to the separations caused by prison however. One participant, for instance, had two friends who were regularly away:

"...And they both came out just as I got put in this time, so I haven't seem them both for a year...I think they're both prison cats - like always coming back!" (10i).

Similarly, a large proportion of another participant's social network also seemed to have been in prison at the time of his interview:

"...Well I got one, two, three, four mates in here...I lost count of the mates I got in [YOI] Feltham" (8i).

Friendships inside aren't the same

The quality of participants' friendships inside may also have been relevant to their evaluations of relationships outside. During interviews participants were asked about whether the friendships they formed with people inside prison differed from those they had outside of prison. The majority responded that friends inside were not as close as those they knew from outside.

For some, the length of time individuals had been known was an important variable. Others were unmotivated to invest much in relationships with other inmates, aware that ties would eventually be broken. One felt that he had come to this realisation over time - as friendships with inmates serving shorter sentences were continually broken:
"... 'cause you've still got a long time left. And you've got to start all over again. Find yourself another mate. And try and trust someone all over again." (9i)

Even if they associated in a superficial way, some participants' perceptions of other inmates had clearly impeded their making friendships. One individual's response typified this position:

"But I don't really mingle with the kids in there. Most of them are idiots, walking around going like they're bad like.. But when it comes down to it they're not really bad, they're just idiots that are putting on an act." (4i)

Others felt that they could not trust the people they met in prison, that everybody inside was 'out for themselves'. As one explained:

"You can't trust anybody in here. Some people in here are alright - you can be good friends with them at one time, but then next day they'll be different. So you can't have friends in here." (16i)

In contrast to this picture, a similar number felt that the friendships they had made with other inmates were closer than those they had outside. These individuals attributed this to the amount of time they spent with other inmates, or the need they had for each other whilst in prison. One noted, for example:

"But you know I've made some good friends in here. 'cause you have to in here. You can't just be by yourself really... You do make some good friends." (15i)

Realising who cares and who's important

In terms of their evaluations of relationships outside of prison, a number commented on the 'friends' who had got them in trouble prior to their coming to prison. For most - particularly one who had been 'grassed up' by friends in the witness box at his trial - there was an understandable sense of anger about this.
More generally, around half the participants seemed to have reflected on who really cared about them. Frequently, individuals commented on who had stuck by them when it ‘came to the crunch’. Some had clearly been surprised about this. One, for instance, felt he had hurt his family so much he had expected them to ‘abandon’ him, “I didn’t think they’d have stuck by me. But they did. And I love them for that” (11i).

Others were disappointed or angered - perceiving that they’d been let down by friends or family. One noted:

“I found out who my true friends are. I reckon I got ‘bout a handful of friends that write to me and come up and visit” (13i)

A few participants referred to how family had stood by them or done their best for them through all the trouble they had been in prior to prison. One was clearly appreciative of his family in this respect:

“But they supported me so many times. I been kicked out so many schools. But my sister was always there like to back me up. To sort of like help me out.” (3i)

Another group of participants felt that prison had not only highlighted who cared, but had brought them closer to family members in particular. “You grow closer to them. I think you get stronger - your family relationships get stronger” (13i). For some, change had occurred as lifestyles, which had been detrimental to relationships, were at least temporarily altered. One, for instance, described how his addiction to crack cocaine had impacted on his family relationships before he came to prison. Others felt they had come to a new appreciation of the time spent with family:

“But I think in a way I’m closer with my mum now as well, since this has happened... Like before I used to always go out and stuff. I used to talk to my mum and that but I never used to have conversations with her... But now like, I have conversations and I sit and talk and stuff... I’m happy for that.” (5i)
Results

Overall, the majority of participants who commented seemed to feel that at least some individuals had stood by them - most commonly family members. One individual was however in touch with his extreme sense of abandonment:

"Like I say, everyone say they care - mum, aunt, cousins, girl - but like sometimes I just feel I'm in a world by myself. No one gives a damn" (2i).

Another similarly appeared to have lost trust in his friends and girlfriend outside:

"'Cause when I was on road I used to trust them.. But when I'm in here they could turn on me. I don't know - I just don't trust them.....It's all messed up, I swear.. it's just the stuff they do sometimes. Like when I phone sometimes, they know it's me and for some reason they switch off their phone.... It's just a weird feeling in jail." (6i)

Whilst in the majority of cases, participants' evaluations of who had 'stuck by them' were grounded with anecdotes and a certain degree of elaboration, this was not the case for a few. Accounts of relationships in these instances appeared somewhat vague, inconsistent or idealised. This may have served a protective function for participants - to help them maintain a sense of closeness with family and friends outside, regardless of the reality of the situation.

One individual’s case served as a potential example of this. Having started his interview idealising the support and loyalty of his family, one participant’s ambivalence and apparently overwhelming anger emerged later during his interview:

"I mean I've tried, I've made an effort, and if they're not going to try and make an effort with me then I'm sorry but I don't want to know them....They've hurt me really bad...." (11i)

Concerns for family and friends

Some participants had clearly reflected on how family and friends had been affected by their sentences, and some expressed regrets about this. Several were aware how
family or friends had missed them, particularly when they had *missed important events* or anniversaries. A couple expressed the concern that their sentences had *contributed to illnesses* their mothers had protracted - indeed in one individual’s case to his mother’s eventual alcohol-related death.

Even when family members had not been ill, the comments of a couple of participants highlighted their anxiety about this possibility. As one explained:

> "I’ve always got these little fears - like I get these little panic attacks now and again - that what if anything happened to my mum? What if one of them got ill or something?... 'Cause that would make me go mad." (13i)

Occasionally participants were also aware of how they had *let their families down.*

One, in particular, felt he had been a great disappointment to them. His family’s decision to conceal the truth of his sentence from his niece had no doubt given him a strong message about this:

> "It’s a big secret. She thinks I’m working... that it’s a big factory owned by the queen so she can only come and visit me sometimes.... I mean it’s not nice having to say that to her. But it’s the only way of keeping her from getting hurt” (11i)

**Prioritising relationships**

Evaluations like these not surprisingly resulted in participants prioritising which relationships they wished to invest in on release. Some wished to avoid friends whom they perceived had let them down. Others wished to spend time with family on release:

> "When I go home on me licence, I’m just going to be staying with me mum and dad at home. Spend loads of time with me mum and dad. Make up for the time we’ve lost” (13i).
Explaining Offending

On the whole, participants seemed to have spent at least some time thinking about why they had offended in the past. Occasionally, nonetheless, participants with shorter sentences seemed relatively unreflective in this sense.

The route into offending

"Me mum used to look after me until me dad come out [of prison] like. I never used to really get upset about it. 'Cause I knew all about it... When I was like nine I used to rob. From people's sheds and stuff. 'Cause I was brought up on a council estate. It was kind of rough. It's still rough now."

Some participants talked about having offended from a very young age - in one case from the age of 7 or 8. Indeed, one was so young when he started stealing he noted "I didn't even see no right or wrong about it" (16i). For these participants and the individual above (who's dad had been in and out of prison whilst he was young) the criminal lifestyle was just the norm.

Some individuals noted more specifically that they had learned their criminal behaviour through observation of the offending behaviour of family members, including fathers and brothers. Occasionally, individuals stated that they had learned from peers. In learning from others, participants described how they would copy what they saw. In example, one described how his offending began:

"I think because of me eldest brother. He started stealing motor bikes so then so did I. And then he started doing burglaries and so did I. Just things like that.." (9i).
A few had also been encouraged by the fact it seemed possible to get away with offending - "...but when they did more and I see they weren't getting caught I just thought 'why not?'" (4i).

Other participants described a downward spiral of events leading up to their initial offending, including being kicked out of schools or family homes. One individual felt, in contrast, that offending was "just a phase everyone goes through" (2i).

**Motivation to offend**

Whether they described learning from criminal peers or not, a number of participants talked of crime - including committing burglaries, fights and stealing cars - as something you do with your mates. Some felt that they had offended through their loyalty to or affiliation with violent and 'trouble making' friends. For others, offending was more of a past-time. As one summed up:

"I guess I was just with my friends like. That's the shit that we do" (6i).

In most cases, participants seemed to have grown up with the friends they offended with. There were exceptions however. One seemed to have 'fallen in' with criminal peers having been 'kicked out' of school. Whilst another noted that his 'proper' friends did not offend, he described how he had actively selected criminal peers when driven to offending by the death of his father. At the age of fourteen, he felt he had been unable to deal with the intense anger associated with this bereavement, and that, at least initially, his offending had represented a cry for help:

"...all the anger. To get that all out...And that was what I was doing. Just going silly. Silly... I was like blaming it on other people too. Getting my anger out. I couldn't cope. So it was a way of shouting out I needed help and all that. I was just doing loads of crime." (14i)
More commonly however, offending brought specific benefits or reinforcements. For
some, offending kept *boredom* at bay. A couple went as far as to suggest offending
gave them ‘a buzz’. As one described:

"Like one time I walked past saw a handbag in the car and broke in. And
then it gives me like a rush. A buzz, sort of thing. It’s a laugh when you’re
doing it, and you’re getting police chases. It’s like adrenaline innit” (15i)

Others talked about offending *for money*. The opinion that offending presented an
easier option than working for a living was occasionally voiced. The hedonism
associated with having money, and lots of it, was rewarding in itself to a number. A
couple acknowledged that there was at least an element of wanting to impress their
friends. Whilst he recognised that his lifestyle may not have been healthy, one
individual related how he spent his ‘earnings’:

"...Girls, hotels, Charlie, whatever I wanted, get it. If you go in my home I
got fifteen pairs of trainers lined up. Just loads of shit!.. I know it’s good
and that getting all that money, but it’s fucked up as well.” (8i)

Finally, drugs and alcohol were implicated for a number in their offending. A
proportion talked of offending, at least in part, to fund *drug habits* - particularly
crack cocaine, and sometimes cannabis. Others talked of offending under the
*influence of alcohol* or the ‘silly things’ they did when drunk - including ‘smashing
things’, drink driving and ‘little common assaults’.

**Lack of control and responsibility**

"It were just that my co-dealer was doing a street robbery and a man was
beating up my friend, like, so I got in there and just got carried away and
got caught. I never set out to do it like.” (4i)
Results

From a number of accounts - particularly those of individuals who had committed violent index offences - there was the sense that participants had somehow stumbled into their offences or that it had all been a big mistake. As one put it, the offence that landed him in prison for unlawful wounding had been "five minutes of stupidity". Such a lack of control or responsibility was particularly linked to violence under the influence of alcohol, or incidents where participants felt they had become embroiled in what friends were doing (as the above quote illustrates).

A few participants, in contrast to this, noted their personal agency in their offending - "Whatever I do it's my own choice" (2i).

Evaluating the impact of the sentence

Not surprisingly, a number of participants referred to things they disliked about prison. These included being 'told what to do', 'not having your freedom', 'being away from friends and family', and specific prison procedures such as 'bang up' (periods during which inmates are locked in their cells) and 'spending time in the segregation unit'.

Participants were also asked about how they felt they had changed since coming to prison, and many commented on this. A few felt that they had not changed, or at least not fundamentally. A greater number felt that they had generally matured or calmed down during their time inside - that they had learned to think before acting or to control their temper more effectively. One participant's comment was typical - "I'm not as violent as I used to be. It's calmed me down a bit." Several related such changes to the incidents of violence they had witnessed, or in one case suffered,
during their sentences. Others talked about having had to control their reactions whilst inside.

Participants’ perceptions of how they had changed did not always correspond to their overall perceptions of their sentences however, nor to their apparent adjustment on release. Rather, it was the meanings participants ascribed to their time in prison which seemed most significant - to which we now turn.

Attributing meaning

A number of participants suggested or implied that they had found themselves able to handle life in prison and that in reality it had been bearable. Regardless of this, a few had concluded that prison was ‘just long - a waste of time’. One, for instance, noted that he had wasted a few months when he “could have been doing different things” (5i). Whilst he suggested that the YOI had been more of a ‘holiday camp’ than a prison, another gave a poignant insight into how the sheer length of his sentence had affected him - particularly initially:

“But then when they bang the door, it’s the longest I been behind a door. And there’s no handle there. And I woke up the first day and I thought I was at home. And I looked and it was that door again. And I kept having them dreams, that I was at home, for about a month. And I’d keep waking up and that door would be there again.... It’s hard to explain, how that really effects you. I can’t really express it that well.” (13i)

Others spoke about their sentence having been a turning point, or a time to think. For some, it had provided time to think about where they had gone wrong and how they might put things right on release. For a couple of participants, prison was seen as the principal influence in their having grown up and turned their lives around. One noted:
"It makes you think more... you learn more about yourself - like how you react to things, how you are... it just makes you... like when you’re outside you haven’t really got time to think" (17i).

A few participants saw their sentence as a turning point in that it had broken the vicious cycle of offending for them, if not prevented them from doing worse, by providing time out from their habitual environments and lifestyles:

"By coming here I can sort myself out like... Like when I get back on road again I can do college or something. But if I was still out there I think I’d be still burglarising, still on crack. I think I would have wrecked me life. So I’m glad I got caught." (3i)

A smaller number commented that their sentence had taught them a lesson - “I mean I wouldn’t have learnt my lesson if I didn’t come” (11i). Certainly it was an experience they did not wish to repeat. One individual further believed that his sentence could serve as a valuable lesson to friends, as well as himself:

"’Cause they see me in here, and it’s gonna help them and show them that they shouldn’t come here. Like they use me as an example." (7i).

Only one individual seemed to feel that his sentence had represented an act of injustice. In spite of this, he appeared proud of how he had taken prison ‘on the chin’ and felt he was a stronger person as a result.

In contrast to their peers however, a few participants felt that the ease with which prison could be handled meant that their sentences had exerted little impact on them. One seemed to be simply biding his time before release - “...just keeping my head down, doing my time and getting out”. The familiarity of the whole thing for the family of another seemed to make this a forgone conclusion for him:
Results

"...my dad's been here, seen it, done that. My mum's been here, seen it, done it 'cause she's come to see my dad and my step dad - 'cause her husband now's been in jail." (8i).

These individuals went on to acknowledge the potential of prison in actively encouraging a criminal lifestyle. Indeed, one felt it was inevitable, as inmates talked about and compared notes on their crimes - "...how much money they got, the chases they got off the police, stuff like that." He explained the end result:

"You learn stuff in here as well. Learn how to get cars and stuff, how to door lock them - stuff like that" (10i)

Mediators of the sentence's impact

Some participants commented during interviews about characteristics of the sentence which they felt mediated the impact of prison - either on themselves or others. For instance, the majority of participants who had served previous custodial sentences indicated that it was easier to adjust to prison the second time around - the implication being that it exerted less of an impact. One clearly felt strongly about this:

"That's what I wanted to say in court, 'there's no point in you keep sending me down, 'cause it ain't going to help'. This second time it means nothing now." (14i)

On the other hand, the length of the sentence was also identified as a potential mediator of its impact - allowing a couple with more lengthy second sentences to feel hope that prison had 'worked' this time round. Both participants serving particularly long sentences were critical of brief sentences, drawing on their own experiences of having learned over time. One concluded:

"I'll be honest with you. I think it's the people with the short sentences that actually learn the bad things. And it's the people with long sentences that actually realise and learn all the good things. That's my honest opinion." (9i)
This participant was furthermore critical of the new Detention and Training Order (DTO) as it failed to allow days to be added to the sentences of recipients. He noted that it left these individuals thinking they could get away with "running around, being wild" and that "they screw up and come back again" as a result. In contrast to this, an old-style parole sentence was seen to encourage an entirely different perspective: "You just sit back at association and you watch people and think 'what the hell is he up to?' Why?" (9i).

**Intentions regarding Re-offending**

“It's jail yeah. well put it this way - if you go to jail and you're getting bullied and that, I don't reckon you're going to do more robberies to get back in there. But if you go there and you reckoned it's easy or whatever, then you're going to be thinking 'Boom. If I get caught for a robbery and get sent back here, it's nothing 'cause I can handle it'.” (4f)

During pre-release interviews, participants were asked about the likelihood of their re-offending. Overall, it was felt that participants' intentions regarding re-offending were mediated to a greater or lesser extent by their evaluations of their sentences described. Only a couple made the link directly however (as above). Not surprisingly, many commented directly that they did not want to come back, or implied as much. One individual was further deterred from re-offending in view that a further custodial sentence would see him in a "big man's jail" now he was eighteen - a possibility he wished to avoid. As he explained:

"...you go to a men's jail, and you start meeting older people and get dragged into the circle more and more, and it gets harder to get yourself out of it. Next thing you know, you're 40 and you're in jail again. The hours get longer... I don't want to be doing that." (13i).
Ambivalence about abstaining

“Well I’m not looking forward to re-offending again when I get out. I don’t know.. if I get caught up in a predicament like... it’s a violent world out there.. and if I get caught up in a violent predicament and I have to fight my way out, then I’m going to have to - I ain’t got no choice. But as far as bank robberies and shops go, that’s not really my league any more.” (2i)

At least a degree of ambivalence with respect to their intentions was however evident in the accounts of many. Whilst none seemed to be expressing a desire to fight on release, a few felt, as the participant above, that they would defend themselves as necessary. Others noted that they would probably re-offend, but that they would most likely restrict themselves to ‘less serious’ offences.

The ambivalence of some may have linked with their (sometimes distorted) perceptions of the likelihood of apprehension and punishment - “I don’t know. I might offend yeah. But I don’t think it’s going to be anything serious enough to come back in here” (5i). One individual planned to keep out of trouble, at least until his licence expired, but felt that beyond this, his motivation would probably wane:

“I probably will offend again. I probably will get a car because I enjoy cars. I should get a licence really. But it costs money and that college place is only £40 a week they’re paying me.” (10i).

Lacking confidence

Even amongst those who were more certain of their wish to avoid re-offending, a number showed a lack of confidence in their ability to abstain. Only one participant expressed a clear confidence that he would not be back - “I seen people in here who told me they’ve been in seven, eight times. But man... this is my first and last time” (7i). His confidence seemed to rest on the fact that he’d always worked hard and had never been in trouble previously.
Some were openly uncertain about whether they'd make it. As one explained "It's easier to get into crime than anything" (13i). A few knew from previous sentences that staying out of trouble on release had been far from easy. One, in particular, seemed resigned to the statistical risk he now presented on return from his second sentence - "But I got a higher chance now. Second time back - you know what I mean" (14i).

Whilst other participants expressed at least some confidence in their ability to abstain, the superficiality of their confidence was evidenced by the inconsistency of their accounts in this respect. All expressed some doubt about whether they could maintain their position. One individual, who otherwise appeared certain that he would not return and was determined to 'do something with his life' added nonetheless "no-one can say they'll never" (17i).

Another professed to have turned over a new leaf: "I know for a fact that when I get out I ain't going to do no bad things any more". His story fluctuated wildly however and he later acknowledged that some temptations could be too great for him. More generally his positive front was tainted by what he saw as his lack of control over his behaviour and its inevitably poor prognosis:

"When I was younger I had behaviour problems from day one really. And they took me some place for behaviour problems yeah. But it never worked. It was supposed to be the top one in the country or something, but it never worked." (15i)

**Plans for the Future**

During pre-release interviews, participants were also asked about their plans for the future and what they would need to do in order to stay out of trouble. Overall,
participants varied in the extent to which they had reflected, the realism of their plans, and their apparent motivation and confidence about seeing the plans through. As might be expected, those who appeared more highly motivated to stay out of trouble had usually reflected to a greater degree on how they would see changes through.

Non-specific solutions

In talking about their plans, some participants talked about either very vague or non-specific strategies to keep themselves out of trouble. One individual commented: "It's just a matter of will power innit?" (2i); others that 'hoping' they would not re-offend would somehow be enough. One suggested it would need to 'stop raining', as he loved to steal cars and splash pedestrians as they passed. Another concluded he'd have to just "go with the flow" (13i).

Indeed, a couple of participants seemed to feel that it would be hard for them to formulate definite strategies until they were actually out. One, in particular, seemed unconcerned when asked about whether there were changes he’d need to make:

"I ain't really thought about it that much. Course there is. There's lots of changes I need to make.... Well all sorts of changes..... I just need to change my whole life around to the opposite direction. I don't know. I can't really do much in here, can I? No I can't." (8i)

Specific solutions

Some participants also identified more specific plans. Many acknowledged the need to stay away from peers who offended or might lead them into trouble. Not surprisingly however, the majority of these were either ambivalent about whether they wanted to, or lacked confidence that they would be able to maintain this stance. Indeed, this scepticism seemed realistic for the most part.
Only one stated it would be 'easy' to avoid criminal peers and that he would invest his time with family and college instead. Others recognised how hard it would be to stay away. Whilst one individual acknowledged how difficult it would be, there was a certain naivété to his response:

"'cause the people who do crime are my mates, they're good mates. I've hanged about with them for years, yeah. So I can't just say 'go away, I don't want to see you no more' and go and hang about with good people. 'cause that I can't do - they're good mates. But I just have to say like when they're going out 'come on, let's go and do this..' I'll have to say 'I'll wait here for you, you go' and they'll say 'alright'." (15i)

By far the majority of participants had formulated plans about going to college or working, often with family members, on release. Many felt that keeping themselves occupied in this way would help. As one commented:

"I'd need a good job. A hard, tiring job....It's no good me sitting around all day 'cause that won't do me no good. That's when I'll get back into trouble if I haven't got nothing to do" (9i).

Indeed, many participants seemed to have gained a sense of achievement from the qualifications they had obtained or started in prison, proudly relating these to the researcher. Some appeared reasonably positive about the prospect of going to college, although one was mindful that more appealing options of going to parties with friends might interfere with his determination to study.

Participants were more mixed in their views about work however. A couple seemed keen to get going: "I want to get myself out of here and start working hard. I want to do my best at that and I'm looking to save money" (16i). Others were not so sure: One, who had never worked previously, recognised he might find it hard to stick at such a new role, seeing that he was not really a 'nine 'til five man'; Those who had
found work ‘too hard’ previously were often conscious that they might find this hard again; A few were also aware that having gone to prison might limit their options with cautious potential employers.

Finally, some participants expressed their determination to stay off drugs (particularly crack cocaine) and in some cases alcohol. One, in particular, felt certain that a return to drugs would see him back in trouble. He explained:

"I'm not looking to get back into it [drug taking]… 'cause I know for a fact that, if I do, I'm going to end up back in here. And I'll probably do something even worse - not drug-wise, but criminal-wise” (16i).

One participant had chosen to practise controlled drinking on release and, having completed the relevant course, appeared well educated in how to achieve this. Many other participants had not received help and were concerned it would be hard to stay away from drugs. A couple were nevertheless encouraged by the fact they had managed to abstain - and even turn drugs down - whilst in prison.

**RECONNECTING**

The second main process identified as relevant to young offenders’ adjustment to release was labelled ‘reconnecting’. During the post-release interviews, participants talked about their experiences of actually leaving the prison and returning to their habitual environments. Accounts reflected a number of elements, which seemed to convey participants’ initial sense of disconnection from their previous environments and lifestyles, and their consequent need to ‘reconnect’ in some way. Participants varied with regards to both the extent to which they experienced an initial sense of disconnection, and the difficulty they experienced in reconnecting. The process
nevertheless appeared universal to all participants on at least some level. Furthermore, this process appeared significant in terms of its potential effect on the young person’s mental health and well being on release.

Initial Emotional and Cognitive reactions to Release

Disbelief and sinking in

Regarding their initial emotional reactions to release, several participants spoke explicitly about their initial disbelief that they were finally out. Some simply alluded to a similar experience. One, for instance, commented that it felt as though he were “in a dream” as he walked from the gate (11f). Following from this initial disbelief, participants described how the reality of the situation tended to sink in - typically as they reached their home towns and engaged in some of their habitual activities.

Happiness and elation

“....And the day came. And it was a good feeling...you feel a good feeling that you are leaving. Because when you are there, everyone’s with their heads down like... But when I was walking out I felt different. I walk with my head up again” (7f)

Perhaps predictably, over half the participants described feeling happy on their release. For a couple, this seemed to border on elation. Others described a contentment or a ‘good feeling’. Participants referred to various aspects of being out initially which contributed to this happiness - including been re-united with friends and family, their freedom which they had come to value, and the choices that were associated with it.
Results

Reconnecting with the Physical Environment

Some participants seemed to feel somehow disconnected from the physical environment outside of prison in the early stages of their release - experiencing it as somehow alien or different. This was not evident in all accounts, but was experienced in particular by those who had spent longer periods in the prison.

Altered perceptions

Many described that their perceptions of basic environmental characteristics were in some way distorted when they first left the prison. Participants seemed to find it hard to articulate this experience and there was often a vagueness about their descriptions. As one explained “Was all just weird... Didn’t feel right as soon as I got out” (3f).

Some participants’ descriptions revealed a more specific distortion of their perception of size. Occasionally, participants referred to things like trees outside seeming larger - “Everything looked bigger like... everything was bigger and it was different.” (7f). A couple, on the other hand, referred to their homes feeling smaller. One individual who had served a long sentence described other ways in which he had to reacquaint himself with his physical environment outside of prison. These included desensitising himself to the height of his tower block which ‘scared him a bit’ initially and remembering to turn the taps off, having been used to the ‘ones which pop back up’ in prison (17f).

Others referred either explicitly, or implicitly, to a distorted sense of speed when they first encountered the outside. A number made references to feeling unaccustomed to the speed of various forms of transport in particular. As one commented,
"...these fast cars were going past and it felt like they were doing one hundred and thirty mile an hour" (9f).

Whilst only one labelled it as such, some described experiencing symptoms, possibly of anxiety, whilst travelling in cars and trains for the first time. One described experiencing an 'adrenaline rush', 'dizziness' and 'feeling sick. Another interpreted the feeling he got quite differently as excitement, commenting "...you see like with coke [cocaine], it's not a buzz, but it's a feeling you can't describe - a really nice feeling...It was just like that" (15f).

For a couple, the strangeness did not seem to be associated solely with literal physical speed, but with the more general hustle and bustle of everyday life outside. One participant described this vividly:

"It's not like in prison. Everything there's all their times. And what they do there is all slow.....But when you're out, everybody's moving around doing things... and that's what it is. You're not used to moving that quickly. You're not used to walking down the road. You're not used to catching buses. You're not used to drinking... to going to the bar.. all rushing to the bar. You're not used to all rushing to the toilet.. all that really. It's weird basically...." (14f)

For one or two, this unaccustomed activity and exercise took its toll on them physically - “A long walk round town and that killed my legs” (15f).

Feeling overwhelmed

"I just stared at the front door for about five minutes.... I don't know... I was just leant against the banisters looking at the front door. Then I sat down on the stairs, looking at the front door. And there was a lady in the office [of the hostel] and she come out going 'are you alright?'. And I was going 'yeah, yeah'..." (15f)
Results

As the above reflects, a few participants also described feeling *afraid or nervous to leave their homes* during the early stages of this or a previous release. Again, this experience was sometimes described somewhat vaguely by participants. Some appeared to find it hard to admit this vulnerability initially during the interview. Others simply found it hard to explain, seemingly puzzled by the whole experience. That participants' anxiety was linked with the described distortion of their perceptions seems plausible. The hypothesis was however hard to validate on the basis of the available accounts.

Yet another individual similarly described feeling *overwhelmed* as he left the prison gates for the a town visit after a long period inside. He noted that he had felt ‘as if he was looking down a hill’, that his ‘legs had gone from under him’ and that he had been left ‘unable to speak’ for about half an hour (17i).

Only one participant, however, suggested that that he had experienced difficulty in ‘breaking out of’ his anxiety and that it had prevented him - at least initially - from doing things he would normally do:

"*There were a lot.. a lot I wanted to do... I wanted to go shopping, I wanted to go my girl’s house and then and I wanted to come back home.. But I never done none of them things - apart from staying in my house*” (4f)

The majority seemed to have confronted and overcome their anxiety very quickly, desensitising themselves to the outside world within the first few days, or even hours, of release.
Finally, one individual had also avoided going out initially, but for a completely different reason. Having heard they were angry, he wished to avoid meeting the victims of his previous offences:

"... well like a month I sat at home with my mum and that. I just kept my head down 'cause I knew that there were so many people there after me" (3f).

Little things that have changed

Finally, a few participants commented on changes to their areas. Whilst relatively trivial in nature, these changes seemed to have contributed to participants' initial sense of disconnection from their area and community. One young man was also aware of how things had moved on more generally:

"But it's like them little things - like when you go in a shop to buy a packet of fags... Just before I went in prison you could buy twenty fags for three pounds something, but now it's nearly a fiver. All different." (9f)

Reconnecting with the social environment

That participants felt somewhat disconnected, at least initially, from their habitual social environments outside of prison was also evident from accounts. How pervasive this sense was, the exact manner in which it manifested itself, and the difficulty experienced in overcoming it varied between accounts. All participants described at least some initial disconnection on a social level however.

Feeling visible

About half the participants who completed follow up interviews described feeling in some way visible, or 'on the spot' when faced with their habitual social environments on release. For a couple, this sense of visibility extended to the more general public,
including people unknown to them. For instance, one described his experience on a shopping trip with his mother, the day after his release:

"...and I was walking around thinking 'everyone's looking at me'. I was thinking 'do they know what’s happening? What I’ve been through?’…… I just thought everyone was staring at me and I was thinking 'what’s wrong with me?'" (3f)

Some also described feeling uncomfortable when reunited with friends. In these cases, participants’ sense of ‘being on the spot’ did seem attributable, at least in part, to the behaviour of their friends, who may themselves have been unsure about how to react. One participant commented:

"...every time I had to speak it all went quiet, and I was proper on the spot” (17f).

Participants described this sense of visibility and the attention they received when reunited with others as overwhelming, if not aversive. Several suggested that they had felt nervous as they anticipated the reunion. A couple were uncomfortable with the attention, feeling that it was undeserved. One commented about the ‘fuss’ his mother made of him:

"...it was like I deserved something when I come out. But it should be the other way round. Like I should be making it up to my mum or something” (5f).

Another summed his feelings up "I just wanted to crawl back in” (17f).

Regaining confidence in basic social skills

"It was like when I was first out when I went round my aunt’s for the first time, I wouldn’t sit down... It was my own aunt yet I wouldn’t sit down... I was afraid that I’d just end up sitting wrong.. slouching down in the chair... I was afraid of that. Until she eventually got up and pushed me into and said 'just sit down'.” (9f)
Both participants who had served particularly lengthy sentences referred to a loss of confidence in their basic social skills subsequent to release. For one of these, who appeared also to have suffered an impoverished and unusual upbringing prior to prison, this sense appeared pervasive. He described having got so used to the way people had interacted in prison that he had felt completely overwhelmed when removed from such an environment. He described having been unsure about even the most basic of social skills subsequent to his release, and having been extremely anxious about doing things ‘wrong’. This included how to talk, how to ask for things he wanted, how to buy things in a shop, even how to sit in a chair correctly - as illustrated above.

Whilst he dismissed the thought as “one of them silly things you think”, the difficulty he had experienced in dealing with conflict subsequent to his release had lead this individual to reconsider the merits of life in prison:

“... Sometimes when I get really stressed or whatever I think to meself it would be easier to be back there. I do... All the stress of people keep nagging on to me when things don't go right.... [In prison] I know I could just stick me fingers up at them and walk away.. But out there you can't. You know what I mean? You got to stand and face them... Well you got to face them sometimes inside, but out here it's different.” (9f)

Re-establishing relationships

All participants described feeling disconnected from friends on their return home on at least some level. Of note, the degree to which this was experienced did not necessarily match the expectations individuals had held prior to release. Furthermore, few described such a sense with their family. This may have reflected both the depth of relationship with family compared to friends, and the differences in the amount of contact participants had had with the two groups during their time inside.
For some their sense of disconnection from friends appeared relatively mild - resulting largely from the mismatch of their recent life experiences. Around half the participants spoke either explicitly or implicitly of the potentially shared experiences they had missed with friends and the time they had needed to spend catching up on these stories.

In a couple of cases, hearing what they had missed seemed to highlight the sense of loss participants associated with their custodial sentences. Perhaps related to this, a few disliked being asked too much about their time in prison, preferring not to think about it when they had just been released.

Many also spoke of their awareness of changes to either themselves or others on being reunited. Changes typically noted in others included changes in levels of maturity and physical size. One commented: "Because my mates have changed. I keep noticing things now, that I've never noticed before... how they've grown up" (17f).

Another aspect which seemed important to participants were apparent changes in friends' lifestyles and offending behaviours. Sometimes these changes were welcomed and acted to produce a greater perceived similarity between participants and their friends. One individual, for instance, had decided to disassociate himself from criminal peers on his release, whom he felt angry for leading him to offend. In the event, however, he perceived that his friends had 'grown up' in his absence, and resumed the relationships with unexpected ease.
Participants’ sense of disconnection seemed on the other hand exacerbated in cases where they perceived a mismatch between the lifestyles they chose to resume compared to those of their friends. Whilst one participant seemed to have reconnected quickly with his criminal peers, his contact with previous non-criminal friends was never restored:

“No, I hardly seen any of them. I seen a few of them and that but they’re all settled down now doing nice jobs, wearing suits and that (laughs)....and I’m still up town looking for hangers (speed pills) and that!” (15f)

The majority of participants suggested that reconnecting with their friends and family had been unproblematic. Several commented that ‘nothing had changed really anyway’ with regards to their relationships, and others that settling back into their social niches had been easy. One individual, for instance, was matter of fact about it:

“.. it was like I’d just gone on holiday and come back....and they was asking ‘how was your holiday?’...And I just spoke about it and that was it” (11f).

Perhaps facilitating this process, a number of participants had clearly felt appreciated by friends and family on their return home (although as noted, some experienced the attention they received as a mixed blessing). One summed up his experience:

“When they seen me they were right happy...and they were giving me phones and stuff. [It felt] real good” (7f)

In contrast, one particular individual described how he had needed to regain trust in his friends gradually. Having completely lost trust in them whilst in prison, he felt he needed to watch for potential signs of their allegiance to a rival gang who had held their territory on another part of the estate:

“.. if they go to that area and they get beat up, then I know I can trust them. But if they don’t get beat up, or they talk to them, then I’ll know I can’t trust them.” (6f)
Results

Only one participant seemed to have remained completely disconnected from his previous social circle at the time of the follow up. Of note, this individual presented as withdrawn and depressed subsequent to release. Whilst he professed to enjoy the time he now spent with his family and was occupied on a college course, this individual noted that his expectations for release and the fun he would have with friends had been too high. He now chose to spend all his time with his family and seemed to feel little sense of connection with his previous friends. As he commented: "They're just the same as before... but it's me that's changed" (4f).

Re-establishing basic Routines and Skills

A smaller number referred to the need to re-establish basic routines. In particular, some individuals referred to the fact that the sleeping pattern they had learned in prison took a few weeks to unlearn, subsequent to this or a previous sentence.

Finally, both participants who had served long sentences spoke of the need to regain confidence in basic life skills. One spoke pointedly about re-acquiring skills in driving, shopping and cooking and his anxieties around these previously familiar activities. He told the story of when he had taken to the kitchen subsequent to his release:

"When I first come out I wouldn't do nothing... just in case I done it all wrong... I remember when I first cooked dinner for the lot of us I made one little bit of mess and I panicked... One little bit of mess and I panicked... burnt the lot." (9f)

Whilst he appeared to have taken it more in his stride, the other spoke about the 'pressures' of obtaining and budgeting his own money:
"Like in Huntercombe you didn't have to do nothing did you. No bills to pay, no money to go out.. didn't have to pay when you wanted to eat. Nothing at all. Apart from canteen, and people from the outside sent it."

(17f)

CHANGING

The third process identified as relevant to participants' adjustment to release related to their attempts and success in implementing necessary changes in their lives subsequent to release. These changes fell into two broad areas - taking on new roles and lifestyles and avoiding old roles and lifestyles. Whilst not being limited to participants' avoidance of offending, the process was most directly relevant to this outcome.

Taking on New Roles and Lifestyles

Work and college - no problem

Several participants were working at the time of their follow up. A couple of these had resumed labouring jobs as they had done prior to prison, and seemed to have settled well into the working role as a result of its familiarity. One, who was working in a family member's business, was also considering an apprenticeship scheme elsewhere. He was somewhat put off by the extremely low pay however. Another was also working full time in a semi-skilled manual job. He similarly had plans to learn his trade at college - "It's always good to have a trade isn't it." - and felt that the job he had held during his time in prison had prepared him well for the working life.

One participant even seemed to have found an increased determination for his college work, now that he had been released. Indeed, his dedication appeared at the
Results

expense of all else: "I just want to do my work now. I haven't got time to be with my friends and stuff. It's just work. that's all I'm worrying about" (5f).

**Difficulties in finding and retaining work**

For other participants, however, settling into the working role had been less than straightforward. One had intended to work for a family member, but was honest at the follow up "I just couldn't be bothered" (6f). The remaining participants seemed to have faced at least some difficulties in finding or retaining a job. One appeared to be actively job hunting, but as yet had been unsuccessful. Others reported having worked at some stage subsequent to release, but all had 'quit', or in one case lost, various jobs. Many had felt that the work did not 'suit' them.

One individual, for instance, had been determined to persist with the first job he had acquired - in spite of the fact that the work was "shit" and left little room for a social life. He was eventually worn down however and quit after a couple of months. Whilst he managed to get another job, his persistence seemed to have evaporated:

"But then I thought 'no' as soon as I stepped in the place. It's not my sort of environment 'cause it's office work. And I just walked straight out of there without telling anybody." (3f)

Another had similarly been put off by a job he had got within a day. He explained "I want to work yeah. But it's just like finding the right job". He noted more generally how hard it was to find a job - let alone one that was desirable - and felt that prison had greatly minimised his chances of this:

".. I mean really it's employers. They don't give ex-prisoners a chance. 'cause I think they do police checks now innit...If they do that, then I'm f***ed. I'll never get a job." (15f)
Results

Having lied about his prison record, he was waiting to hear if he’d been offered a job in a shop. More generally however, his motivation appeared undermined by the increased rent he would have to pay in his hostel if he found work.

Finally, one participant spent a few days working but was now half-heartedly looking for a college course. He was clearly finding the demands placed on him too great:

“They tell you when to be at certain places. And they say I’ve got to come here twice a week for the next three months. and it’s hard. I can’t work really... I got to go down the job centre some day... I got to see careers. I’ve got to live up [location of hostel]. It’s all hectic, and hard.” (10f)

New responsibilities

In addition to taking on the role of work, some participants also had new responsibilities to come to terms with on their release. One participant’s girlfriend had given birth shortly before he went to prison. Now released, he was faced with adjusting to being the full-time dad of a four-year old. He seemed to have grown accustomed to the role, but related how strange it had seemed initially:

“It’s just one of them things really. Been inside three and a half years you’ve missed out on him growing up. Come out and he rushes up says take me out to football... It was a shock. I didn’t really know what to say.” (9f)

A couple of participants were also getting used to more independent living, having moved into hostels on release. One had been living between friends both prior and subsequent to his sentence, and had only just been allocated hostel accommodation within the week of the follow up interview. He felt however that the hostel was “too far to go” - being located out of his area - and was reluctant to sleep there as a result.
Results

The other was similarly finding his first taste of hostel living hard to adjust to. Friends not being allowed to visit, he commented “you get lonely and that”. More generally, he felt a hostel was the wrong place for him:

“I want to live back home innit... ‘cause I don’t feel I’m ready for living by myself yet.” (15f)

Both participants were however aware of the need to stick by the hostel rules “if I want to keep a roof to call my own” (10f).

Avoiding Old Roles and Lifestyles

Re-offending

Around a third of participants who completed follow up interviews admitted or strongly insinuated that they had re-offended in some form at the time of the follow up. The remainder claimed that they had not.

Of those who had re-offended however, several felt their offending had not been as ‘serious’ as it had been previously - that they had in some way stepped down their level of criminal activity. One participant, for instance, noted:

“I’m not keeping totally clean and that. I’m not burglarising and I’m not stealing cars. I haven’t done any of that. I’ve not robbed anyone. Nothing like that... Only stuff to do with drugs.” (10f)

Another was however aware that he risked a return to previous levels of offending now that he was misusing crack cocaine again.

Participants’ attempts to curb their criminal activity seemed in at least one case to have been motivated by the likelihood the individual perceived of being apprehended.
Results

When asked what had stopped him committing robberies, one individual explained "It's too hard. The police.. I'd get nicked straight away" (10f). Although he was being investigated by the police he felt he ran less of a risk of being charged for dealing cannabis, and minimised the seriousness of such offending.

Participants who disclosed having re-offended were asked about when and how they had got back into crime. Although he had avoided re-offending himself, one participant felt individuals were most at risk on their first day out of prison:

"'cause you're in this emotional [state]... like the first day I was out you want to go and see your friends. And as soon as you see your friends you could fall back into [crime]... well you could say to them 'what's live now?'. What's going on around that area? Who's making money? And stuff like that. You could get into it so easily....The first day is when you decide whether you're going to go back, or if you're going to go through with what you've been saying god knows how many days you've been inside." (11f)

This certainly appeared to be the case for one participant's return to dealing cannabis - "Like the first day come out, I got a couple of ounces. Smoked about an ounce of it, then started selling the rest of it to make my money back..." (10f). For other participants however, the return to crime seemed more insidious.

Back to stealing

A couple of participants had clearly struggled with the urge to steal or commit burglaries - largely as a result of their need for money. Such offending was seen as an easier option than working. One young man, who desperately needed money to fund his re-addiction to crack cocaine, explained his dilemma:

"And then I'm still looking out for jobs and that but then I'm thinking 'no - I can still go and do the crime'. It's easier and it's quicker." (3f)
Another’s experience showed some similarities. Having spent his savings within the first couple of weeks he commented “I had none left. I had to go make some” (15f). Offending was perhaps the most familiar option open to him.

**Back to fighting**

One participant appeared caught in a vicious cycle of fighting with a rival gang. Although he was no longer ‘comfortable’ with the whole thing, he could see no way out of his predicament:

“I don’t know....like everybody has to fight. There’s no way out. There ain’t, it’s true. Because everywhere I go I see them same boys I used to fight before. Everywhere I go I see them, and they don’t want to stop.” (6f)

Even for those who’d managed to avoid a return to their previous lifestyle of fighting, their behaviour seemed at least in part governed by others - be they friends or rivals. One individual felt his friends had matured whilst he had been in prison. To his relief, this meant that he was no longer forced to join the fights they started in his local pub.

Another individual had faced a similar situation to the participant above, on seeing some boys he used to fight with on a station platform. His rivals looking “kind of scared” had however helped him turn his back to his old ways. He explained the dilemma he had faced:

“And I was just thinking, should I carry it on? Should I fight them? But then they didn’t say nothing and my train come, so I thought ‘forget it’” (5f)

Only one participant had managed to refrain from joining his friends in a fight started in a night club the previous week. He appeared proud of the progress this had represented: “I just stepped back. I wasn’t interested” (17f).
Back to drugs

Some participants were taking drugs again at the time of their follow ups - in spite of their stated intentions in prison. Occasionally, participants minimised that this was a problem for them. Having resisted early offers of cannabis from his friends, one had given in telling himself “I might as well once”. From there however, his substance misuse had escalated to include crack cocaine - “but not so much as to get addicted” - and ecstasy, which was a new experience for him.

Another individual appeared more concerned about his re-addiction to crack cocaine. Whilst working, he noted that the drug had not even entered his head. His first pay packet in his hand, however, temptation had unexpectedly overcome him:

“...but as soon as I got my money I don't know what it was. my mind just switched and I thought 'yeah, I'll go and get it'. And I was thinking 'what's going on with me?'. But I went down and got it. I done it myself. I weren't even with no-one.” (3f)

Having subsequently left his job and with his crack use increasing, he was aware that his family relationships were again deteriorating and everything was spiralling out of his control - “So everything's just going wrong at the moment”.

Getting in trouble again

A number of participants who took part in the follow up spoke about their experiences of being in trouble with the police subsequent to their release. A couple were awaiting hearings for offences allegedly committed since their release. One of these denied his charge of theft of a vehicle having bought a car not knowing it was stolen. The other, due in court the following week, was reassuring himself that all but one of the charges against him would be dropped:
A couple of others had been arrested for previous offences - one for offences he had committed prior to his sentence, the other for an offence he was alleged to have committed during a period he had absconded from prison. Both participants should have been arrested before they were released from prison, but for reasons that remained unclear had not been until subsequent to their release. One had been reassured by police that it was not their intention for him to be sent back to custody, and had been sentenced to pay a fine. The other conducted his follow up interview from in prison - having been remanded to custody for breaching his bail. Whilst serving his sentence in the YOI he had checked and been informed that there were no outstanding charges against him. He was therefore disappointed and angered by his unexpected arrest, a day after his release:

"'Cause the day I got released I thought 'right this is it. Start afresh. I've got nothing to worry about'. And the next day, the next day I was out with my mates having a couple of drinks, and police was there and they arrested me." (14f)

He was understandably anxious about his forthcoming trial - which was to take place in front of a jury in the Crown Court now that he had turned eighteen. He appeared somewhat resigned nonetheless to his prison existence:

"It was hard. It was hard... I thought 'no, not again. I don't want to do this again. I can't handle it'... And I was annoyed - proper cheesed off really... But I've got back into the regime again now. I've got used to everything again now. So I don't really think about it. well I think about being at home a lot at night, but I don't think a lot in the day." (14f)
LOCATING THE EXPERIENCE

The final process of adjustment was labelled ‘locating the experience’. This process related to the place individuals’ experiences of prison seemed to occupy in their minds at the time of the follow ups, subsequent to their release.

The continuum - forgetting versus remembering

Forgetting versus Remembering

An important continuum emerged during post-release accounts regarding the extent to which participants had remembered or looked back on their experiences of prison, or tended to forget them.

The point along the continuum at which participants positioned themselves was sometimes hard to ascertain in practice however. Simple questions such as ‘Do you ever look back on your time inside?’ occasionally elicited responses which appeared somewhat contradictory with statements participants had made at other points during their post-release interviews.

In spite of these difficulties, several participants were judged overall to have forgotten the experience to all intent and purposes. All of these individuals suggested that they no longer thought about, or at most rarely looked back on their time inside. There was also a sense from their accounts that they had in some way shut the door on the experience completely - that it no longer held any significance for them. One individual’s comment typified this position:

“I don’t really care. It’s gone. It’s in the past” (10f)
Other participants varied in the extent to which they seemed to look back on the experience, but related doing so to at least some extent and talked about memories they entertained as evidence of this. At least at the time of the follow up, none of the participants seemed to occupy the other end of the continuum - whereby they appeared preoccupied with the experience. It was clear from one participant’s account however that he’d shifted from the start of his release when “everything to do with prison. It was still in my head” to the position he currently held - “I’ve almost blanked it from my head now” (15f).

Indeed, it seems plausible that this individual’s experience of a shift may have reflected the norm - whereby individuals start their release from a point of relative pre-occupation, but as time progresses think about it less and less. In talking about his release from a previous sentence however, another participant’s account is worthy of note. The difficulty he had experienced in moving from this position, and the traumatic nature of it for him was clear from his account. The following extract exemplifies this:

“I remember when I first came out, I was actually having dreams about prison and all that. Like when I was in my bedroom at home I ripped my door off and threw it out the window. And it was ‘cause I was getting paranoid. ‘cause I was in my bedroom and waking up I kept thinking I was in my cell still... ‘Cause I’d done a year in prison I kept thinking ‘I’m still in my cell. I’m in me cell.’.. I thought the door was locked, and I had to rip the door off, throw it out the window.. I was getting proper paranoid.” (14i)

Finding a balance

“Well.. it will always be in the back of my mind. Put it that way... If I do decide to do anything, that will always be in the back of my mind. ...I appreciate freedom more than I did before.” (4f)
Results

Overall, it was considered that those who showed some sort of a balance between the two extreme positions appeared better adjusted at the time of the follow up. With the possible exception of one these individuals seemed to have successfully grieved the losses they had accrued as a result of prison. Furthermore, they appeared able to hold on to the reflections - particularly evaluations of prison - that had motivated them to start afresh whilst they were still in prison. Thus, the experience seemed to hold a more lasting impact on their motivation to avoid offending.

Indeed, all of the participants judged to have adopted the extreme position of having 'forgotten prison' related re-offending on at least some level subsequent to release. In contrast to this, all but one of the individuals who seemed to have achieved a balance in locating the experience claimed to have completely avoided re-offending, as did several who whilst more ambiguous in their position showed at least elements of the balance. One, for instance commented:

"I think about some of the things I've done in there - like work and stuff. And it motivates me to get my job. Like when I worked in there I used to say to myself that I was going to get a job when I come out and I wasn't going to get in trouble.. and I haven't got in trouble and I did get a job... I mean I done what I wanted to do.." (11f)

Only one participant had returned to a lifestyle of fighting in spite of his apparent adoption of such a position and his previously stated intentions. Although his attempts to curb his fighting had been futile, he nonetheless appeared to be searching for solutions:

"Cause sometimes when I'm going out with my friends, sometimes they take drugs, or a knife or shit like that. And I think about going back in and tell them not to." (6f)
Results

**Negotiating Identity**

One more specific aspect of participants’ location of the experience comprised the extent to which it had a more lasting negative effect through its impact on the individual’s developing self-concept. Overall, the vast majority seemed able to separate themselves from their prison experience, and as commented, a number saw themselves as different from other inmates at the YOI. For the occasional participant, however, the negative impact of prison on the individual’s identity was evident.

**Taking on a Criminal Identity**

For the purposes of classification, participants were assumed to have adopted a ‘criminal identity’ if they either referred to themselves directly as ‘criminals’ or if they talked about an increase in their potential for crime in an apparently positive light.

With this classification system in mind, only one individual had clearly labelled himself a ‘criminal’ and was judged to be negotiating such an identity. In spite of his determination to turn his life around during the pre-release interview, his reflections had changed dramatically at the post-release interview. He appeared to feel a sense of pride, not only that roles with his co-defendant had switched - such that he was now the ‘bad influence’ - but that “prison has made me braver to do crime” (3f).

Whilst a few others also implied in hindsight that prison had increased their potential for crime, this was not in such stark contrast to their presentation during the pre-release interviews.
Factors Influencing the Process of Locating

Several factors emerged which may have mediated the way in which participants located the experience of prison. These may be seen to be broadly related to the individual's status with regards to the other processes of adjustment outlined. Firstly, participants' location of the experience seemed to be related to their success in holding onto their original reflections and re-evaluations. Participants' success in reconnecting with their previous environments and lifestyles also seemed particularly influential. Finally, the extent to which participants were able to make changes in their lives also appeared relevant.

The Process of reflecting and re-evaluating

Of those that related memories of prison at the time of the follow up, participants were mixed in terms of the memories they recalled. Some appeared overall to recall mixed memories, including those of a more negative nature. Although one participant noted he tried not to think about prison too much, he commented "But when I think of it now I think it's a waste" (5f).

In contrast to this, others appeared to show a bias for remembering the positive things about prison. One, for instance, would occasionally ponder about his days in prison if he ever heard of friends going back "...like going education, social and all that, playing with mates, playing pool and all that.... like laughing and everything" (3f).

Another referred to this bias directly:

"...when I spoke about it in there it was all serious, but I can laugh and joke about it now.. 'cause it's done now." (11f)
Results

In some cases, there was evidence that such a bias in participants’ recall may have been relevant in reducing their motivation to avoid offending. Of note however, this bias did not inevitably preclude individuals from achieving a balance in locating the experience, as described. In spite of one participant’s jovial memories, for example, he was able to hold onto his original evaluation of the experience as a whole. He remarked of this:

“I mean it’s what’s kept me out of trouble. I mean.. just realising my life is worth more than just sitting in a cell - looking at four walls for six months”.

(11f)

Closely related to such reflections and memories, the losses participants perceived and the extent to which they had grieved over them may also have played a role (although the nature of this was hard to specify on the basis of the available data). Some participants commented on how they had missed out on experiences as a result of their sentence at the time of the follow up - predominantly those they might have enjoyed with friends outside. The majority of these seemed to have come to terms with such losses, or minimised the impact of them. However, one young man’s grief - which focused on the disruption to his life and his education in particular - appeared somewhat incomplete:

“Sometimes I feel low.. but that’s only when I think of what I could have been doing if I hadn’t gone inside” (5f).

Several participants - notably those with longer sentences - also commented directly on the loss of prison life or friendships inside. In spite of his apparent success in turning his life around and his overall happiness in being out, one acknowledged this aspect of his experience:
Results

"You do miss your mates. and sometimes I miss the peace and quiet of my cell. I could relax in my cell... more than I can relax in my bedroom now" (17f)

The process of reconnecting

Evidence for the impact of the reconnecting process on participants' locating of the experience came from statements suggesting that participants felt their lives had now *gone back to normal*. This seemed to imply that participants felt they had successfully reconnected with their social environments in particular.

Indeed, a number expressed such a sentiment, and either implied or stated that it had become hard to hold onto the memory of prison as a result. One individual's comment was representative:

"Everything's back to normal now. It's like I haven't gone away really." (5f)

For another, his engagement with his life outside had meant that there was simply no room for his memories:

"It was still in my head.. but then it started that more things from outside started coming into my head and started pushing them things out". (15f)

The extent to which others had got used to participants being out and allowed them to forget about prison also appeared to play a role. Several participants talked about their displeasure at being constantly checked up on by the police - "They just basically won't leave me alone" (9f). Others (one of these in relation to a previous sentence) also noted that the enduring curiosity of friends and acquaintances made it hard to forget the experience. One, for instance, commented:

"All the questions.. I mean they was asking me like what was it like? How was it in there? Who did you meet? Like all that". (11f)
For some, **reminders by others** were experienced as a frustration. One participant, in particular, found the whole thing irritating:

"I just get pissed off with it sometimes really. Like going in the pub, and people go 'oh he's been in prison, he's done three years' and all that....Just sitting there having a quiet drink and everything - I don't want to hear that. I'm out now. I don't want someone coming telling me I done three years. I know I done three years." (17f)

For another however, this was not the case. Indeed, the preoccupation of others with his experience of prison and the esteem they held him in as a result appeared to have contributed significantly to his testing out a more criminal identity:

"As soon as I got out.. some people think 'yeah, you've been in jail' and it's a good thing you've been in jail... Even if people haven't been in and don't do crime they think 'raaa' like. But then I think, say if I was a straight forward person I wouldn't think like that. I'd think 'no - that person's a criminal'... But then I am a criminal so I can't really say that" (3f)

Struggling with apparently unresolved ambivalence he went on:

"I think they're respecting me, but then I think 'why?'. Really it's me. I shouldn't be doing this.. But then I think nothing of it. I just think 'yeah I'm enjoying them thinking that and that's it...nothing much". (3f)

**The process of changing**

Finally, whilst less evidence was available to demonstrate the influence of the changing process, a couple of accounts reflected something of this. In these cases, participants' failure or success in implementing changes had apparently exerted an indirect effect, via the effect on participants' reflections and re-evaluations.

In a positive direction, one individual's success in avoiding offending and resuming a working lifestyle had apparently reinforced his original evaluation of the benefits of this. He concluded:
Results

“It feels good, ‘cause I know I achieved something in myself. I can go on the streets without worrying the police will be on my back” (11f).

Another participant, on the other hand, had not been able to maintain the changes he had managed to implement for some weeks after his release. This had clearly distorted the meaning he had attributed to his sentence prior to release:

“That’s what me and my co-dealer said to each other - prison didn’t do nothing for us. ‘Cause we’re back on the same things we were doing before. That’s why I’ve totally forgotten about going inside” (3f).

His return to drug misuse had further impacted on his motivation to avoid prison. Whilst under the influence of crack cocaine he felt he simply ‘didn’t care’.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

During both pre-release and post-release interviews, participants were asked about their perceptions of the support offered by different sources and factors which prevented them from approaching others for it. Whilst the focus of the following account will be on support offered in relation to release, some comment will be made on participants’ use of support more generally where relevant.

Use of Social Support

Support from Prison Officers

Overall, participants expressed very mixed views of prison staff, including officers and governors. Whilst negative views were expressed about some staff, the majority felt that at least some officers were ‘alright’. One, for instance, noted: “These governors, they’re good people...Not here just to lock you up and that’s it” (13i)
Results

Even so, it was clear that prison officers were infrequently called upon for support. Whilst one participant commented "I actually found officers in here that I can talk to about anything" (9i), his opinion was shared by few, and descriptions of officers offering emotional support were extremely rare.

A few reports were nevertheless made of how some prison officers had offered more indirect means of support - at least during specific times of crisis. In a couple of cases, for example, officers had facilitated participants’ access to more habitual sources of support (e.g. allowing participants to make a phone call to family from the office). Other reports included officers attempts to help distract participants from their distress - by finding ways of reducing the time they spent in 'bang up'. One individual had been particularly grateful for this when his mother had died during his sentence:

"They let me stay with my cousin, always got me out of my cell...let me do things. I was hardly ever locked in my cell... At lunch time and at night time, but apart from that I was hardly ever in my cell. Doing some sort of good" (9i)

It was seldom the case that participants had talked to officers in any detail about their forthcoming release more specifically. Indeed, there was little evidence of support being offered in this respect. One individual’s view seemed representative of many:

"If you do have a conversation it won't be about what you going to do when you get out and stuff... A couple of screws will ask you but you just answer it college or whatever and it will be left like that. It won’t carry on or nothing... You’re more likely to talk about football... or if there was a film last night, you might talk about that...But nothing like being released or family or anything.. It's not like that." (4i)

Support from Case Workers

"They're alright. They sort stuff out for you caseworkers. Like if you can't get visits they sort all that out for ya'. Or if you want a town visit, home leave, something like that, your caseworker sorts it out for you." (14i)
Overall, participants perceived their case workers reasonably positively, and were clear about their roles and responsibilities. The majority of participants cited examples of the practical support they had received from case workers, such as making *practical arrangements* for visits or attending courses at the YOI. Some mentioned having spoken to case workers about possibilities and plans regarding work on their release.

Again however, case workers had seldom provided more emotional forms of support to participants. Even one individual, who had otherwise praised his case worker and enjoyed a close relationship with him, noted: "I trust Mr [X] as well, but he's not about to talk about personal stuff" (17i). More generally, a number commented that in theory they could call up their case workers if they had worries or concerns. It was rare however that they had actually done so in practice and a reluctance to was evident for some. As one noted:

"He's safe... but I don't really call him up when I got problems" (6i).

**Support from Youth Offending Teams**

Interestingly, participants' perceptions of their YOT workers sometimes varied between pre- and post-release interviews. Prior to release, the majority of those who commented spoke positively about their YOT workers. Some implied that they were easier to talk to than some prison staff, and attributed this to the fact that their YOT workers had known them for longer.
A few also noted that their YOT workers were easy to talk to as a result of their ‘being on a level’, as one termed it. This seemed to mean slightly different things for different participants. One participant commented of his YOT worker:

“He can say he’s been there, done that. he knows exactly what goes on so it’s easy to communicate with him. ‘Cause you can’t really turn around and tell him this when he can see its the opposite of what’s going down ‘cause he can cut through.” (2i)

Another described:

“. he’s just safe like. He’s not like - how can I say it? - he’s lenient... not lenient.. but me and him can share a joke like. He’s not bossy or nothing.” (4i).

At the time of the follow ups, however, a shift had apparently occurred for some. Indeed, post-release, a number of participants felt that their mandatory supervision meetings were unwanted or a waste of time. The majority described the meetings as brief, and in some cases ineffective. One participant’s account was typical in this respect:

“Coming here.. coming here for ten minutes.. it’s nothing. They just ask you ‘What you been up to?’ And I say I’ve been working. And they say ‘What you been doing socially?’. And I say ‘going the pub’ and that’s it.. Ten minutes I’m out... That’s the everyday thing when you come here.” (3f)

There was also a sense from a few participants’ accounts that they felt they had been ‘dropped in the dust’, to get on with their release. One, for example, noted:

“She was... well she was saying ‘what’s it like to be out and all that?’...and I was telling her it was OK and all that, and then she just went ‘well we’ll see you in a week’ basically. So.. no good really....” (14f).

Whilst the majority tolerated their meetings, one participant was more indignant:

“Don’t do nothing. I don’t want him involved” (6f).
With regards to the type of support offered, some participants had appreciated YOT workers involvement in *helping them find jobs or college courses*. Specifically, reports were given of YOT workers talking through participants’ plans for work, both prior and subsequent to release. Prospectuses, careers advice and occasionally job interviews were also obtained for participants by YOT workers. Practical assistance was also given by social workers in finding accommodation for those who needed it subsequent to their release, or accessing drugs counsellors if participants felt they would benefit from this.

Similarly to prison staff however, the emotional support of YOT workers was rarely sought - even if participants felt that it would be given. One felt that his YOT worker had been very supportive with the difficulties he had experienced with his family - acting as a go-between on his behalf. Such reports were infrequently made however.

**Support from family**

It was clear that the vast majority of participants seemed to view family members, including mothers, siblings and occasionally cousins, as their *main source* of support. This was true not only in general, but with respect to release more specifically. Some commented that family were the only ones that could really be trusted, or that is was just the way family’s were “*Just mums innit like. We’re close*” (4i).

In the same ways as they made use of professional support, participants readily accepted the practical support of family members. More than half the participants related family members’ offers of work, or their assistance in helping participants find
jobs or college courses. Their general encouragement in this respect was noted as important by several. One commented:

"My mum and dad have helped a lot. Like when I was going to work they gave me money to get there and stuff. And they helped motivate me - they used to come and wake me up and stuff for work" (11f)

Some also talked of the material support offered by their families. This included their financial support through prison, and a few referred to the monetary gifts of family on their release. In at least one case, financial support seemed to have been offered in the hope that it would help prevent him returning to offending. In illustration, one participant’s mother had been anxious about this when he was released from his first prison sentence:

"...she wanted to do more stuff for me... help me more like... If she heard me talking about anything she’d try and get it for me so that I wouldn’t go out and do nout’ silly and that" (4i)

In contrast to other sources of support, however, some participants also drew on family members (particularly mothers) for more emotional forms of support - both during prison and subsequent to release. Overall, participants seemed to feel more able to talk about problems and admit their feelings to close family members. Even one, who was unusually open to support from outside, commented of his mum:

"I know if I needed to talk I could go and talk to any of them. But I talk to my mum most of all. My mum’s like my friend" (7i)

In some cases, participants’ evaluations that family members had stuck by them may have made them more ready to draw on their support with respect to release. Indeed, families’ continued acceptance of participants seemed to be viewed by at least some as supportive in itself. One clearly gained relief from his perception:
Some difficulties may have been particularly hard to talk about however. Of participants who had experienced anxieties about going outside on release, only one seemed to have disclosed this to his mother subsequent to a previous release. Importantly, she appeared to have learned from the difficulties he had experienced previously and her encouragement proved beneficial this time round:

"Basically she'd asked me to do things and all that - like go to the shop for her and all that... and she wouldn't normally do that. She'd go to the shop herself. I know she was trying to get me out more" (14f)

Finally, it was apparent that the mothers of some participants had tried to make their sons think about their lifestyles and offending, either before or after their sentence. Whilst some acknowledged that their families 'meant well', few seemed to regard this as supportive.

**Support from friends**

The support of other inmates was so infrequently discussed that, for the purposes of the report, support from participants' friends from outside will provide the focus. Overall, there was some variability in participants' accounts of the support offered by friends. Whilst a number provided examples where individual friends had clearly provided help, in general the support of friends was spoken of less frequently than that offered by family.

During their time inside prison, a few related how friends had sent *material goods*, including tapes and money. A couple were also grateful that friends had apparently
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supported their mothers: "They're always going up to see my mum. Always. I don't know.. asking to give my mum a lift up here" (17i).

After release and as with other sources of support, a few participants related how friends had helped them secure work - either asking people they knew if there was a job going or keeping an eye out for suitable posts and encouraging participants with their efforts. A few also commented how friends had encouraged them to stay out of trouble in other ways too. One participant's friends, for example, were aware of his potential for offending under the influence of alcohol. They had clearly been mindful of this during his first trip to the pub subsequent to release:

"... I knew they would have carried on drinking... but this time they were watching me, and they were going 'alright, we'll have another one, but it's the last one and then we're off'" (14f)

In comparison to family sources, fewer participants appeared to have turned to friends for emotional support, although the occasional example was given. Friends may nonetheless have played a particular role in helping participants reconnect with their social environments in other ways. Many reported friends' efforts to update them on experiences and events missed whilst inside. One participant's friends in particular had learnt from his previous release:

"But this time he remembered that I didn't want to be reminded about prison and all that. So he didn't talk about it at all really...We were just talking about the good times we had before I went to prison and all that, and he was telling me what he's been up to and all that...That was better than my mates talking about prison". (14f)

Whereas it was rarely referred to directly as a form of support, there was some evidence that friends may have helped participants by distracting them from their problems. Anticipating during his pre-release interview that he would be homeless on
his release, one comforted himself “I’ll feel better when I go round my mates and have a smoke” (12i).

**Blocks to the Use of Social Support**

In talking about their use of social support, a number of themes emerged relating to blocks participants perceived, that hindered them from actively seeking or making use of the support on offer. Whilst some overlap was evident between them, blocks were categorised into three broad types. ‘Intrapersonal’ blocks concerned those relating most specifically to the individual and his general way of approaching problems. ‘Interpersonal blocks’ concerned those relating to participants’ perceptions of others which affected their willingness to disclose problems. Finally, contextual blocks concerned those which, whilst interpersonal in some respects, were strongly influenced by the more general context of the criminal justice system and participants’ offending.

**Intrapersonal blocks**

Some participants demonstrated a generally *avoidant style of coping*, which precluded their seeking support from others. This was evident in several ways. Occasionally participants spoke explicitly about their lack of feeling or reflection in relation to problems. As one commented about a bereavement he had suffered:

“I’m not really emotional. I don’t really think about it and feel no way”. (2i)

Others showed a *lack of reflection* or a *tendency to minimise* experiences which for many would have caused distress or anxiety. Indeed, several participants denied that
they had ever needed support and even appeared surprised at the very idea. When asked about who he would turn to if worried or upset, one participant commented:

"Why would I be worried or upset? I've never been worried or upset?...I suppose I'd talk to someone, but I just don't know" (16i).

A greater number denied having anticipated or experienced any particular difficulty with release more specifically, so pre-empting any need for support. One participant, for instance, remarked:

"There's not really much to talk about. I mean, all there is to talk about is getting out and adapting to the outside again. I mean, I know it's not going to be that hard" (11i).

A preference to deal with problems themselves, rather than call on the support of others, was expressed by many. On the rare occasions these individuals had approached others for support, they had done so only when they felt sure that this would improve the situation for them. For others, their ferocious independence meant they never really talked to anyone about anything. One participant felt there were benefits to this position:

"I don't know...most people say that I'm a really private person. I prefer to do things the way I like them... to do it my way... that way I know it's smooth" (2i)

Related to this, participants often felt that the best way to learn was from experience, rather than from the advice of others. A couple felt that they had revised this attitude however. One linked this to his increasing maturity:

"I was young and I didn't want to know. Anybody gave me advise and I didn't want to know. It's difficult when you're young" (14i).
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For some, the advice of those who 'wouldn't know' was particularly to be dismissed. Related to this, many assumed that only those who had been in prison themselves could really understand their experience of release.

**Interpersonal blocks**

Some participants described a difficulty in trusting others. For a couple, their lack of trust was pervasive. One noted "I can't really trust no-one" (2i). More generally, trust - where it was awarded - had to be built up gradually. A couple of participants described how they would deliberately test people out, to see how trustworthy they were. Even one participant who generally enjoyed a number of supportive relationships in and outside of prison explained:

"Like I'd watch someone for a little while.. I'd been talking to them but I'd like see what he does - if he talks to this one or that one" (7i).

More generally, this group appeared hyper-vigilant to potential signs that others either did not care or couldn't be trusted:

"If I get let down, it's just I'm not really looking to turn back to them. That's the way I see it. If they've done it once, what makes you think they're not going to let you down again?" (2i)

Indicators that others were not to be trusted included their having broken confidences or promises. Some also noted how professionals, in particular, had failed to keep their appointments - sometimes without explanation or apology. What might have been seen as small things to the professional often mattered greatly to this group of participants. One spoke of his probation officer's failure to send some promised magazines:

"He said that, what, five, six months ago, and I still haven't had them off him. Still haven't even had a letter. So if I can't believe him in getting a
Some participants were hindered from seeking support by their reluctance to show their feelings to others - "I'm just the sort of person like that. I just don't show it" (3i). Some of these were apparently concerned about what others, particularly other males, might think. Several commented that women were easier to talk to in this respect. One individual's investment in maintaining a 'macho' image amongst his friends was particularly clear:

"You don't really want to tell your mates what it's like in jail. They'll think that you was a pussy, that you was weird, that you was a fraggle... If you tell them that you was in jail and got rushed a couple of times... they're not wanting you to tell them that. They're hoping you'll tell them 'oh yeah, I held it up'" (6i)

Finally, others tried to hide their worries for the sake of others - particularly their mothers:

"I wouldn't talk to my mum 'cause she's a worrier. She'll just worry more" (17i).

Contextual blocks

Concerning more contextual or situational blocks, some participants were concerned that any information they disclosed - particularly to YOT staff - might be used against them. As one individual explained:

"I just don't trust them. I got a bad feeling about 'em. You tell them things and they use it against you later on. So I don't trust them at all". (10i)

Occasionally, participants' beliefs were grounded in their experiences of previous pre-sentence reports written by their YOT workers for the courts. Indeed, one appeared bitter:
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“They take the piss out of people. They pretend to be friendly and that to get information they need, and they hit us with it.. say ‘yeah he’s committed two burglaries. Take him to court’” (10f)

In other cases, participants who did not appear to have encountered such experiences were nevertheless wary. Ironically, participants were most reticent to seek support with the problems they most needed help with, or were most worried about. This included offending, fighting and drug taking. One participant, for instance, had disclosed his use of cannabis to his YOT worker. He kept his use of crack cocaine to himself however, reasoning “he might be a bit worried really that I might start re-offending” (16i). Another expressed fear that his family might be informed were he to disclose his renewed addiction.

One emerging theme concerned participants’ relationships with many professionals - which were either poor or distant. With regards to prison staff, the majority of participants were critical of at least some officers. As one noted:

“Most of them are alright... just say hello to them and have a joke with them and stuff like that. But some of them.. there’s no point even talking to them”.

(13i)

Thus, poor relationships with officers was identified as a block to many young offenders seeking support from prison staff. Of the complaints made, some participants seemed to feel that staff ‘stitched them up’ or abused their power -

“What they do is they change the rules when it doesn’t work out. They just do what they want to do and we ain’t got no say. That’s what they do and that’s what gets me mad” (4i).

Others were critical of what they perceived as staff’s disrespect for them. One commented “There’s no point. They just talk to you like you’re shit. Like you’re a
bad person just 'cause you're in here” (5i). The occasional reference was also made to the difficulty for inmates when they felt they had been labelled by staff. In talking about a previous institution, one participant explained how the fights he had got into initially had so hindered his progress at the institution, that he had applied for a transfer:

“.. once I got labelled with a bad name, it was hard to get out of that.. and after about a year I wanted to settle down and do courses and that.. but no-one put me forward to do courses, no-one wanted to take an interest in me” (17i)

Even if staff had apparently been respectful, some participants were wary of their motives. Having enjoyed an apparently close relationship with one officer, one participant had dismissed the relationship when he had been ‘nicked’ by the officer “since then I haven’t spoken to him” (4i). As another commented:

“I don’t see no point in getting close, ‘cause the way they see it, for them it’s a job, it’s a working relationship. They’re governors, we’re cons...they can’t even mix those two types” (6i)

Whilst the link was not made directly by all participants, it seems likely that such perceptions would have hindered participants from seeking support from many officers. As one summed up:

“It’s just the way they are. You can’t go and talk to a governor. There’s no point. No point at all. They’re not really bothered whether you’ve got a problem or not. So it’s just the way it is” (14i).

Furthermore, the importance of prison officers taking time to build relationships with YOs was highlighted by one, who spoke about an officer he felt particularly able to talk to:

“Like he plays games, he’d play pool with us, football, come outside, go weights with us.. do stuff with us, help us... He’s alright, yeah. I’d say I talk to Mr [X] the most.” (7i).
This point may also have been relevant to case workers at the YOI. Although very negative comments were rare, a number of participants commented on how little they saw of their case workers. One noted:

"He's not about on our wing. You only see him now and again. He's always busy in there [the case workers' office]" (17i).

There was also a feeling from some accounts that case workers considered the building of relationships to be of little importance. One individual explained:

"since I been here you could say I seen him five or six times, but it's just 'cause he bumps into me on the wing - not because he comes to see me" (2i).

In many cases this may have precluded participants from seeking all but the most practical of support from their case workers, and may have rendered disclosures of a more personal nature virtually impossible.

The brevity of YOT appointments may similarly have hindered participants from disclosing problems to workers. As one noted:

"Well I don't really talk to her much when I come. I'm only here for five minutes. just to show my face isn't it" (17f).

With regard to participants' families, the conflict participants' problems often caused may have made individuals reluctant to disclose difficulties they experienced on release with regards to offending and drug taking. Whilst none of the participants directly identified this as a block to their seeking support, a number alluded to conflict or the 'nagging' of mothers and grandmothers particularly. Whilst it was sometimes recognised that relatives acted in concern, many saw this as an irritation. One individual's description of the confrontations that used to arise with his mother clearly illustrated this:
"She's said to me since when I was young I was going to end up in jail like my dad. But I never used to listen. I just used to do my own thing... and I used to be all mouthy... I'd say 'I ain't going to jail', and she'd say 'yeah you are you little shit'." (8i)

For some, their patience had been diminished still further by their use of drugs. One related: ".. not while I was high, but maybe after - when I wake up in the morning and I'm all grotty and not in the mood for people nagging at me... and that would set me off" (16i). The comment of another reinforced the point:

"'Cause I'm cracked out I don't want to chat to them. That's what the rush is like... you don't want to chat to anybody" (3f).

For a few participants the situation seemed to have improved with family members, who were hopeful that participants had made a fresh start. Whilst in reality he had offended again, one participant hid his failure from his mother and appreciated the changes to their relationship as a result of her illusion:

"Before, she was all 'where you been today? Nicking someone's stereo?' and all that.. but she speaks to me more like an adult now as well". (15f)

He felt the encouragement he had lacked previously was of great importance:

"Saying 'you're doing well, keep it up!'. before I never got any encouragement...and it boosts you up, it makes you think 'I'm doing well'... My family are seeing me do well, so I can do well... But if you don't get any encouragement like, you don't really stick at it. You get me?" (15f)
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study set out to characterise YOs’ experiences of release, including their expectations, actual experiences and any difficulties they encountered in adjusting. The use YOs make of social support in making the transition was also explored.

The analysis of both pre-release and post-release interviews according to the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis yielded a number of core themes or categories. The contributions of pre- and post-release interviews were not separated, however, as participants’ adjustment to release appeared to be a more dynamic and continuous process than such a division would imply.

Waiting for Release

In summary, participants’ experiences of waiting for release were often characterised by a prevailing sense of uncertainty and in some cases a lack of control over their futures. Whilst many suggested that they did not anticipate problems on returning to the community, others noted their lack of preparation for release. More generally, there was a sense in which participants’ releases were unmarked - at least by the institution and its staff. As a result of these experiences, YOs’ emotional and cognitive reactions to their forthcoming release were, not surprisingly, mixed. Whilst many described preoccupation and restlessness or anticipation and excitement, others described an ambivalence, including feelings of fear or a total lack of feeling.
**Processes characterising Young Offenders’ Adjustment to Release**

Overall, four processes emerged as integral to YOs’ adjustment to release. The first process which emerged as significant for YOs’ adjustment to release was labelled ‘reflecting and re-evaluating’. Particularly during the period they spent in prison, participants seemed to spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on and re-evaluating their lives - often for the first time. Almost universally, participants had spent time re-evaluating their relationships - particularly focusing on who had stuck by them during their sentence and the preceding troubles.

Many had also reflected on the reasons for their offending and the impact of their resulting custodial sentence. Influenced particularly by the latter, many described hopes and plans they had for their future, related to changes they wished to make on release. Of note, whilst many talked of their intentions to avoid re-offending, a degree of ambivalence or a lack of confidence in their ability to change was evident in the accounts of many. Some individuals’ plans to avoid offending were also somewhat non-specific or poorly thought through.

The second process identified as relevant to young offenders’ adjustment to release was labelled ‘reconnecting’. With regards to their initial experiences of release, many participants described a sense of disconnection from their previous social environments, and in some cases from their physical environments. Feelings of social disconnection were often aroused as participants were reunited with friends. Some also seemed to feel disconnected from the wider social community. Disconnection from the physical environment was evident in participants’ accounts of their initially distorted perceptions of time and space. Possibly related to this, some described initial
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agoraphobic tendencies. Indeed, that participants may have under-reported this phenomenon, given the difficulty they experienced in disclosing it, seems likely. Finally, some participants with longer sentences felt that they had lost basic life skills and social competencies over the course of their incarceration.

Whilst participants varied greatly in terms of the extent to which they experienced a sense of disconnection, it was necessary for the majority to go through a process of 're-connecting' on at least some level. Significantly, difficulties experienced in relation to this process appeared the most influential with respect to the young person's mental health and well-being on release.

The third process identified as relevant to participants' adjustment to release was labelled 'changing', and related to YOs' success in implementing changes to their lives on release. These changes fell into two broad areas - taking on new roles and lifestyles, such as work, and avoiding old roles and lifestyles, including offending and substance misuse. The early days of release were seen by some as a time of potentially high risk in terms of re-offending. For many however, difficulties seemed to creep in more insidiously. In some cases, difficulties were linked to a participant’s return to drugs. In other cases, participants’ motivation to persist with working lifestyles waned as difficulties were encountered and offending was seen as the easiest option. Not surprisingly, therefore, this process emerged as one of the most relevant to outcomes relating to young offenders' recidivism and re-arrest.

The fourth and final process of adjustment was labelled 'locating the experience'. In particular, it concerned the place individuals' experiences of prison seemed to occupy
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in their minds at the time of the follow up interviews, subsequent to their release. In this respect, an important continuum emerged regarding the extent to which participants had remembered or looked back on their experiences of prison, or tended to forget them. The extent to which the experience impacted on the YOs’ emerging self-concept also appeared significant.

The difficulty in ascertaining the point at which participants positioned themselves along this continuum was noted in analysing transcripts. This was largely due to fluctuations in participants’ responding at different points throughout follow up interviews. To an extent, such fluidity seems typical of the conversational process. It also seems feasible, however, that participants found such direct questions difficult to respond to, since they required them to reflect directly on their own thought processes. Alternatively, these inconsistencies may have reflected the dynamic nature of the process of ‘locating the experience’. Specifically, participants’ ability and motivation to hold the experience in mind at any point in time may have reflected complex interactions between their habitual thinking styles and other aspects of their subjective experience. Whilst the overall position adopted by participants at a given time point may have been relatively stable, momentary fluctuations may have occurred in response to the context of discussion.

All in all, it would seem that the natural progression for many YOs may be to move from a point, shortly after release, where prison was often remembered, to thinking about it less and less. In the current study, however, some participants appeared more successful in holding onto memories of prison than others - particularly to their original evaluations of its impact.
Discussion

Thus, whilst YOs’ position along the continuum may inevitably vary, it was considered that some sort of a balance between the two extreme positions was most optimal in terms of adjustment. On the one hand, participants at the extreme end of the continuum - who seemed to have ‘forgotten’ the experience completely - appeared at least superficially protected from the potentially adverse effects of remembering on mental health and well-being. On the other hand, there was some suggestion from the results that these individuals were more likely to be re-offending at the time of the follow up.

As for potential mediators, it was suggested that the other processes of adjustment identified may have influenced the way in which participants located the experience of prison at any one point in time. Firstly, participants’ location of the experience seemed to be related to their success in holding onto their original reflections and re-evaluations. Specifically, a number of participants showed a bias for remembering the positive things about prison and failed to hold onto the more negative aspects. Furthermore, participants’ success in reconnecting with their previous environments and lifestyles seemed particularly influential. For many, their sense that ‘everything was back to normal’ had clearly contributed to their forgetting the experience. Indeed, for many, it was as if they had never been. The extent to which participants were able to make changes in their lives also appeared relevant - predominantly via its influence on participants’ original evaluations.

At the same time, there was evidence that the process of reflecting and re-evaluating influenced processes of both reconnecting and changing. For instance, an individual’s evaluation of how his friends had got him into trouble sometimes influenced his
reconnection with these peers on release. Similarly, his intentions and solutions to offending formulated during the reflecting process inevitably influenced his success in avoiding re-offending during the changing process of the model.

**Young Offenders' use of Social Support in Adjusting to Release**

Finally, YOs' *use of social support* in making the transition of release was examined. In particular, the roles participants' informal and professional networks played in providing support were examined. Overall, the results seemed to suggest that participants made greater use of the social support offered from more informal sources. The majority of participants seemed to feel that family members in particular were their primary sources of support. To varying degrees, friends from outside also provided support on an ongoing basis. Other inmates were rarely turned to for support, however, and these relationships often appeared relatively superficial in comparison to participants' friendships with individuals from outside prison.

In contrast to this, participants were often reluctant to draw on the support of professionals, including YOI staff and YOT workers. When given, the support of professionals was on the whole limited to more practical forms, such as arranging for job interviews and college prospectuses. Interestingly, much of the support from family and friends was similarly focused on helping participants secure and hold down jobs. However, mothers and occasionally siblings were amongst the few individuals from whom participants were prepared to seek more emotional forms of support on occasion. Friends from outside may also have played a particular role in helping participants reconnect with their social environments on release. Finally, material support was more commonly offered by participants' informal support networks.
A number of themes also emerged relating to factors or *blocks to social support* participants perceived which hindered them from actively seeking or drawing on the support available from others. Whilst some overlap was evident, blocks were categorised into three broad types. ‘Intrapersonal blocks’ concerned those relating most specifically to the individual and his more general way of approaching problems. These included some participants’ avoidant coping styles, participants’ lack of reflection or tendency to minimise problems, their preference to deal with problems themselves and their opinion that the best way to learn was through experience.

‘Interpersonal blocks’ concerned those relating to participants’ perceptions of others which affected their willingness to disclose problems. Some described a reluctance to show their feelings to others. A number of participants also described a difficulty trusting others. They felt that trust had to be earned gradually and were often hyper-vigilant to potential signs that others were unreliable.

Finally, ‘contextual blocks’ concerned those which, whilst interpersonal in some respects, were strongly influenced by the more general context of the criminal justice system and participants’ offending. These included participants’ concerns that information they disclosed to professionals, particularly YOT workers, would be used against them, participants’ negative perceptions of their relationships with prison officers and governors, a lack of contact with case workers and the brevity of appointments with YOT workers. Attempts by family members to support participants in turning from their lifestyles of offending may also have been hindered, in many instances, by the conflict participants’ offending inevitably caused, and their perceptions that mothers, in particular, ‘nagged’.

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Overall therefore, the study was felt to have addressed the original questions posed. Firstly, the findings characterised YOs' expected and anticipated experiences of release predominantly in terms of four basic processes inherent to YOs' adjustment on release and the interaction of these processes (as summarised in the model below). A number of important insights might also be derived from the model with regards to difficulties YOs may encounter on returning to the community. These are considered in terms of potential adverse outcomes - including those pertaining to both mental health and re-offending. Finally, the study highlighted YOs' use of social support in adapting to release. This included the different roles professional and informal social networks play in facilitating the four processes outlined, and the blocks YOs perceived to seeking or accepting support from these sources.

**Overall Model of Young Offenders' Adjustment to Release**

The model outlined below, and presented schematically in Figure 8, depicts how the four processes of adjustment relate to each other. Overall, the processes may be seen to relate dynamically to each other, although the balance between them will inevitably shift both over time and with circumstance. Particularly prior to release, the individual may go through a process of reflecting on and re-evaluating his relationships, his offending, the impact of his sentence and consequently his plans for change. This initial process sets the context for his experiences of subsequent processes on release - including reconnecting, changing and locating the experience.

The manner in which the individual locates the experience will furthermore affect, and be affected by, the extent to which he has reconnected with his previous environment on release, and the extent to which he has managed to implement changes to his
Figure 8: Model of young offenders' adjustment to release from YOIs

INTERNAL RESOURCES
- coping style
- intrapersonal blocks to support

PROCESSES OF ADJUSTMENT
- Reflecting & Re-evaluating
- Locating the experience
- Changing
- Reconnecting

EXTERNAL RESOURCES
- support available
- interpersonal and contextual blocks to support

CHARACTERISTICS OF SENTENCE
- sentence length & type
- experiences of sentence & waiting for release

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES
- successful adjustment
- mental health problems
- re-offending
- substance misuse
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lifestyle. The influence of the processes of reconnecting and changing on the individual’s location of the experience at any one point in time may be either direct or indirect. Regarding the latter, the influence of these processes may be via the individual’s reflections and re-evaluations (whilst the individual may engage most actively in reflecting and re-evaluating prior to release, he may nevertheless continue in this process subsequent to release).

The individual’s adjustment and his success with each of the four processes inherent may additionally be influenced by several factors. Firstly, it seems plausible that the characteristics of the sentence may affect adjustment to release. Certainly, the length of the sentence emerged as a potentially important characteristic affecting adjustment in the current study. Whilst not investigated in the current study, it might be hypothesised that other characteristics of the sentence and the individual’s experience of it might also be important to post-release adjustment. For instance, opportunities for town visits, extent of contact with friends and family, or experiences of bullying might impact on subsequent adjustment.

The individual’s adjustment would also seem to be mediated by the external support available to him, and his selective use of it. The internal resources he possesses, such as coping strategies, although not focused on in the current study, might also be hypothesised to play a role in mediating his adjustment.

Finally, potential outcomes of poor adjustment include those relating to re-offending, substance misuse and mental health (notably depression and anxiety disorders).
Discussion

The findings with regard to each of these domains - processes, potential outcomes and use of social support - will now be considered in the light of existing literature.

THE FINDINGS IN CONTEXT

The Processes of Adjustment

Interestingly, some of the themes which emerged in the current study showed a similarity with those identified by Lyon et al (2000) in their study of young people in the criminal justice system. This similarity, at times striking, was considered to reinforce the validity of the findings of both Lyon et al’s and the current study - particularly in relation to the process of ‘re-evaluating and reflecting’ and to some extent the process of ‘reconnecting’.

Concerning the reflecting and re-evaluating stage of the model, considerable overlap was evident between participants’ explanations of their offending and the themes outlined in Lyon et al’s (2000) discussions regarding the ‘background to offending’. In particular, the importance of the peer group and involvement with drugs and alcohol were reflected in both studies, as were some of the more motivational factors identified in the current study.

Some of the diverse meanings attributed to the sentence by participants in the current study were also reflected in Lyon et al’s reporting of young people’s appraisals of prison life. In that study, whilst many felt that prison had been a positive experience, which had allowed them “time to think or get their heads sorted”, others had felt that “the experience of prison did not fulfil its intention as a deterrent measure” (p.42-43)
Of particular relevance to the ‘reconnecting’ process, Lyon et al (2000) noted how ‘Most young people saw prison as a separate world, disconnected from their lives outside’ (p42). Whilst the present study did not focus on YOs’ experiences of prison, participants’ sense of disconnection on returning to the community on release emerged as an important theme. That some young people felt they had become dependent on prison and many felt they had not been adequately prepared for release was also commented upon in Lyon et al’s study, mirroring some of the current participants’ assertions.

In summary therefore, the current study reinforced some of Lyon et al’s (2000) original findings. Likewise, although Lyon et al did not present their findings in terms of psychological processes, the overlap between some of the themes identified in the two studies attests to the reliability of the current findings.

With regards to the overall model of adjustment described, an interesting parallel might be observed with Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross’ (1992) model of change (in McMurran, 1994). In writing about change with respect to addictive behaviours, Prochaska et al (1992) outlined five stages of change characterising an individual’s motivation to change.

During the first of Prochaska et al’s (1992) proposed stages - the ‘pre-contemplation’ stage - an individual is said to be unaware or unconcerned by his addictive behaviour and has no intention to change in the foreseeable future. During the ‘contemplation’ stage of the model, the individual is said to become aware that a problem exists and is seriously contemplating change. At that stage, however, he shows no definite plans to
take action. Only at the ‘preparation’ stage has the individual made a definite decision to change and begun to make preparations accordingly. The next stage of the model, termed ‘action’ concerns the individual’s attempts to put his plans for change into action. Finally, during the maintenance stage of the model, the individual’s attempts at behaviour change begin to be consolidated and confirmed.

According to the model, the majority may return to earlier stages of the model (often contemplative or pre-contemplative) as ‘relapse’ occurs. More generally, progress through the stages may not always be smooth, and some individuals may become ‘stuck’ in particular stages for long periods of time.

Applying Prochaska et al’s (1992) model to the current findings, it might be hypothesised that many YOs who are eventually sent to a YOI may be persistent offenders who, prior to their custodial sentence, are at the pre-contemplation stage of change. The experience of a custodial sentence may bring many to the point where they begin to contemplate their offending and the consequences it has had for them.

Particularly those who evaluate their sentence in a positive manner - for instance, as a ‘turning point’ where they come to appreciate their liberty - may enter the preparation phase as a result of their reflections. Others, who view their sentence as having little impact, may return to the pre-contemplation phase and fail to identify potential solutions to their offending. Thus both contemplation and preparation stages of Prochaska et al’s model might be seen to be characterise individuals who are going through the process of ‘reflecting and re-evaluating’.
Similarly, the process of 'changing' identified in the current study might be seen to correspond to Prochaska et al.'s proposed action stage of change. This includes the individual's success in implementing changes which might lower his risk of re-offending. Attempts to abstain from old roles and lifestyles associated with offending (e.g. drug use) and the successful assimilation of new roles and lifestyles (e.g. work) would both seem important in this respect.

From such a perspective, recidivism and further contact with the criminal justice system might be conceptualised as a 'relapse', which is in turn influenced by the individual's failure to 'locate' his experience of prison in an optimal manner.

**Potential Mental Health Outcomes**

Participants' accounts clearly highlighted aspects of YOs' adjustment to release which could have lead, or in some cases apparently had lead, to the development of mental health problems. In consideration of Rice et al.'s (1993) developmental model of coping outlined previously, the 'daily hassles' associated with the event of leaving prison might have been expected to show the greatest association with YOs' mental health on release.

Aspects of participants' experiences which might have constituted 'hassles' were many. With regards to the process of reconnecting, for instance, many contended with the hassle of catching up on the experiences they had missed, dealing with the continuous questions about prison, being checked up on by the police and re-learning basic skills and competencies which had been lost through their lack of use in prison. Concerning the process of changing, many were faced with the hassles associated with
starting work. For some, their first taste of independent living, or the responsibilities of being a father proved stressful, and in the face of all these hassles, YOs were required to cope without recourse to their habitual strategies of offending and substance misuse.

From such a perspective, many YOs proved themselves extremely resilient in adjusting to the demands placed on them. At least one however showed signs at the follow up of having developed depressive symptomatology. This individual appeared to have experienced difficulty in reconnecting adequately at a social level on release. Of note, it has been suggested that loneliness and social withdrawal may be important antecedents to depression in the case of adolescents (Simeonsson, 1994 in Geldard & Geldard, 1999).

In addition to these more general influences on YOs' mental health and well being subsequent to release, participants' accounts further highlighted how individuals might develop more specific symptoms of agoraphobia. Butler (1989) has described agoraphobia as fear to a cluster of situations, including crowded or confined spaces, public transportation or being far from home. In such cases the individual's fear is determined by his/her distance from safety as well as proximity to the phobic stimulus, and is said to be maintained via the reinforcement of fear reactions, principally through avoidance. Certainly a number of participants described physiological arousal on re-experiencing the outside world. On the whole, participants appeared to have experienced such arousal aversively as anxiety, whether or not they labelled it as such.
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Whether this arousal was linked to their distorted perceptions of environmental characteristics including speed and size remained unclear. This uncertainty aside, it seems plausible that participants might have developed an agoraphobic disorder had they repeatedly failed to confront their anxieties. Indeed, whilst he described having finally ‘broken out’ of his problem, one participant described how his anxiety had prevented him from doing the things he normally would, for some weeks after release.

Finally, the possibility that some individuals, who experience aspects of their sentence as traumatic, may develop symptoms of post traumatic stress prior to or subsequent to release from custody was also highlighted. Although only described by one participant (in relation to a previous sentence) in the current study, it is conceivable that many YOs may experience traumatic events during their sentences as a result of the milieu of YOIs. YOs may, for instance, witness or directly experience violence, bullying, self harm and even suicide by other inmates. Interestingly, one study found particularly high rates of PTSD amongst an incarcerated sample of adolescents (32% meeting the criteria and a further 20% meeting partial criteria) when compared to community adolescent samples (Steiner et al, 1997, in Hagell, 2001). Half of the individuals experiencing such symptomatology suggested that witnessing interpersonal violence was the traumatising event.

Joseph, Williams & Yule (1997) have outlined a psycho-social model of post traumatic reactions which may be helpful in understanding the impact of prison on the development of symptomatology. They suggest that in processing traumatic stimuli, individuals typically go through a repetitive cycle of intrusions, appraisals and reappraisals of the trauma. This cycle is affected by an individual’s personality
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(including schemas and assumptions), his coping (commonly through avoidance) and aspects of his environmental and social context. Of note, the latter includes the support available to the individual, which may exert an impact via its influence on appraisals in particular. It thus seems possible that, for at least some individuals detained in a YOI, the restricted access to habitual sources of support may hinder their processing of such trauma and consequently increase the likelihood of their experiencing symptomatology both prior and subsequent to release.

**Potential Re-offending Outcomes**

Of the sample of 16 participants, for whom pre-release interviews were analysed, a total of four admitted or strongly insinuated that they were re-offending at the time of the follow up two months later. All had been in trouble with the police in some capacity subsequent to their release, even if they had not been charged due to insufficient evidence. A couple of the original participants were also known to have been in trouble with the police again for offences committed prior to their release (either before or during their sentence). Two of the total had been imprisoned as a result of the charges against them. With rates of reconviction within a 2-year period around 80% for YOs released from custody (NACRO, 2000), a greater number of the current sample might have been expected to re-offend had the follow up period been longer. It further seems likely that the number who reported re-offending may have represented an underestimation of the true levels within the sample, given the understandable reluctance of many to disclose such behaviour.
As noted previously, Rutter et al's (1998) review of the literature pertaining to antisocial behaviour in young people concluded that three features stood out as associated with turning points for individuals in their offending careers. These were:

1) a change in social group to one that involved more appropriate values;

2) a change in skills or qualifications likely to open up advantageous new opportunities;

3) a change in mental set that provided a concept of self-efficacy and control over one's destiny.

In relation to these factors, none of the participants who conducted post-release interviews seemed to associate with a completely different social group on release. Only one individual appeared to have remained disconnected from his previous antisocial peer group at the time of the follow up. Despite his having started at college, he suggested that he had not made new friends and appeared somewhat withdrawn, if not depressed. Whilst not directly discussed by participants, the difficulty for YOs released from prison in forming new social ties on release may be considerable. Forming relationships with a new pro-social peer group may be particularly difficult for YOs who have become accustomed to relating with other inmates and are stigmatised with the label of prison.

For some, the intrigue and even esteem such a label afforded them on release might have led to their assimilating a more criminal identity, as was the case for participant three. Poor self-esteem has indeed been cited to increase the likelihood of adolescents becoming involved in deviant behaviour and failing to resist peer pressure (Zimmerman Copeland, Shope & Dielman, 1997).
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On a positive note, a number of participants had studied for or gained some qualifications during the time in prison. Some nevertheless experienced difficulties in assimilating the working role, particularly if it was at odds with their self-concept or if they lacked the motivation to persist when offending provided an easier alternative to earning a living. Many participants' apparent lack of a sense of self-efficacy or control over their abstinence from offending may further have undermined their attempts to change. Rather, their accounts revealed a lack of confidence in their ability to change and desist from offending.

From the paucity of research available, Rutter et al (1998) suggest that institutions which provide opportunities for individuals to exercise responsibilities and personal decision-making in ways that foster such self-efficacy may be the most effective in bringing about change. Often run in stark contrast to this, the importance of creating systems and ways of working within YOIs which allow for this should clearly not be underestimated.

Young Offenders’ use of Social Support

The findings of the present study with respect to YOs’ use of social support seemed broadly in keeping with what has been found in the literature previously. In terms of the types of support most commonly accepted by YOs, many described how family, peers and professionals offered more practical and material forms of support (see Piko, 1998). It was rare that participants sought more emotional forms of support, and when they did, mothers were the most common source.
More generally however, a number of studies investigating male and female coping styles have attested to adolescent boys' tendency to ignore, avoid and keep problems to themselves (e.g. Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; 1999). In line with this, many of the participants in the current study expressed their reluctance to disclose problems or difficulties experienced to others, particularly professionals. YOs' reluctance to talk about their difficulties applied not only to problems more generally, but also to difficulties they experienced in terms of mental health, substance misuse and offending on release more specifically. Previous studies have also attested to adolescents' preference to turn to peers or family over professionals, from whom support is rarely sought (Whitaker et al, 1990).

Some participants in the present study not only avoided thinking about their problems, but went as far as to deny that they ever experienced worry or sadness at all. Indeed, the occasional participant seemed surprised by the researcher’s questions regarding their need for and use of support. Lloyd’s (1997) observations may help explain this finding.

Lloyd (1997) has suggested that boys are given such a strong message about not having feelings - particularly those considered ‘soft’ - that when they do experience these, they feel bad about it. Coupled with this, he describes how the kinds of feelings young men are ‘allowed’ to show are progressively narrowed down as boys grow up. By the age of 14-16, Lloyd suggests that only laughter and anger remain acceptable. Thus many other feelings, if experienced, are ‘funnelled’ by the young person into one of these two options. This may help explain participants’ observed tendency to minimise their distress and their need for support. For some, the extreme suppression
could conceivably lead to confusion with regards to their emotions. That some
participants found it so hard to articulate the anxiety they apparently experienced on
encountering the outside world again is thus also understandable from this
perspective.

The difficulty many YOs experienced in trusting potential sources of support clearly
resonates with the findings of Frydenberg & Lewis (1993), whereby boys’ reluctance
to turn to others for support was consequent upon their lack of trust in others. With
respect to the more contextual blocks to support identified, Geldard & Geldard
(1999) have stressed the importance of the issue of confidentiality to young people in
disclosing personal information, which mirrors the loyalty they expect in their peer
relationships. That the context in which YOs relate to their YOT workers (the
Criminal Justice System) inevitably renders complete confidentiality impossible
seemingly exacerbates YOs’ distrust of such professionals and may be a difficult
obstacle to overcome.

More generally, young people’s views of staff at all levels in the current study
mirrored Lyon et al’s (2000) findings. Although some officers in the YOI were seen
by YOs as ‘alright’, others were criticised essentially for their adherence to their role
as custodians rather than carers, as was found by Lyon et al. YOs in both studies
further felt that at least some staff abused their power, and that probation and other
specialist services failed to support them effectively.

With regard to caseworkers at the prison in particular, YOs’ lack of contact with
them may have made it difficult to establish effective, supportive relationships. The
importance for young people of having a sense that they are ‘known’ by and ‘special’ to their key workers has been raised in a study of the relationships between residents and staff in hostels for young homeless people (McGrath & Pistrang, submitted for publication). Such findings are in keeping with psychotherapy research, suggesting the importance of the qualities of the therapist and the bond between therapist and client (Asay & Lambert, 1999, in McGrath & Pistrang, submitted for publication).

**IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Whilst the study was considered to address the research questions initially posed, certain limitations of the study should be borne in mind in interpreting the findings. Firstly, the small number of participants in the study may have limited the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the wider population of YOs. In spite of the attempts made to select a sample which was reasonably representative of the population in YOIs at the time, the final sample may have been skewed in some respects. In particular, those with longer sentences seemed to be under-represented in the sample. Given the apparent differences that emerged between those with different length sentences, this may have been significant in terms of the findings. On the other hand, the final sample of 16 participants was considered a good size for an in-depth, qualitative study. Furthermore, the triangulation of data from pre-release and post-release interviews represented a particular strength of the study.

The restriction of having used only one institution from which to recruit participants may also have limited the confidence with which findings might be generalised. More specifically, the YOI in question was considered within the field as a generally progressive institution in comparison to some of its competitors. It might therefore be
hypothesised that a greater number of adverse outcomes (particularly in terms of mental health) would have been obtained had participants been selected from other institutions. Future studies might therefore employ samples recruited across several YOIs in redressing this imbalance. It seems unlikely however that the overall processes of adjustment identified would have varied for individuals released from different institutions.

In spite of these limitations, the heterogeneity of the sample in other respects was considered to reflect the heterogeneity which would be expected in the wider population of male YOs receiving custodial sentences. Firstly, the sample included participants with a range of different index offences. Participants also varied with regards to their previous experiences of institutions. Although some had served custodial sentences previously, others had not and were experiencing release for the first time. Whilst the small sample size precluded any adequate investigation of the potential impact of these variables on adjustment, the heterogeneity of the sample provided some insights.

Secondly, whilst attempts were made to conduct the follow ups for participants within a similar time period of about two months subsequent to their release, this was not always possible in practice. For instance, the YOT worker of one participant asked for the follow up to be delayed until some new charges brought against him had been resolved in court. This may have weakened the reliability of the findings overall, which were intended to reflect short-term adjustment over a two-month period (the majority of participants were nonetheless seen within the intended time period).
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Furthermore, not all of the original 16 participants for whom pre-release interviews were analysed were followed up subsequent to their release. Rather, a total of 11 completed both pre and post-release interviews, representing 69% of the original sample. Although this was considered a reasonable proportion of the original sample, it is possible that participant attrition was not entirely random and that the final sample may have been skewed in some way. For instance, it may have been that participants experiencing greater difficulties may have been reluctant or unable to conduct the follow up. Indeed, two of those for whom follow ups were not completed had been in trouble with the law again, and one declined on the basis of 'personal difficulties'. Again, this could have resulted in a more positive picture of YOs' adjustment to release being painted than is actually the case for the population as a whole.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that participants may have attempted to present themselves and their adjustment in a more socially desirable manner during interviews. Whilst attempts were made to minimise the likelihood of this, it remains possible that the researcher was aligned with youth justice staff in the minds of participants, and as such was seen as an authority figure. This may have been exacerbated by the fact that post-release interviews were organised via YOTs and were indeed held in YOT sites.

In spite of this, however, the majority of participants did not appear to associate the researcher with either the YOI or YOTs, and were felt by the researcher to be surprisingly open and honest during interviews. One individual spontaneously commented how he felt he could trust the researcher. More generally, a number talked, apparently freely, about their struggles with offending and their mistrust of
staff. In line with the afore-mentioned literature, nonetheless, participants seemed to find it most difficult to admit more neurotic vulnerabilities, such as the anxiety some felt on going outside. When they did refer to such vulnerabilities, participants often seemed keen to move the conversation on, necessitating that the researcher be sensitive in encouraging them to elaborate.

Overall, however, the researcher’s concern that participants might prove difficult to engage and that the data might be severely limited by the young men’s investment in maintaining a ‘macho’ image was not borne out. Indeed, it was felt that many appreciated and even benefited from the time spent listening to their point of view. In the YOI, many commented that it was nice to spend time away from their wings. Even at the follow ups, when alternative activities may have competed, the ready co-operation of many participants surprised the researcher. Several YOT workers also commented on the willingness of participants to conduct follow up interviews, which might further indicate that they found the interviews a rewarding experience and were open to exploring their experiences with the interviewer.

Concerning the validity check of asking workers in the field to comment on the account developed, both the social worker and forensic psychologist approached noted how the account did indeed fit their observations of young people on release. One felt it was helpful to have these insights structured on paper. She also commented on the apparently traumatic impact of prison for some, and the nightmares that some experienced as a result of it. Whilst not a dominant theme of the current account, such a picture was presented by one participant in particular. The other commented in particular on the resonance between her observations and the account’s portrayal of
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the disconnection many feel on release and the interpersonal blocks which hinder them from seeking support.

With regards to the model developed, a number of hypotheses were generated which require further empirical validation. These include whether the meaning YOs attribute to their sentences do indeed mediate their intentions regarding re-offending, whether the processes of adjustment outlined are related to mental health and offending outcomes as described and whether the processes of locating the experience are mediated by the other processes of adjustment. In particular, it was not possible to ascertain whether the various relationships observed between processes of adjustment and outcomes were causal (as was hypothesised) or merely correlational. If they were indeed causal, the direction of causality further remains to be verified.

For instance, it was hypothesised that participants who had effectively ‘forgotten’ prison in locating their experience were more likely to re-offend as a result of this. Alternatively, it may have been the case that those who re-offended on release were more motivated to either ‘forget’ their experience of prison, or to view it less negatively. This scenario could have arisen as YOs attempted to minimise the cognitive dissonance their offending would otherwise cause (see Festinger, 1957). In verifying the exact nature of such relationships, future research might include longitudinal designs which more clearly map the temporal sequences over time.

The model described was further developed on the basis of YOs’ accounts two months subsequent to release. Future research might investigate YOs’ adjustment to
Discussion

release over longer periods of time - for example, at selected intervals up to a year or two post release.

The development of quantitative measures of adjustment - pertaining both to the four processes and potential outcomes described - would clearly facilitate the statistical investigation of a number of important questions using large scale samples of YOs. This would, for instance, enable the investigation of the statistical significance between adjustment processes and various outcomes. The impact of various offender-related variables (e.g. type of index offence, age, previous experiences of custody) - some of which were touched upon in the present study - might also be useful to elucidate with larger samples. Gender may represent an important offender-related variable, and the need to replicate the current study with female YOs is clear.

Finally, the investigation of relationships between adjustment on release and various sentence-related variables (e.g. length of sentence, type of sentence, bullying and other experienced in custody, rehabilitative interventions undertaken, work and training opportunities, extent of contact with family and outside community) may prove a fruitful line of enquiry. Whether the model may similarly be applied to the adjustment of young people being discharged from secure accommodation facilities (which may differ in important ways from YOIs) also remains to be verified. As Rutter et al (1998) note, “Most of the public debate on custody has been on the supposed deterrent effects (which seem to be quite limited) or incapacitation effects (which are greater but still decidedly modest). More attention needs to be paid to the consequences of the content and nature of people’s experiences in institutions”. (p. 365).
Discussion

Such developments might eventually help in answering fundamental questions regarding which types of sentences (and experiences within that) might be most beneficial for which types of offender.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

In addition to the possibilities for future research, the findings highlight a variety of implications for practice at a number of levels. At the simplest level, the findings might be used to generally raise the awareness of professionals working with YOs sentenced to custody regarding the difficulties they might face on release. A number of more specific implications are also worthy of discussion.

**Criminal Justice System Policy**

At the broadest level, there is scope for change in Criminal Justice System policy with respect to custodial sentences. In particular, there is a need for an ideological shift in how custodial sentences are passed, which affords greater weight to systematic empirical research with regards to what actually works in bringing about behaviour change. Insights from models of addictive behaviour change should also be borne in mind in sentencing young people, given their demonstrated relevance.

Fundamental changes might also be brought about in terms of how YOIs are set up, with the aim of facilitating YOs’ adjustment to their eventual release. Waplington (1998), for instance, has proposed that prisons should offer an expanded pre-discharge phase. He suggests such a phase “would involve help and assistance from agencies providing accommodation and employment where necessary. It would link
with employment opportunities and provide some sort of mentoring support on discharge. It would also deal with relationships, pressures and expectations on release. Ideally prisoners would be given support and provided with a plan to overcome some of the more obvious hurdles which might lead them back into offending" (Waplington, 1998, p.37). The findings of the current study both support such a notion and provide further insights into the 'hurdles' YOs might face in particular on release.

Alongside such a system, granting at least some community leave to all YOs (not just those who have earned the privilege) would seem beneficial. This would help in desensitising young people to the anxiety they might feel outside of the physical confines of the YOI, to which many become accustomed.

Finally, specialised posts within YOTs, in line with the adult probation service’s 'through care team', might prove beneficial in ensuring that young people’s needs are met on release (e.g. housing needs, work, arrangements post custody).

**Practices in Young Offender Institutions**

In terms of practice in YOIs, insights regarding the nature of YOs’ experiences on release might be incorporated into pre-release courses or associated interventions carried out prior to release. For instance, the uncertainty many express with regards to what release might hold might be reduced, were aspects of the findings to be shared within such courses. Alternatively, a booklet, video or similar resource, describing YOs’ typical experiences of release (e.g. altered perceptions of speed) and offering practical tips to facilitate the processes of adjustment might be produced for wider distribution to both YOs and their families. Having ex-inmates deliver aspects of this
Discussion

education (either talking on pre-release courses or speaking about their experiences on video) might increase the likelihood of YOs taking on board the advice offered.

In the light of YOs’ reluctance to seek support from professional sources in YOIs, the importance of facilitating YOs’ access to habitual sources of support whilst they are in prison should not be underestimated. At a basic level, this might include the provision of further telephone lines, or the facilitation of additional family meetings during times of crisis.

Given many YOs’ difficulty in forming trusting relationships with staff, case workers in YOIs might facilitate the development of positive relationships with inmates by providing regular meetings with them, regardless of whether particular issues have been raised by inmates. Whilst the constraints on staff time often limit the opportunity for this, participants in the study often questioned whether professionals both inside and outside of the YOI were simply ‘doing their job’, and related to this, whether they cared for them as an individual.

Whilst the dual role of prison officers in being responsible for both the discipline and day-to-day care of YOs, and the general culture of prisons being ‘anti-staff’ may make it difficult for officers to build trusting relationships with inmates, the current study demonstrates that positive relationships are indeed possible. As Lyon (1998) suggests nonetheless, models of authoritative parenting (Coleman, 1997) may usefully be drawn on by prison officers and governors in promoting healthy environments where young people learn to cope.
Discussion

Practices in Youth Offending Teams

Many of the implications highlighted for practice in YOIs might also be applied to YOTs. Again, the need for YOT workers to be consistent with appointments - not only subsequent, but also prior to release - is apparent if workers are to build up the trust necessary for YOs to make use of the support on offer. Attempts should also be made to keep young people informed of the arrangements for their release (e.g. accommodation) and plans should be set as early as possible.

Whilst there are inevitably constraints on the capacity of YOT workers to maintain the confidentiality of appointments, in relation to counselling adolescents more generally Geldard & Geldard (1999) recommend that workers carefully consider what information needs to be shared and what may remain confidential. Open and explicit discussion about this with the adolescent, including the necessity of informing others (whether it be family, the police or courts) may help decrease his suspicion. Offering YOs some control over how and when the sharing of information will take place may further give them some sense of control over the disclosure and its consequences (Geldard & Geldard, 1999). Finally, discussion exploring possible factors that sometimes hinder young people in disclosing difficulties might facilitate workers in creating a more open context for YOs who may be battling with ambivalence about disclosing difficulties.

YOT workers’ abilities to detect and make good use of YOs’ ambivalence with regard to the disclosure of difficulties (such as a return to substance misuse) may well be hindered if supervision appointments are too brief. Finally, that mandatory supervision and indeed custodial sentences themselves may by their very nature interfere with one
of the central developmental tasks of adolescence, whereby individuals move towards increasing autonomy and responsibility, should be borne in mind. It seems plausible that such mandatory controls might encourage adolescent offenders to exert their autonomy in more subtle ways. These might include the withholding of information from workers. Attempts to increase the control of YOs over their supervision meetings might thus prove helpful. In relation to adolescent counselling, Geldard & Geldard (1999) suggest that contracts for sessions be negotiated with young people. In the context of supervision orders, these might include details of how long supervision sessions run for and what it would be helpful to focus on in meetings.

Clinical Psychologists in YOIs and YOTs

Finally, the potential implications of the research for clinical psychologists working in YOIs and YOTs are many. Certainly, clinical psychologists might be proactive in developing pre-release courses, or literature, alongside other YOI and even YOT staff. On a very general level, Clinical Psychologists also have role to play in providing training to other workers on adolescent development and communication, considered within the context of the Criminal Justice System. Training might also be offered regarding these issues in the context of release more specifically.

In terms of direct clinical work with YOs around the transition of their release, the overall goals of intervention might focus on facilitating YOs' adjustment in relation to the four processes outlined. With these processes in mind, specific objectives for the interventions that might be undertaken in achieving these are listed in table 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of Adjustment</th>
<th>Objectives of therapy</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting and Re-evaluating</td>
<td>To help YOs in gaining an understanding of how their offending came about</td>
<td>Motivational interviewing techniques (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To help YOs attribute positive meanings to their sentence which motivate change</td>
<td>Relapse prevention training techniques (Marlatt, 1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To increase YOs' confidence and self efficacy regarding their ability to change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To help YOs explore concrete and specific changes they might make on release</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnecting</td>
<td>To help YOs reconnect with their physical and social environments:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To raise the awareness of family and others with regards to the experience of release and how to help YOs make the transition</td>
<td>Family therapy techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To facilitate the gradual exposure of YOs to the outside, prior to release (when individuals have served long sentences without leave from the YOI)</td>
<td>Cognitive-behavioural therapy techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing</td>
<td>To support YOs in implementing the changes they have planned for release</td>
<td>Cognitive-behavioural therapy techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To undertake specific interventions identified as necessary</td>
<td>(e.g. substance misuse, anger management work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locating the experience</td>
<td>To help YOs locate their experiences of prison in an adaptive manner, dependent on their stage of release:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To help YOs adopt a non-criminal personal identity</td>
<td>Cognitive therapy techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To help YOs who 'forget' their experience to retain particularly their negative memories of prison and their evaluations of its impact</td>
<td>Use of diaries of reflections and plans prior to release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To help YOs who remain preoccupied with their experience to adopt a more healthy balance</td>
<td>Grief counselling techniques, post-traumatic work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Briefly, motivational interviewing techniques (Miller & Rollnick, 1991) might prove beneficial in helping YOs re-evaluate their lifestyles and prison experience in a manner which both motivates change and develops confidence. A range of cognitive, cognitive-behavioural and family therapy techniques might also help participants reconnect with their environments, make changes to their lifestyles and achieve an optimal balance in locating their experience of prison. Such work might be undertaken either individually or in a group setting.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of the current study provide some understanding of the experiences of YOs being released from YOIs, and the role of social support in facilitating the transition. The model derived illustrates the part a custodial sentence may play in bringing YOs to a point where they begin to reflect on and re-evaluate their lives and lifestyles, possibly for the first time. Without appropriate and effective support, however, such a key window of opportunity may, at best, be wasted. At worst, such an experience may paradoxically perpetuate young people’s difficulties, entrenching them still further in criminal lifestyles, and precipitating or exacerbating mental health problems. A number of implications, regarding appropriate interventions and the delivery of effective support, are offered on the basis of the insights exposed.

Finally, the current study provides a holistic account of YOs’ experiences from their own perspective, in which issues of mental health and well being are afforded equal importance with the issue of offending. The necessity of such a holistic approach has increasingly been recognised and resonates with recent changes in the youth justice system, including the establishment of YOTs.
REFERENCES


References


References


References


McGrath, L. & Pistrang, N. (submitted for publication). Policeman or friend? The role of the keyworker in hostels for young homeless people.


NACRO. (1999a). Youth Offending and Health: The Role of YOTs. London: Youth Crime Section Briefing, NACRO.


References


APPENDICES
Appendices

APPENDIX A:
Letter to potential participants

[Participant’s name] Helen Champion
[Prison number] Sub-Dept of Clinical Health Psychology
H.M.Y.O.I. Huntercombe University College London
Nuffield Gower Street
Nr Henley-on-Thames London WC1E 6BT
0207 391 1258

Dear [Participant’s name]

I am writing to ask whether you would take part in some research I am carrying out in H.M.Y.O.I. Huntercombe. The research looks at how people being released from Youth Offending Institutions think and feel about leaving prison and returning to the community, and how well supported they feel they are around this time. I hope the study will help others, including staff, better understand the experiences of people like you, and that it might also help us think of things that could be done to help others in the future feel more prepared for their release.

If you did agree to take part in the research it would involve a total of two meetings with me - the final one of these would take place after you have left Huntercombe. I have enclosed an information sheet explaining the study in greater detail for you to read if you think you might be interested in taking part.

If you did take part in the study, and if you would like, I will send you a summary report of the project and its findings when I have completed the project.

If you feel that you would like to help us with this study, please would you let your Case Worker know as I will be contacting him/her shortly to hear what you have decided. If you are willing I will then call you to arrange a meeting.

Thank you for your help. I look forward to meeting you if you would like to take part.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Champion
Clinical Psychologist in Training
APPENDIX B:
Information sheet for potential participants

Helen Champion
Linda Clare
Sub-Dept. of Clinical Health Psychology
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT
020 7391 1258

Research Project: Young offenders' experiences of adjusting to release and their use of social support

Information Sheet for Potential Participants
Confidential

This study looks at how people being released from Youth Offending Institutions think and feel about leaving prison and returning to the community, and how well supported they feel they are around this time. I hope the study will help others, including staff, better understand the experiences of people in your position, and that it might also highlight things that could be done to help others in the future feel more prepared for their release.

You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

If you feel you might be interested in taking part, I would like to meet you soon to explain the project further, answer any questions you might have, and make sure that you are happy to take part and to talk about important parts of your life and your feelings.

If you did agree to take part in the research it would involve a total of two meetings with me (Helen Champion) - the second one of these would take place after you have left H.M.Y.O.I. Huntercombe. If you would like to see more about what these meetings would involve please see the ‘Outline of Research Meetings’ sheet attached.

What we talk about during our meetings will be kept confidential and between ourselves. Your Case Worker at the prison and your key worker at the Youth Offending Team will be told that you are taking part in the study, but what we actually talk about will not be shared with them or anyone else. We would only ever share something said during our discussions if it was worrying you and if you felt that you would like to talk to someone else about it.

All proposals for research with people are reviewed by an ethics committee before they can proceed. The proposal for this research was reviewed by the joint UCL/UCLH Committees on the Ethics of Human Research.

As mentioned, if you did take part in the study, and if you would like, I will send you a summary report of the project and its findings when I have completed the project.
### Research Project: Young offenders’ experiences of adjusting to release and their use of social support

#### OUTLINE OF RESEARCH MEETINGS
Confidential

**Meeting 1**

The first meeting would be held about two weeks before your release date. During the first meeting, I would introduce myself to you and answer any questions you might have about the project. If you decided that you would like to take part I would ask you to sign a consent form to say that the study has been fully explained to you and that you are happy to take part. (This does not mean however that you are not free to drop out of the study at any point should you wish). If you decided that you did not want to take part, you would be free to leave the meeting.

If you did agreed to take part you would then be asked to complete two questionnaires which would be read to you. One of the questionnaires asks about whether you have experienced certain problems lately. The other asks about the people who support you when you experience problems, and how happy you are with the support they give you. These questionnaires would take about 20 minutes to complete.

We would then spend some time talking about your thoughts and feelings about leaving Huntercombe and returning to the community, and how people have helped and supported you at this time. This discussion is expected to last about \( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{3}{4} \) hour and would be tape recorded.

**Meeting 2**

The second meeting would then be arranged for about two months after your release when we would have a similar discussion about your actual experiences settling back into the community and the support you felt you’d received since leaving Huntercombe. Again, our discussion is expected to last about \( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{3}{4} \) hour and would be tape recorded.

---

If you decide to take part in the study you may like to keep this sheet to remind you of what each meeting involves.

A space has also been provided below for you to write in the times of meetings to be agreed between the researcher, Helen Champion, your Case Worker (or Youth Offending Team in the case of the Meeting 2) and yourself, should you take part:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Where it will be held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 1</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C:  
Letter to participants’ YOT workers

[Helen Champion]  
Sub-Dept. of Clinical Health Psychology  
University College London  
Gower Street  
London WC1E 6BT  
07866 100 312 (mobile)

Dear [YOT worker],

I am presently conducting some research at H.M.Y.O.I. Huntercombe which looks at how juvenile and young offenders think and feel about being released from Young Offender Institutions, the difficulties they experience returning to life in the community, and how well supported they feel around this time. I hope the study might help people who work with young offenders better understand their experience of adjusting to life back in the community subsequent to release. This understanding may also help us find better ways of helping such young people feel more prepared for making this transition.

Individuals who agree to participate with the study are seen on two separate occasions by me. The first interview is conducted with participants in H.M.Y.O.I. Huntercombe, and the second constitutes a follow up of participants in the community, approximately two months after their release date. Anything said during these two meetings is private and confidential. If at any time participants decide they do not want to continue they can drop out of the study.

[Participant’s name], whom I believe is being supervised by your team has agreed to take part in the research. I interviewed him at Huntercombe on [date]. I therefore need to arrange a time with him to meet for the final interview in the community to take place around [date]. I would be very grateful if I could arrange this in conjunction with you, to coincide with one of your meetings with him at the Youth Offending Team site if this is at all possible.

If I have not heard from you I will telephone shortly to discuss whether this would be possible. In the mean time, if you have any questions about the study that you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above number.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and help in this matter. I realise that the study may cause you some inconvenience if you decide to co-operate. I would nevertheless be extremely grateful for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Champion  
Clinical Psychologist in Training
Appendices

APPENDIX D:
Approval from UCCCL/UCLH ethics board

The University College London Hospitals

The Joint UCL/UCLH Committees on the Ethics of Human Research

Committee Alpha Chairman: Professor André McLean

Please address all correspondence to:
Iwona Nowicka
Research & Development Directorate
UCLH NHS Trust
1st Floor, Vezey Strong Wing
112 Hampstead Road, London NW1 2LT
Tel. 0171-380 9579 Fax 0171-380 9937
e-mail: iwona.nowicka@uclh.org

Ms Linda Clare
Lecturer in Psychology
Department of Psychology
UCL
Gower Street

June 29, 2000

Dear Ms Clare

Study No: 00/0093 (Please quote in all correspondence)
Title: Moving on from young offender institutions: A study of juvenile offenders use of social support in adjusting to release from Young offender institutions

Thank you very much for your letter dated 16th June addressing the points raised by the Ethics Committee. There are no further objections and the study can go ahead.

Please note that it is important that you notify the Committee of any adverse events or changes (name of investigator etc) relating to this project. You should also notify the Committee on completion of the project, or indeed if the project is abandoned. Please remember to quote the above number in any correspondence.

Yours sincerely

/\ Professor André McLean, BM BCh PhD FRC Path
Chairman
APPENDIX E:
Approval from the Governor at the YOI

HM Young Offender Institution
Huntercombe Place
Nuffield
Henley on Thames
Oxfordshire RG9 5SB
Telephone 01491 641711
Extension 209
Fax 01491 641752

Ms Helen Champion
Flat 3
37-39 West Heath Drive
LONDON
NW11 7QG

Dear Helen

Further to your telephone call with my Secretary I now write to confirm that I am happy for you to proceed with your research proposal.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]
PAUL MANWARING
GOVERNOR

[Stamp]
HM PRISON SERVICE
APPENDIX F:
Pre-release interview schedule

Introduction / Ice breaker
How have you found it in here?
   Prompts: What have been the best and the worst things about prison for you? What’s it like being in a YOI?
What are you most looking forward to when you get out?

Background
When are you going to be released? When was your release date set for?
Which Youth Offending Team will be following you up?
What will they be doing?
   Prompt: Who is your key worker in the team? How much contact with your YOT key worker will you be having? How much contact did you have with your key worker prior to your sentence? Had you had previous contacts? How much contact has there been with your key worker since you came in to prison?
Who is your Personal Officer/ Case Worker at [the YOI]?
   Prompt: How much contact do you have with him/her?
Can you tell me a bit about how you came to be in [the YOI]?
   Prompts: What was your offence? What was your sentence? What lead up to your offending?
Has this been your first experience of prison?
   Prompts: Have you spent time in a YOI or secure unit previously? How long were you there for?
Where did you live before you came to [the YOI]?
   Prompts: Who were you living with? Have you always lived with X/in care?
Who is in your family?
   Prompts: Are you in contact with your mum and dad? Do you have any brothers and sisters? Are there people in the family who are important to you (e.g. aunties, grandparents?) What’s your relationship with them like? Are you close?
How much contact have you had with your family since coming to [the YOI]?
   Prompts: How often have your parents visited? How much phone contact have you had? Have they kept in touch by letter? How often?
Do you have friends / a girlfriend?
   Prompts: Who are your friends? Do you have a best friend? Do you have a girlfriend? How do you know them? What do they do? Have they ever been in trouble with the police? What’s your relationship with them like?
How much contact have you had with friends / your girlfriend since coming into [the YOI]?
   Prompts: How often have they visited? How much phone contact have you had? Have they kept in touch by letter? How often?
Where will you live when you leave [the YOI]?
What are the arrangements for your release?
   Prompts: Who will be there to meet you on the day of your release? How will you get home? What arrangements have been made more generally? Do you have any definite plans of what you’ll do when you’re released?
Thoughts and feelings experienced prior to release about leaving YOIs

How do you feel about leaving [the YOI]?  
Prompt: Are there things you will be glad to leave behind? Are there things you will miss? (e.g. staff, other inmates, activities, aspects of prison life or routine?) Do you have mixed feelings about being released? Do you have any worries about leaving?

What do you think about when you think about leaving?  
Prompt: What images come in to your mind? What thoughts do you have about it? What thoughts do you have about having been in a YOI?

How do you think you will feel on the day of your release?  
Prompt: How will you feel saying good bye to everyone? How will you feel leaving your friends here? Do you think you will see them again? How do you think you will feel leaving? What will you be thinking?

How do you think you’ll feel about [the YOI] and your time here when you look back in a few months time?  
Prompts: Do you think you’ll think about your experience at all? What will you think about when you do?

Do you think you’ve changed during your time here?  
Prompts: Do you feel you’re leaving as a different person? Do other people think you’ve changed? Are the changes a good or a bad thing? What do you think other people might notice about you now that’s different from before?

Difficulties anticipated in returning to life in the community

What do you think it will be like returning to life in the community?  
Prompts: What will it be like being back at home with your family/ foster parents/ independent accommodation / girlfriend etc.? What will it be like returning to your role as a dad (if applicable)? What will it be like seeing your friends again? What will it be like returning to the area/ your community? What will it be like returning to education (if applicable)? Will you be looking for employment? What income will you have and will it be enough? What will you do with your time?

What do you think it will be like the first few weeks outside?  
What will it be like a few months down the line?

How do you feel about going back?  
Prompts: What feelings do you have when you think about going back? What thoughts do you have? What are you looking forward to about returning to the community? What are you not looking forward to or anxious about? Do you feel ready to go back?

What effect do you feel being in a YOI has had on your relationships, if any?  
Prompts: With family? With friends? With girlfriends? With employers? With other people you meet in the community more generally? What do they think about you being in here? Has it made a difference to how you get on or how they see you?

Has being in the YOI influenced the likelihood of your being employed for work in any way?  
How likely do you think it is that you will re-offend?

What do you think might influence the likelihood of your re-offending?  
Prompts: Are there things about your circumstances, relationships, lifestyle, (e.g. substance misuse) things you do that would need to be different to help you avoid re-offending?

Do you think you might experience any difficulties trying to make these changes?  
Do you think you might experience any difficulties adjusting to life outside more generally?
Appendices

The sources, nature and quality of social support drawn on in making the transition from YOIs to the community

What do you do when you’re upset or worried about something, or if you’ve got a problem?
Who did you generally turn to when you were worried or upset about something before you came to [the YOI], if anyone?
  Prompts: Did you talk to any of your family when you had a problem? Did you talk to friends? Anyone in particular? Can you give me an example of when you turned to them for support? What made you choose them?
Who have you turned to when you’ve had a problem during your sentence, if anyone?
  Prompts: Is it the same person / people as you did when you were outside? Have you turned to any staff or other inmates here? Can you give me an example? Have you had any particularly difficult times since you’ve been here that you could really have done with talking to someone about? What made you choose them to talk to?
Do you feel you’ve made any friends in here?
  Prompt: What’s your relationship with them like? How do your friendships in here compare to your friendships outside? Do you turn to your friends here for support ever? Would you ever?
What has been done to help you prepare and adjust to leaving the YOI and returning to the community?
  Prompts: How prepared do you feel to go back? Have you been to any pre-release/offending behaviour/other courses in the YOI? Have you attended education classes? How helpful were these? Have you been on home visits and how helpful were they? How has your YOT key worker helped you prepare? How has your Personal Officer/Case Worker or other YOI staff helped you prepare? What else has been done to help you prepare or adjust back to life outside?
Have you talked to anybody about how you feel about being released in particular?
  Have you talked to anybody about your feelings about leaving the prison and returning to the community? Which individuals have you talked to (non-professional - family, friends, others; professional - prison officers, YOT workers, chaplain, psychologists, others)?
How supportive have people been?
  Prompts: Who has supported you? At what times or in what situations? How helpful have they been? What difference has it made to you? What is it that was helpful about what they said or did? What have people said or done that has not been helpful at this time? Who have you found most supportive and why?

Blocks to seeking social support, or gaps in the support perceived in relation to making the transition from YOIs to the community

How could people have helped or supported you more in returning to the community?
  Prompts: What else could have been done, or would you like to be done to help you?
  Would you have liked more help or support from anyone in particular?
Do you feel able to ask for help and support?
  If not, what stops you?
APPENDIX G:
Post-release interview schedule

Introduction / Ice breaker

How have you found it being out?
  Prompts: What have been the best and the worst things about being released? What’s it like being out?

What was the first thing you did when you were released?

Background

When was your actual release date?

How much contact have you been having with your Youth Offending Team since then?
  Prompt: How much contact have you had with your YOT key worker?

Where have you been living since your release?
  Prompts: Where are you living now? Who are you living with? Did you live there when you were first released?

How much contact have you had with your family since your release from [the YOI]?
  Prompts: How much have you seen or spoken to your parents since release? Other family?

How much contact have you had with friends / your girlfriend since your release?
  Prompts: How much have you seen or spoken to them?

What happened on the day of your release?
  Prompts: How did you get home? Did anybody come up and meet you? What did you do that day?

 Thoughts and feelings experienced on release about leaving the YOI

How did you feel about leaving [the YOI]?
  Prompt: How did you feel on the last few days before your release? What did you feel on the day of your release? Are there things you’ve missed since? (e.g. staff, other inmates, activities, aspects of prison life or routine?) Did you have mixed feelings about being released?

What were you thinking about on the day of your release?
  Prompt: What thoughts did you have about it? What thoughts did you have about leaving the YOI?

What was it like saying goodbye to people in [the YOI]?
  Prompt: Did you say goodbye to anyone? Who did you say goodbye to? Friends? Staff? What was it like? How did you feel? Have you kept in contact with anyone?

How do you feel about [the YOI] and your time there when you look back on your sentence?
  Prompts: Do you ever think about your experience at all? What do you think about when you do? Do you think your experience of prison has made a difference to you or your life at all?

Do you think you changed during your time there?
  Prompts: Do you notice any changes in yourself since your sentence or being released? Do others notice any changes or ways you are different from before? Are the changes a good or a bad thing? Have the changes lasted?
Appendices

Difficulties experienced in returning to life in the community

What was it like returning to life in the community?

Prompts: What was it like being back at home with your family/foster parents/independent accommodation/girlfriend etc.? What was it like returning to your role as a dad (if applicable)? What was it like seeing your friends again? What was it like returning to the area/community? What was it like returning to education (if applicable)? Have you worked since you’ve been out? Have you spent time looking for a job? How have you found working? What have you been doing with your time since your release? Is that different from how you spent your time previously?

What was it like during the first few weeks outside?

Prompts: Was anything difficult to get used to or adjust to?

What is it like now?

Prompts: Have things changed over time since you were first released? How are things different now? How have things changed since the time of your release with family/friends? how you spend your time? etc.

What effect do you feel being in a YOI had on your relationships, if any?

Prompts: With family? With friends? With girlfriends? With employers? With other people you meet in the community more generally? What do they think about your time in prison? Has it made a difference to how you get on or how they see you?

Has being in the YOI influenced your attempts to find work in any way?

Prompts: Have you told employers? How have they taken it?

Have you re-offended since being released?

Have you been in trouble with the police since you’ve been released?

How likely do you think it is that you will re-offend in the future?

Prompts: What do you think the chances of your re-offending are? How likely do you think it is that you will get in trouble again? How hard has it been avoiding offending?

Have you experienced any difficulties trying to make changes you planned?

Have you experienced any difficulties adjusting to life outside more generally?

The sources, nature and quality of social support drawn on in making the transition from YOIs to the community

Do you feel anybody has understood what is has been like for you being released?

Prompts: Who do you think understands? How do they show it? How do they help?

Who have you turned to when worried or upset since your release?

Who has helped you in adjusting to life outside again?

Who have you turned to when you’ve had a problem since your release, if anyone?

Prompts: Who have you turned to? Is it the same person as before you went inside? Can you give me an example? Have you had any particularly difficult times since you’ve been released that you could really have done with talking to someone about? What made you choose them to talk to?

Has anybody or anything helped you adjust to leaving the YOI and returning to being back outside in the community?

Have you talked to anybody about what it’s like being released in particular?

Did you talk to anybody about your feelings about leaving the prison and returning home? Which individuals did you talk to (non-professional - family, friends, others; professional - YOT workers, others)?

How supportive have people been?

Prompts: Who has supported you? At what times or in what situations? How helpful have they been? What is it that was helpful about what they said or did? What have people said or done that has not been helpful at this time? Who have you found most supportive and why?
Appendices

Blocks to seeking social support, or gaps in the support perceived in relation to making the transition from YOIs to the community

How could people have helped or supported you more in returning to the community?
  Prompts: What else could have been done, or would you like to be done to help you?
  Would you have liked more help or support from anyone in particular?

Do you feel able to ask for help and support?
If not, what stops you?
APPENDIX H:  
Participant Consent Form

Helen Champion  
Linda Clare  
Sub-Department of Clinical Health Psychology  
University College London  
Gower Street  
London WC1E 6BT  
020 7391 1258

Research Project: How well supported are Juvenile Offenders in Leaving Young Offender Institutions to return to the Community on Release?

Consent Form for Participants
Confidential

Delete as necessary

Have you read the letter telling you about this study? YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? YES / NO

Have you received answers to all your questions that you are happy with? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about this study? YES / NO

Which researcher have you spoken to about this study? ....................

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study
• at any time
• without giving a reason for withdrawing YES / NO

Do you agree to take part in this study? YES / NO

Signed: ................................................. Date: ......................

Name in Block Letters: ..........................................................

Case Worker’s signature: ....................................................

Researcher’s signature: .....................................................